



# **Cowichan Valley Regional District**

## **State of the Environment Report**

CVRD Environment Commission June 2010



## Some Context

- Scale
- Content
- Complexity



## **A report card on the Cowichan environment.**

**Is our environment healthy?  
Is our environment resilient?  
Is our “natural capital”  
being protected?**

# The Report Card

- Indicators provide a reliable measure of the region's environmental health.
- Benchmarks will allow us to track future trends.
- Metrics give a firm basis for: guiding Board policy, implementing best practices, and informing actions we can all take in our community and homes.

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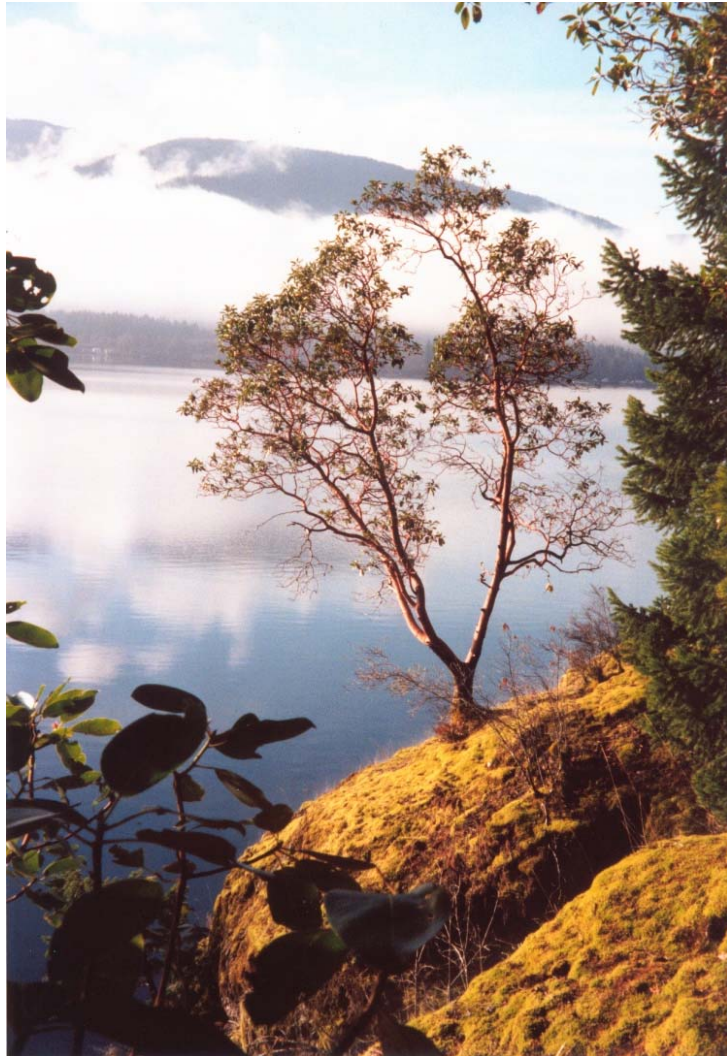
# The Report

A vibrant field of wildflowers, including purple lupines, red columbines, yellow daisies, and white daisies, growing in a lush green environment.

- Produced by an expert scientific team.
- Supported by the CVRD Environmental Policy Division and the CVRD Environment Commission.
- Assisted by community groups and other government agencies.

A photograph of a forest with large trees and people walking on a path. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and branches. The trees are tall and have moss growing on their trunks. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The text "Key findings were grouped by broad themes." is overlaid on the image in white font.

**Key findings were grouped by broad themes.**



# Themes

- Land Base
- Biodiversity
- Water
- Air Quality
- Population
- Agriculture
- Climate Change
- Waste Management

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# Land Base

- The human footprint (including forestry) now covers over 75% of the CVRD.
- Less than 8% of the CVRD has 'protected area' status.
- Development continues to degrade shoreline habitat.
- Only remnants of the Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem remain.

