

## Annual Report 2022

*The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society's Purposes: To advance education by providing programs and classes to children, youth, and the public on the subjects of the Cowichan Estuary, its marine and bird life, its natural and cultural history, the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds, and other natural ecosystems, and to protect, restore and enhance the quality of the natural environment in the Cowichan Estuary and its adjacent watersheds.*



**Introduction** The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre is an interpretive centre overlooking the Cowichan Estuary, a 400-hectare estuarine ecosystem in the traditional and unceded territory of the Quw'utsun' People who have cared for these lands and waters for thousands of years. The estuary provides vital habitat for resident and migratory birds, Pacific salmon, shellfish, and a diversity of intertidal life. We offer interactive educational opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn about the estuary, its marine and bird life, its natural and cultural history, and the Cowichan & Koksilah watersheds of which it is a part. Our indoor classroom has both freshwater and intertidal aquariums and an observation tank. We have microscopes, a wildlife viewing telescope, interactive displays, and maps. Outdoors visitors can climb our wildlife viewing tower and explore the estuary's increasing biological diversity on our interpretive trails. The estuary was degraded over many decades. As part of our work, we offer volunteers, school, and youth groups opportunities to engage in hands-on restoration projects. Awareness-raising, conservation, restoration, and environmental monitoring are all critical to the estuary's ongoing recovery. We are making a difference.



## The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre – January 1 to December 31, 2022

### Adapting Hands-on Nature Education in Year Three of Covid-19

2022 was yet another year to be nimble and flexible with our programs and plans while keeping our visitors, volunteers, and staff safe through another 12 months of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Centre, an inviting open classroom with a wildlife mural, three-dimensional eelgrass meadow and many interactive exhibits, is normally home base for our programs on weekdays, and open to the public Saturday and Sunday afternoons, plus holiday Mondays. Our freshwater aquarium, home to Coho salmon fry, and our saltwater aquarium and observation tank, with many both colorful and camouflaged intertidal creatures, draw visitors of all ages as soon as they come through the door. We are hopeful we can expand the hours we're open to visitors in 2023.



Eelgrass & Salmon

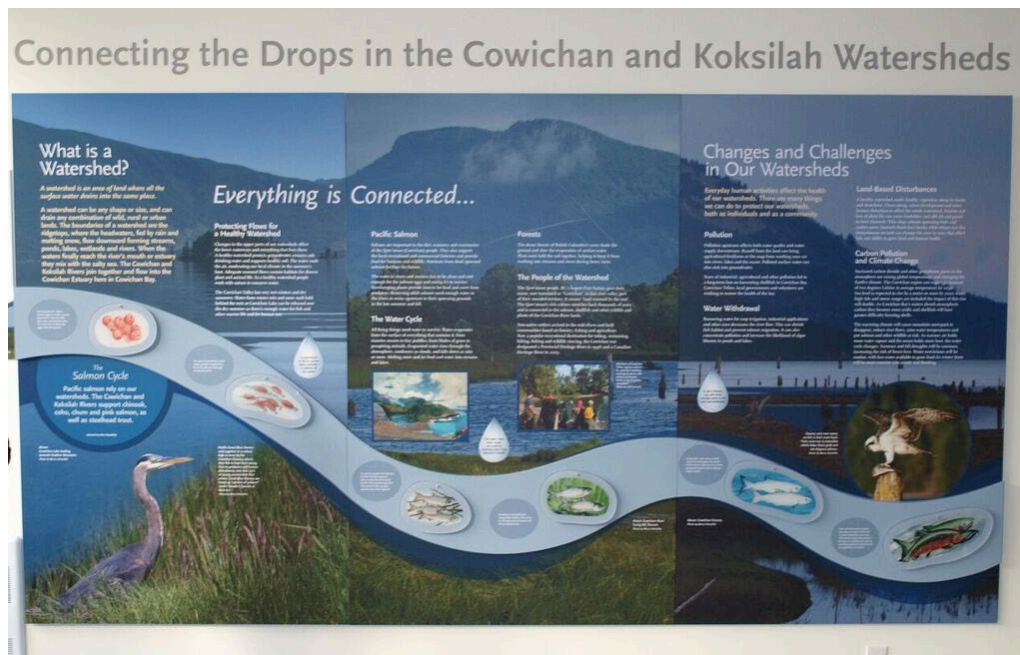


The beginning of the Salmon Cycle



Checking out creatures in the Observation Tank

A wall-sized Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds exhibit, created in partnership with the Royal BC Museum (RBCM), tells the interactive story of the water cycle and the salmon cycle, illustrating how everything in a watershed is connected, as well as describing the challenges our watersheds face from increasing weather extremes and climate disruption and what we can do to respond to them.



