

Cowichan Watershed Board and Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Committee

Summer Lake and River Levels Information Session Highlights

July 24/2010

On July 24, 2010 the CWB and CLRSC co-hosted an information session, *Summer Lake and River Levels – What’s Happening?*, at the Cowichan Lake Secondary School Theatre. Over 70 people attended the session or a portion of it.

The meeting was facilitated by Cowichan Watershed Board (CWB) Co-chair Mayor Rob Hutchins.

The session began with welcoming comments from CWB Co-Chair Chief Lydia Hwitsum and Cowichan Lake and Stewardship Committee (CLRSC) Co-Chair Joe Allan.

Cowichan Watershed Board -Rob Hutchins

Rob Hutchins provided a brief presentation on the Cowichan Watershed Board, its mandate, its members, its relationship to the Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan, and its activities and progress to date. Early on in his talk Rob introduced the i>clicker audience survey technique which proved to be quite popular. People were asked:

- where they lived (57% of those responding were from Area I, Lake Cowichan or Area F (split relatively equally);
- whether they owned or rented lake or riverfront (54% did);
- how they heard about the meeting (76% found out through community group or word of mouth);
- what is the best site for meetings like this in Lake Cowichan (87% indicated the school was best);
- whether meetings should be rotated between Lake Cowichan, Youbou and Honeymoon Bay (57% indicated Lake Cowichan was best); and,
- the appropriate time limit for posing questions/making statements (100% indicated one minute).

More details of Rob Hutchins’ presentation as well as the details of responses to the above questions are included in the PDF of the presentation that is located at [LINK](#).

Summer Lake and River Water Levels 2010: What's Happening? -Craig Sutherland

Craig Sutherland is a Water Resource Engineer with Kerr Wood Leidal Associates. He has been working in the Cowichan watershed for the past 12 years on a variety of projects. Craig's talk was divided into 5 components:

- The history of the Catalyst weir at Lake Cowichan and its purpose;
- How river flow and the lake level are managed
- Water levels and management in 2010?
- Water levels and management in previous years?
- How can water be better managed?

Craig noted that since the mid 1980s it has become much more difficult to maintain the summer target flow of 7 cubic meters per second. This is due to a significantly lower average summer inflows to the lake during that time period (almost a 37 percent decrease) and inflexible rules that has made it difficult to begin with full supply at the beginning of the summer and take advantage of summer rains (when they are available to fully supplement water reserves during very dry summers. Craig proposed moving to a more flexible rule band approach as opposed to the current rule curve method as a basis for operating the weir. He noted that this would be a better approach for addressing the various water management objectives involving the weir. Details of Craig Sutherland's presentation responses to three i-clicker questions related to the presentation are located at [LINK](#).

Fish ... A Cowichan Watershed Overview –Tom Rutherford

Tom Rutherford is a fisheries biologist who works for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Living Rivers BC. Tom discussed:

- The importance of fish from an Ecosystem perspective;
- Overview of fish species in the watershed;
- Salmon species: their importance and place in the watershed;
- Challenges and limiting factors;
- The good news –things that are working well; and,
- Plans and opportunities for moving forward.

Tom also touched on the lake fisheries work of Tracy Michalski, a fisheries biologist with the BC Ministry of Environment, who was not able to attend the meeting. There has been a significant decline in the lake fisheries over the past 20 years and efforts are focussed on determining the cause so that issues can be addressed in a long term lake management plan. Tracy has met with the local Fish and Game Club to discuss the Ministry's work and Gerald Thom noted that he and Howard Smith would be willing to discuss the fisheries work being done at the lake with anyone who is interested.

In Tom's talk he pointed out that:

- Steelhead are considered to be moderately abundant and stable in the Cowichan but remain a conservation concern for MOE;
- Chum salmon spend a limited amount of time in the watershed but they are a major contributor of biomass when they spawn and die. Spawning numbers have been high in recent years (around 150,000);
- The trend for Coho and Chinook has been downward;
- Considerable efforts are being made to determine the cause of the Chinook decline –possible causes are water quality, water volume/flow issues, sedimentation, off channel habitat, estuary health and catch and marine survival.

Tom expressed optimism based on:

- The prevalence of cooperative relationships among the parties involved in watershed management;
- The emergence and growing influence of stewardship organizations in the watershed that include individuals with strong credentials and solid track records;
- The ability to implement major collaborative habitat enhancement projects such as the \$1.3 million Stoltz Bluff project;
- A strong commitment to research in the watershed;
- Innovative management activities and hatchery strategies.

Tom noted that he expected that the Cowichan Watershed Board would play a major role in water management including fisheries recovery in the watershed.

Comment Forms

Attendees were asked to fill out "Comment Forms" at the end of the meeting. Comments that were received are summarized below.

The Best Things about the Session

- The fisheries presentation (most frequent comment) (8);
- The presentations in general (4);
- The i-clickers (4);
- Feedback and sharing of information (3);
- Clarification of the water management/weir issue (including rule/band rule curve) (3);
- Workshop was well organized (2)
- Realizing there is a problem with water flows in the river;
- That there was an information session held;
- Update on Board and Committee.

The Session Could Have Been Better If.....

- Rule curve/rule band information had been presented more simply (4);
- There had been more notice (2);
- There had been discussion of good and bad effects of rule band on lake and river stakeholders;
- There were more technical details;
- MOE's water licensing had been better explained;
- There had been handouts;
- Slides had been more legible;
- There had been no cell phones;
- It wasn't on a weekend;
- Weir and increasing water levels had been addressed more directly;
- Used simple analogy for how rule band/curve system works and differences between them and then when that's understood bring out the graphs;
- There had been a broader look at watershed management;
- Didn't use laser pointer;
- Questions were limited to the 1 minute that was decided upon;
- It had been shorter.

Good Topics for Future Workshops about the Watershed

- Riparian zone development (3);
- Influence of forest practices on watershed (2);
- Watershed management;
- Land ownership options;

- Water quality objectives for ecological health and drinking water;
- Protection of watershed –enforcement of bylaws and rules;
- Process for changing a water license;
- Effects of rule band on lakeshore and river residents both good or bad;
- Habitat protection/destruction and restoration, what can we do as individuals;

Other Comments (Comments that weren't captured above included.)

- Respect is key;
- Important that the science supporting and opposing recommendations is presented openly and transparently
- Lake Cowichan Community Hall has better parking;
- Focus on Duncan and Cowichan Bay for future sessions;
- Need broad information on the watershed as a whole including erosion in the river to make sound decisions;
- Please don't raise the weir.
- River erosion should be included in erosion study.
- Concern over the accuracy of comments that were made on health costs.

Our sincere thanks to all who participated and attended.