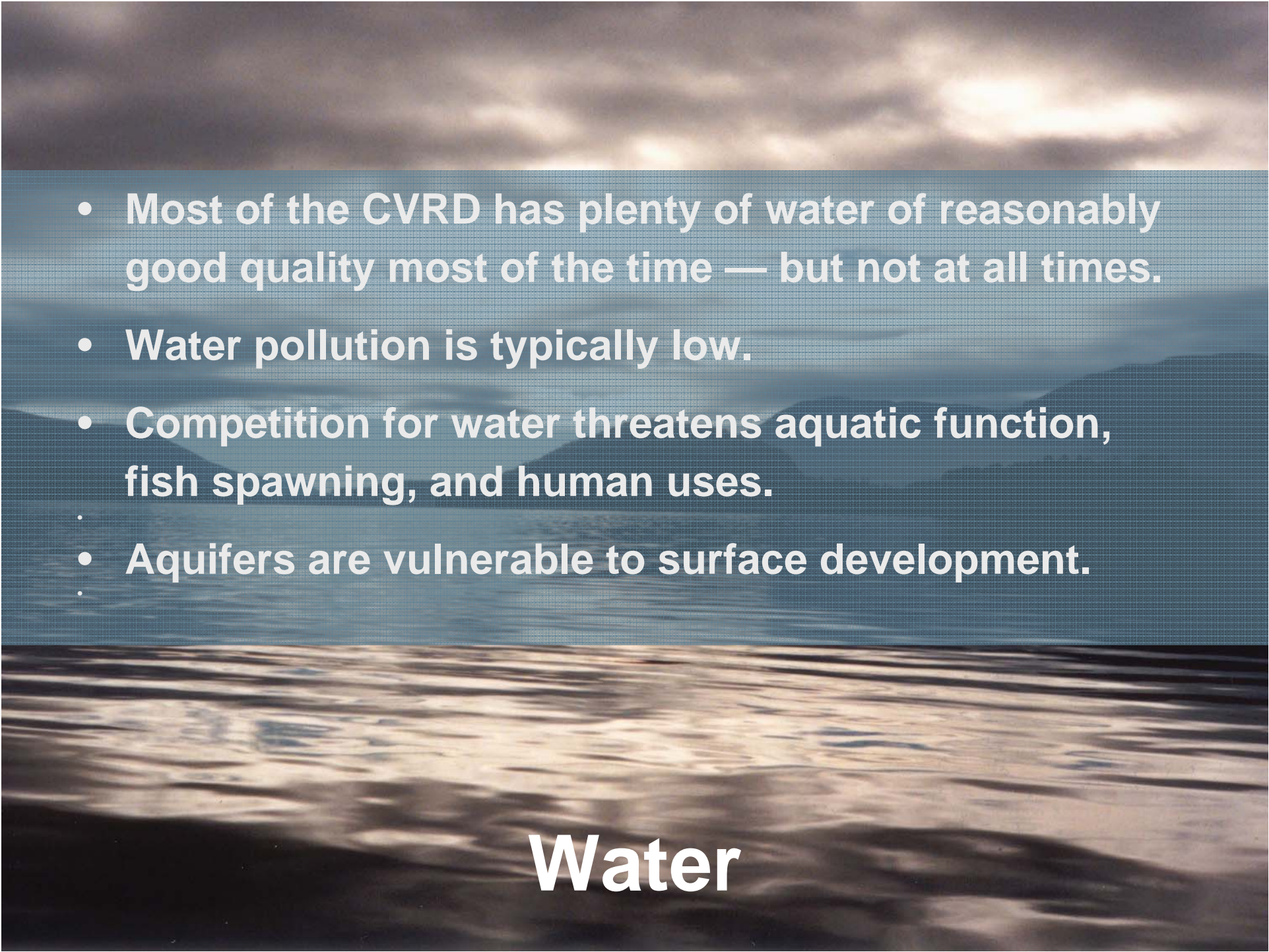
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# Biodiversity

- More species and ecological communities are at risk in the CVRD than elsewhere in B.C.
- Invasive plant and animal species are expanding their ranges in the CVRD.
- The Cowichan River's principal salmon runs have crashed since 2005.



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- Most of the CVRD has plenty of water of reasonably good quality most of the time — but not at all times.
  - Water pollution is typically low.
  - Competition for water threatens aquatic function, fish spawning, and human uses.
  - Aquifers are vulnerable to surface development.

# Water

# Water

- Lakes are exposed to significant pollution from a variety of sources.
- Major rivers are no longer fit to drink, and long-term impacts have led to the closure of shellfish beds.
- Most areas lack the ability to track domestic water consumption.

# Air Quality

- Air pollution is well within provincial standards.
- Air quality drops in fall and winter due to seasonal wood burning.
- Vehicle exhaust and industrial emissions are year-round sources of air pollution.
- Hospital admissions of children with respiratory problems are higher than elsewhere in BC.

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# Population

- Outside urban nodes (Duncan, Ladysmith, Lake Cowichan) electoral areas average less than 200 people/km<sup>2</sup>, hindering “smart growth” development.
- About three-quarters of us live in communities where we are car-dependent.
- Current zoning could allow pavement to cover as much as 19.8% of the CVRD’s surface, with negative impacts on waterways and aquifers.

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# Agriculture

- Agriculture has historically thrived in the Cowichan.
- Regional food security objectives are within reach.
- Barriers to greater productivity include: water availability, skilled labour, high land prices, restrictive quotas, and inadequate processing capacity.

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# Climate Change

- The CVRD and member municipalities, many groups and individuals recognize the need to address climate change.
- Local Governments are tracking, and taking steps to reduce, their own GHG emissions.
- Region-wide changes in public and commercial activity to reduce GHG emissions have yet to happen.

# Waste Management

- Recycling has risen in total and per capita volumes.
- But waste production is rising faster than recycling rates.
- The CVRD has taken over many small private sewage plants, bringing them up to standard.
- Failing septic systems continue to threaten water quality in some places.

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# In summary

- Our Cowichan environment is under stress.
- Most trends are negative.
- Although we recognize some critical issues, we also continue to degrade many of our natural assets.
- Attention needs to lead to action.

# What next?

- Turn trends from negative to positive.
- This report points up issues that most need our attention.
- We can now measure our progress.

# Is there *any* good news?

- Yes!
- Our citizens are alive to the issues, and organizing to address them.
- A host of civic groups and every level of government are shifting into action.

# And *more* good news

- Many goals are within our grasp.
- None of us can reverse the threats alone.  
But the process of collaboration, cooperation  
and coordination has begun.



# What's next for the Commission

The CVRD Environment Commission will:

- Establish working groups to address the Report's themes.
- Engage and support community groups to leverage effectiveness.
- Work with all levels of government to advance the issues.
- Recommend specific initiatives to the CVRD Board.

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The background image shows a lush green cliffside covered in moss and ferns on the left, with waves crashing against its base. The ocean extends to the horizon under a soft, hazy sky. The overall tone is natural and serene.

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Big vision. Little footprint.