It's paired with a large table-size three-dimensional map of the lower Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds on which are projected stories of the watersheds' biodiversity, challenges, and ongoing restoration efforts, along with a beautifully illustrated and narrated history of the estuary

from the last ice age, through generations of care by the Hul'q'umi'num' speaking First Peoples, to the present day. Co-created with RBCM, the project was also supported by the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Cowichan Watershed Board, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, TD Friends of the Environment, Telus, and many local businesses and private donors. It complements our Estuary Voices videos, shot on the estuary with local Indigenous Elders, biologists, conservationists, and historians talking about the ecosystem's historical, cultural and biological importance (also [here](#) on our website). And, we are more than a physical space to visit. Most of all, we are about people loving, learning about, and caring for nature in this place where we live, with much of that loving, learning, and caring happening outside in nature.

Given new variants and the continuing spread of Covid, our outdoor-focused programming in nature has made so much sense, not just to connect people to the natural world, but to also keep participants and volunteers safe and healthy. We are grateful for our location on the shores of the Cowichan Estuary, with its changing tides and intertidal life, and for our flexible and adaptable staff. Our open hours for visitors, our school programs, and our workshops and events flexed through the year, and unlike 2020 and 2021 when more closures were required, we were able to maintain weekend and holiday Monday open hours from March through December in 2022. A big thank-you to our core volunteers for your ongoing graciousness and dedication in hosting Centre visitors. We continued to require masking indoors (providing masks for visitors) as well as added a HEPA filter and CO2 monitor to optimize and monitor for good ventilation and create a safe indoor space for everyone, including those especially vulnerable to infection. These precautions have enhanced rather than gotten in the way of the fun and the learning.

## Visitors

Since opening on April 21, 2012, we've had over 36,600 drop-in visitors to the Centre. While our drop-in visitor numbers were down in 2020 and 2021 due to mandated closures, we once again hosted over 1,000 visitors on Saturdays and Sundays in 2022 and plan to further expand our public open hours in the spring of 2023. We look forward to being back to capacity, and we treasure every interaction with visitors who are curious and care to explore the magic of the estuary's intertidal.



Even when our doors are closed, our wildlife viewing platform has a panoramic view of the estuary and is a great place for spotting some of the estuary's abundant bird life. The trail along the shore has beautiful interpretive signage, making your meander in nature even more of a learning experience. The signs include pictures of local birds, animals, and plants with their names in English, Latin, and in Hul'q'umi'num', the language of the Quw'utsun' People on whose traditional and unceded territory we have the privilege to be, grateful for their care for these lands and waters over thousands of years and into the present.



## Our Heron Cam

2022 was the second year of live-streaming from the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre's Heron-Cam with its incredible birds-eye view of the largest heron colony on the east coast of Vancouver Island in Wessex Ravine, just across the road from the Centre. Near the end of February CENC restoration lead and heron enthusiast Anna Scouten reported seeing several heron scouts checking out the heron rookery. Within a week, a larger "siege" of herons returned in full to begin another noisy, raucous nesting season.



Photos by Rachel Penney and Robert Stenseth

Once again at least 110 nests were counted, with more than 200 adult herons in residence. It was the perfect time to [click onto the Heron Cam](#), zoom around the heronry, and check in on our returning families. Usually, the herons arrive sometime between mid-February and the end of March and disperse again to their favourite fishing spots in local watersheds once their young are fully fledged in late summer.

The camera, installed atop a 68-foot tower at Wessex Ravine Park has joined the global wildlife bird-camera movement and is now a valuable part of nature education for local visitors and students. In addition, critical data is collected and provided to local biologists, government agencies and conservationists working to preserve the habitat of our Pacific Great Blue Herons, fannini subspecies, a Blue Listed Species of Special Concern under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA). Thanks to Rachel Penney for her close-up and to Robert Stenseth for capturing some of the 200 Great Blue Herons hanging out and raising their families in their Heronry in Cowichan Bay's Wessex Ravine in 2022, very much as you can see them on the Heron Cam.

## Education Programming

The Nature Centre offers hands-on nature conservation and science-oriented school programming for grades and ages from pre-school through grade twelve on-site on the shores of the estuary at Hecate Park linked with the province of BC's prescribed learning outcomes. In 2022 we were able to deliver 19 school programs to 426 students on the shores of the estuary at the Centre, as well as 12 restoration programs to 323 students in local ecosystems, providing hands on learning to 749 students from kindergarten through high school from local public schools, private schools and home school groups – a significant increase from 2020 and 2021. We look forward to offering more hands-on programs integrating river, ocean, and estuary-related knowledge in 2023.



### Coho Eggs



For many years we've participated in DFO's 'Stream to Sea – Salmon in the Classroom' program, raising young Coho fry starting in the spring to be released back into the watershed in the summer or fall, and raising awareness of the critical role salmon play in our local watershed ecosystems with school groups and visitors.

In 2022, at the end of February, our Aquarist Madeline received 100 'eyed' Coho eggs (pictured here about the size, shape, and color of huckleberries) from the Cowichan Lake Hatchery's 'Salmonid Enhancement Program', instead of getting young Coho fry in the spring as we'd done in previous years. In just a few weeks they hatched, and we had fry!

## Spring Youth Restoration Internship - Completing EcoAction Project -Year-3

March 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, during March break, as part of our 2019-22 EcoAction project "Conserving & Protecting Cowichan Fresh Water for a Climate Resilient Future" funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada, and working together with the Cowichan Watershed Board, we were able to offer restoration internships at Bright Angel Park for young people ages 15 to 20. Led by restoration educator and ecologist Anna Scouten, supported by forest ecologist Heather Pritchard, these young people restored native vegetation to support salmon and buffer against increasing flood and drought damage in the Koksilah watershed. Over five, 5-hour days, youth removed invasive species, planted and live-staked native species, and were mentored by and participated in daily Lunch-and-Learn sessions led by local ecologists and Indigenous Elders on the shores of the Koksilah. Over the week these young people gained valuable work experience in ecological restoration techniques that will also hopefully help propel them into employment fields such as Environmental Sciences, Biology, and Ecology.



Measuring Cedars for the Cedar Project



Interns removing invasive Himalayan blackberries



CENC Restoration educators Morgan & Anna



Koksilah at Bright Angel Park - Cowichan Valley Citizen file photo



## Our 10th B'EarthDay

Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, Earth Day weekend, marked 10 years since we opened our doors at the Centre, otherwise known as our "B'EarthDay". We celebrated with an afternoon of cake, sing-along music with Jim, Lyn and Pamela, and games and crafts for the children.



## Eelgrass Restoration

The Cowichan estuary is an incredible ecosystem. [Its healthy eelgrass meadows can store as much Carbon as a 20-year-old forest.](#) May 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre joined together for another round of eelgrass restoration. Volunteers gathered daily on the lawn and the beach at the Centre to tie iron washers onto eelgrass shoots retrieved by SeaChange divers that were then replanted by those same divers to expand and restore the estuary's eelgrass meadows - important habitat for young salmon and so many estuarine creatures. It was a great an opportunity to meet new and old friends and be a part of a growing community working to restore critical salmon habitat.



Photos: Patricia Ashton

Native eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) supports salmon, birds, and a wide range of invertebrate life while sequestering carbon.



## Nature and Science Summer Camps

In July and August 2022, with Covid protocols in place, we offered eight weeks of Summer Nature and Science Camps for children 5 to 7 and 7 to 9 years-old, seven full-week camps plus three single-day camps after the August holiday weekend. Kylie Porter was back with us as our summer camp coordinator, along with Madelyn West and Jasmine Hachey filling out our camp leader team!

After the “heat dome” from end of June into July in 2021 - a climate tragedy that killed large numbers of mussels, sea stars, clams and other intertidal creatures and left beaches closed all up and down the coast all summer, including in the estuary - our team was delighted to be back in the water again with the children doing beach seines and learning about the diversity of life up close in the intertidal zone, as well as in the Centre’s aquarium and observation tank. The team was also delighted to witness the recovery of intertidal life that appears to be underway.

Kylie Porter, Camp Coordinator



Over the summer 119 campers also enthusiastically participated in watershed adventures and games, expeditions through the estuary, bird surveys, and explorations aided by microscope and telescope, learning about how all life in the watershed is interconnected, getting their hands and feet in the mud, having fun, and creating nature-related arts and crafts along the way.

Recognition of the traditional and unceded territory of the Quw’utsun’ People and our respect for their knowledge of and care for these lands and waters into the present was voiced by camp leaders and the children daily in the camp’s opening circle.

Each year the Cowichan Valley Naturalists provide bursaries for campers through their Eric Marshall bursary fund. The Nature Centre also has a bursary fund for children participating in our summer programs to support the inclusion of more Indigenous and new immigrant children and youth from our community, as well as to reduce financial barriers so more children can learn in nature. We happily accept your donations to our bursary fund and your applications.

## Riparian restoration in our Watersheds & the Climate Connection

The climate crisis continues to affect ecosystems here locally and around the world, with increasing extreme weather events from heat waves to increasing droughts, floods, and forest fires. Specific place-based solutions, including restoring local ecosystems, can make a critical difference. Throughout 2022 we continued to work with youth and community volunteers on hands-on riparian restoration to increase resilience in local watersheds, especially the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds that meet the ocean at the Cowichan estuary. We are grateful for the support we have received for this work from the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the BC Conservation Foundation, EcoAction and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. and many supportive local project partners: Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Watershed Board, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Cowichan Community Land Trust, the Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society, BC Nature Trust, SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, School District 79, and Polster Environmental Services.



**Riparian restoration 2022:** Our ever-adaptive restoration educator and ecologist Anna Scouten, with Covid-19 precautions in place, led another creative and successful year of watershed restoration in the Cowichan Valley, engaging 393 children and youth in removing 3,380 square metres of invasives species, and restoring with native species plantings 1,400 square metres of riparian area, overall completing 5,780 square metres of riparian restoration in the the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds. Special thanks to the Pacific Salmon Foundation for their support.



Above Anna, volunteers Willie, Jim, Rob and Lyn, and students from the Environmental Restoration Program at Cowichan High removed invasive English Ivy from the forest at the Cowichan Station Hub on the Koksilah River in preparation for students from Cowichan High to plant native species (below).



Invasive species removal and native species planting sites in 2022 also included a salmon spawning and rearing channel on the lower Cowichan River, a site at Fleetwood regional park, and on the shores of Mesachie Lake at the BC Forestry Research Station at the headwaters of the Cowichan.

We were also thrilled, along with many local volunteers, to be part of planting 150 alders (Kwulala-ulp) to stabilize the banks and soil along the creek at Eve's Park, with support and leadership from restoration ecologists Ken Elliot and Dave Polster.

Here students from George Bonner Elementary plant at Fleetwood Park (left) and Lake Cowichan High School students plant on the shore at Mesachie Lake (right).





## Low Tide Day

Low Tide Day began in 1995 with an “Eco Fayre” in Brighton, England, led by the organization [River Ocean](#). Ever since International Low Tide Day has celebrated “One tide on one day around the world” on the last Saturday in May, or occasionally the first Saturday in June, with the lowest tide. In 1999 Cowichan Bay was the first Canadian community to celebrate International Low Tide Day with an event co-sponsored by the Marine Ecology Station in Cowichan Bay, Cowichan Land Trust, Cowichan Estuary Preservation Society, Cowichan Bay Improvement Association, and Cowichan Valley Naturalists, with support from Cowichan Tribes, including their permission to use Kil-pah-las beach, where children, families and marine biologists gathered to explore its rich diversity of intertidal life and collect data. The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre has carried the tradition forward (see more [here](#)). Throughout Covid we have continued to mark Low Tide Day by gathering smaller family groups to explore life on the beach by the Nature Centre. We look forward to when we can once again celebrate Low Tide Day with the wider community, sharing the magic of our intertidal zone together.



## Quw’utsun’ Sta’lo’ Skweyul (Cowichan River Day Celebration)

On Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup> we were excited to host the Cowichan Estuary station at Quw’utsun’ Sta’lo’ Skweyul. This year the day’s celebrations took the form of a self-paced tour with information and cultural events at sites along the Quw’utsun’ (Cowichan) and Xwulqw’selu (Koksilah) rivers that join the ocean at the estuary - rivers whose waters that have been cared for by the Hul’qumi’num speaking peoples for millennia. Over the course of the day, we hosted 250 visitors at the estuary.

The Nature Centre co-hosted the day with the Cowichan Community Land Trust, offering beach explorations and self-guided learning activities, where we noticed children who’d been to summer camp taking their parents down to the beach to show them what they’d learned; and a day-long community mural-making project, “Healing Water”, designed and led by Quw’utsun artist Shawn Johnny, who engaged children and whole families in creating a colourful collaborative piece of community art that we hope will soon grace an outer wall at the Centre.



The Nature Centre’s Jane Kilthei and Quw’utsun artist Shawn Johnny with the mural in progress. (above) and carver Herb Rice engaged with a Rivers Day visitor (below left) photos Barry Hetschko



Snuneymuxw Master Wood Carver Herb Rice shared his carving skills and stories beside the Welcome Figure he carved to welcome 40 canoes from up and down the coast to the 2008 North American Indigenous Games.

Elders in the shade by the Welcome Figure







Here by the water's edge Quw'utsun artist Stuart Pagaduan - who created the beautiful logos for Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul and for the Cowichan Valley School District, as well as art for the Somenos March Wildlife Society's WildWings Festival - teaches fish identification and demonstrates the hands-on traditional method for fish smoking, while telling stories of Quw'utsun families working together. He was also captured later walking together with his mother Philomena Williams, Rivers Day Queen of Fry Bread!



The Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society was also with us on September 25 with information about their October WildWings Festival, with its events to celebrate and welcome back the Trumpeter Swans for the winter, along with the freshly released bird checklist for both the marsh and the estuary Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and an auction of beautifully hand-painted bird nest boxes.



(Left) Stuart Pagaduan teaches the traditional Quw'utsun approach to smoking fish, and Elder Philomena Williams, Queen of Fry Bread for the Day with her son Stuart, and (above) the Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society's table, topped by an inflatable Trumpeter Swan Photos: Barry Hetschko

Through the day there was music, the Tzinquaw Dancers traditional Quw'utsun dancing and drumming led by Elder Quixote (Robert George); the duo Nice Verdes with world music from Cuba, Colombia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America with Cuban tres, accordions, ukelele, guitar, harmonica, and vocals; and river and water themed songs from the Cowichan Community Choir led by choir director Cari Burdett.



Photos above: Tzinquaw Dancers and Quixote by Walter Nelson Photos below: Cari Burdett and the Cowichan Community Choir by Barry Hetschko





## Citizen Science

The 400-hectare Cowichan Estuary, with its marshes, mudflats, and tidal rivers, is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) providing habitat for up to 230 resident and migratory bird species, with specific annual monitoring of Trumpeter Swan, Pacific Great Blue Heron, and Icelandic Gull numbers. Since 2013 the Nature Centre and the Cowichan Valley Naturalists have partnered with Birds Canada to complete monthly bird surveys identifying and counting waterbirds and shore birds found along a designated stretch of shoreline in Cowichan Bay by the Centre. Volunteers also go out monthly in all-weather to identify, count, and report any dead birds found on the beach. Waterbird and shore bird surveys have continued, along with fall until spring weekly Swan and Goose (plus raptor) counts prior to migrations northward, led and reported on by Derrick Marven and continuing throughout these pandemic years.

A pair of Buffleheads



An intrepid swan counter



Swans foraging & fraternizing with friends



Nature Centre Volunteers were also involved in the European Green Crab Monitoring Initiative with DFO and the Pacific Salmon Foundation and the Hakai Institute's Crab Light Trap Monitoring Project.

## 2022 Nature Centre Fundraisers

**Duncan Island Return-It** Once again, especially in the absence of our usual in-person, indoor pub fundraisers in 2022, we are hugely grateful to [Island Return It Recycling Centre - Duncan](#) for having us as their June 2022 Charity-of-the-Month, and to all the generous folks who brought in your recyclables and donated them to support us. We were the grateful recipients of \$8,934 in 2022 – a huge support for our work! You can donate your recycling to us at Island Return It in Duncan throughout the year. Just give them our account number #330. We very much look forward to seeing you in-person for fundraising fun in 2023.



You can  
donate  
your  
returns to  
us at  
Duncan  
Island  
Return it!

We are  
Charity  
#330



**Thanks to everyone who donated recycling to us at Island Return-It in Duncan!**

## Our First Online Silent Auction Fundraiser

We were ready to organize a Beer & Burger Fundraiser this fall to bring our community together again. Unfortunately, the Cowichan Bay Pub, along with other pub venues in the valley, were still too short-staffed to host us all, so we decided to do our first Year-end Holiday Silent Auction online. Thanks to all the local businesses and artists who donated a range of beautiful, functional, and deliciously edible items, and thanks to everyone who participated in bidding and buying. We so appreciate your support!

## Welcoming our New Staff Team

In late spring we said goodbye to Amy Clinton-Baker, our Coordinator since early 2020, and to long-time Nature Centre aquarist and educator Madeline Southern, with thanks for their contributions. We are also grateful to Camp Coordinator Kylie Porter who ably stepped into the role of interim Centre Coordinator until December. In the fall we were excited to bring on Louisa Varco, who is completing her Fisheries and Aquaculture post-grad diploma at VIU, as our new aquarist and marine educator. And in December we welcomed Alison Adamson as our new Administrative Coordinator. Alison has over 30 years of experience working in administration and 20-years in admin and volunteer coordination in BC's non-profit sector with the Chilliwack Museum and most recently the Shawnigan Lake Museum. We are thrilled to have her join us.

Amy Clinton-Baker



Madeline Southern



Louisa Varco orienting volunteers at the aquarium



Alison Adamson



## Thank-You Volunteers & Supporters!

Our volunteers and regular donors are the backbone of the Estuary Nature Centre, allowing us to keep our doors open to visitors and offer accessible education programming. When you stop in to visit, it's a volunteer who is there to answer your questions. Volunteers also regularly support our school programs. Covid meant that as volunteers we've seen each other in person less regularly. Newsletters and online platforms are useful, and they're just not the same. We look forward to the time when we can gather again in person regularly at the Centre and in the community.

## Celebrating our 2022 Volunteer Team

Covid-19 meant reduced opportunities to get together in-person as a volunteer team, so we were delighted to have a summer volunteer BBQ in August 2022 (and so delighted to be together we forgot to take pictures) and to recognize our 2022 "Volunteers of the Year".

We're grateful to all of our volunteers who welcome visitors at the Nature Centre. This year we especially recognize this amazing team of five – Dorothy Marshall, Kathy Coster, Gail Mitchell, Judy Wilson (pictured here) and Jane Douglas – who all came, and continue to come, to share their knowledge and welcoming smiles with Nature Centre visitors, week

after week, sunshine, rain, or snow. Thank-you!





**Are you are interested volunteering?** We'd be happy to have you join our team and offer you an orientation. We have good ventilation, a HEPA filter running in the Centre to keep our space as Covid-safe as we can, and also grateful be able to continue to work together outdoors in nature. Contact [alison@cowichanestuary.ca](mailto:alison@cowichanestuary.ca) and find out more.

### **Our History - The Journey to Create the Nature Centre**

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre was conceived in February 2011 by a small group of local Cowichan Bay residents - parents, educators, naturalists, fishermen and others - who saw the Estuary as a natural treasure and an ecosystem at risk from development and industrial activities.



Initially working under the Cowichan Community Land Trust, a non-profit society and registered charity that holds conservation covenants, we applied for and received development funding from the West Coast Community Adjustment Program (WestCCAP) and Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), and raised money through local fundraising events, supported by partnerships with the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, and the Rotary Club of Duncan. We opened our doors in April 2012.

In the spring of 2019, we became our own separate charitable non-profit, the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society, transitioning from under the wings of the Land Trust in April 2019.

Our development project included a 1,000 square foot nature classroom, our first Green Shores restoration of eroded shoreline at the west end of Hecate Park, and outdoor interpretive signage and maps showing the diversity of life in the estuary's rich intertidal zone. A path through the park along the waterfront leads to our wildlife viewing platform with views looking up the Koksilah and Cowichan Rivers to the west, north toward Mt. Tzouhalem and east toward Salt Spring Island and the Salish Sea.



The Centre's indoor classroom, built on the eastern edge of Hecate Park, has large windows overlooking the estuary, its changing tides and eelgrass meadows. It's just a short walk to the shore. The surrounding greenspace has been expanded by CVRD Parks to include the Cowichan Bay Marine Gateway to the west with a naturescape play area, picnic shelter, public kayak launch and parking area.

The Centre officially opened on Earth Day weekend in April 2012, with music, the Tzinquaw dancers and a crowd of about 250 people.



As we move into our 11<sup>th</sup> year of operation, We look forward to many more years of offering visitors, school groups, and families opportunities to learn about the Cowichan Estuary and the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds through our hands-on approach to environmental education, balancing science and stewardship to inspire those who come our way to love, care for and protect the natural environment, including increasing opportunities for youth to learn leadership and teambuilding skills while working on riparian restoration in our watersheds.

### **Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre founder retiring**

Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre founder Jane Kilthei is retiring from the Society' board and her work with the Centre over the past 12-years at the Nature Centre's upcoming Annual General Meeting in March. During her time with the Centre Jane has served as the Centre's lead grant-writer, fundraiser, board chair, volunteer executive director, restoration program champion, and as one of the Centre's regular weekend interpretive volunteers.

In February 2011 Jane began writing grant applications, under the auspices of charitable non-profit the Cowichan Community Land Trust, securing \$300,000 in development grant funding from the federal government's West Coast Community Adjustment Program and from Island Coastal Economic Trust, to build the Centre.



Jane then led the Centre's community fundraising campaign team, working with folks from the Land Trust, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and other local groups, and raising an additional \$60,000 locally to make the project a reality, bringing on support from individual donors, organizations like the Duncan Rotary Club, and developing partnerships with Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Watershed Board, and the Cowichan Valley Regional District.

The first big fundraising event for the Centre was a summer potluck and marimba dance party at Affinity Guest House on the estuary for Jane's 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday, followed by the Nature Centre's first of many Beer and Burger fundraisers at the Cowichan Bay Pub with music, a live auction and a packed house of supporters. More recently, on August 29th, 2021, Jane celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> on the lawn at the Centre with Masimba Marimba, the same band, raising \$5,000 to support the Centre's riparian restoration work with youth. Jane was also instrumental in the process of the Centre becoming its own charitable non-profit, the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society in 2019, along with her



partner Larry Lenske, the Centre's treasurer and lead number-cruncher for many years, who will also be retiring as of the March AGM.

In 2021 Jane was interviewed by Island Coastal Economic Trust, one of the Centre's original core funders, for one in a series of portraits of community builders across BC's coastal communities working to create positive change. This piece speaks to why the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre matters to her. [Here's that 2021 interview.](#)

## Our Gift Shop

We have a small gift shop that helps support the Centre's operations, primarily from selling t-shirts, water bottles, field guides, nature books, including some beautiful children's books, small and large animal puppets, colouring books and cards. We also have some lovely pieces of local art for sale. We accept cash, cheques and INTERAC for debit for purchases.



## Our Supporters' Donations Make All the Difference

If you love nature and value nature education please support the Nature Centre by making a donation. Consider becoming an Estuary Nature Centre supporter by making a monthly gift to the Centre. You can also [apply to become a member of the Society](#) with a donation of \$30 or more. Charitable receipts are issued for all donations of \$20 or more. Donations can be made to the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre through [Canada Helps](#) or by e-transfer to [admin@cowichanestuary.ca](mailto:admin@cowichanestuary.ca). We **thank-you** for your support!

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## Financial Report

You will find our 2022 Year End Financial Statement at the end of this report.

As a small centre we are careful with our finances. We are committed to offering accessible educational programs that are affordable within the budgets of families and the public school system, and to having admission to the centre, which is by donation, accessible to all visitors, regardless of income. Due to Covid, we scaled back our open hours to Saturday and Sunday afternoons and statutory holidays in 2020, and we are hoping to expand our hours again once the weather warms up in the Spring of 2023. Stay tuned.

As a volunteer-run Nature Centre we take the health and well being of our volunteers and guests to heart. We are committed to offering a safe place for our volunteers and visitors, including those at greater health risk, by continuing to require the use of masks in our indoor setting and

upgrading our ventilation including a HEPA filter. There is currently a limit of 20 people in the Nature Centre at one time. Thank you for continuing to be kind and patient as we navigate this pandemic together with care for all.

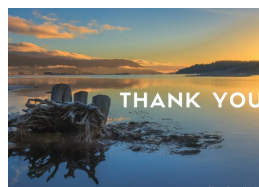
Over the years the Nature Centre has been successful in doing community-based fundraising and in obtaining grants to develop engaging nature and science-based exhibits and education and restoration programs. Over our first 7 years (2012-2018) we built a solid structure of both interpretive elements and people – our committees, volunteer teams, supporter-base, and community partnerships, operated on an essentially break-even basis. Over the past three years (2019-2021), as we fledged from the Cowichan Land Trust to become our own charitable non-profit society and, with the support of our donors and some significant successful fundraising in 2019 and 2020, as well as some COVID relief funding, we've begun to start building reserves. We also have a solid bursary fund. 2022 was also a time of focused work on policy development for us as a non-profit.

A huge "Thank-you!" to all our donors and supporters who contributed to our fundraising efforts. There is much work to be done in the years ahead, and you have been a big part of launching us on our way. We are grateful to all those who've helped us continue to provide place-based nature education and opportunities for hands-on restoration in the estuary and its adjacent watersheds, including Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the BC Conservation Foundation, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (summer students), BC Community Gaming, Island Return-It in Duncan, Pacific Industrial and Marine, and CVRD Area D and E Grants-in-Aid. In 2020 and 2021, we were also grateful for additional support during the Covid-19 pandemic from Canada's Emergency Wage Program.

### Going Forward

In the wake of Covid, we have some updating of our school program offerings to do and an ongoing commitment to access for children and youth of all ages to hands-on nature and science-based education. While our school programs are a source of revenue for us, our primary commitment is to reach young people and give them more opportunities to learn about and fall in love with local ecosystems and the natural world. Our bursary fund is key to making the hands-on programming we offer more accessible and relevant to local Indigenous, immigrant and low-income young people, and continuing to support youth in doing hands-on restoration projects in the Cowichan and Koksilah Watersheds. We're also embarking on another round of strategic planning in 2024 and exploring new opportunities to ensure the Centre is sustainable and self-supporting for the long-term.

The generosity of our supporters and donors makes a huge difference to what we can do.



***The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre's Theory of Change: If we engage people of all ages, especially children and youth, offering them opportunities to be curious, physically connect with, learn about, and care for the Cowichan Estuary and its adjacent watersheds, then they will fall in love with this special ecosystem, share their love and knowledge, and act to care for and protect this place, as well as other natural places, because love and connection, together with knowledge gained through hands-on experience, inspires effective action here in our community and in the wider world.***



# Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society

## 2022 Financial Statements

### Statement of Operations 2022

#### INCOME

Donations & Fundraising	22,900
Grants	77,400
Nature Centre Activities	27,800
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>128,100</b>

#### EXPENSES

Project & Program	18,500
Wages & Benefits	59,500
Other Personnel	26,200
Facility	15,300
Administration	17,000
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>136,400</b>
	<b>0</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>(8,300)</b>

During the Nature Centre's first 8 years (2011-2018), while a project of the Cowichan Community Land Trust Society, the CENC generated a modest surplus of \$12,700. Since fledging into its own separate charitable non-profit in 2019, during the last 4 years (2019-2022), the CENC generated an addition surplus of \$60,300, ending 2022 with an accumulated surplus of \$73,000. As well, there is 31,000 in Deferred Revenue in unspent grants and donations earmarked for various purposes.

Accounting policy change: In 2022 the accounting policy for Capital Assets retroactively changed from amortizing such assets over time to expending in the year acquired those capital assets that are externally funded through earmarked grants and donations. As this applies to all the Nature's Centre's capital assets, the 201,000 in funds invested in capital assets at the end of 2021 was cleared.

### Statement of Financial Position

	31-Dec-22	31-Dec-21	Changes
<b>ASSETS</b>			
Cash & Investments	95,700	123,500	(27,800)
Other Current Assets	8,300	8,900	(600)
Capital Assets	0	0	0
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>104,000</b>	<b>132,400</b>	<b>(28,400)</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
Accounts Payable (A/P)	0	2,500	(2,500)
Deferred Revenue	31,000	48,600	(17,600)
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>31,000</b>	<b>51,100</b>	<b>(20,100)</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			
Accumulated Surplus	73,000	81,300	(8,300)
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>73,000</b>	<b>81,300</b>	<b>(8,300)</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>104,000</b>	<b>132,400</b>	<b>(28,400)</b>