



Draft Minutes – Monthly Board Meeting

Date: Monday, October 28, 2025

Time: 9am-11:30am, beginning with coffee/conversation from 8:30-9am

Location: 55 Station Street and on Zoom webinar format

Meeting Chair: Kate Segall (Co-Chair)

Participants: Shannon Waters, Calvin Swustus Senior, David Slade, David Froese, Tim Kulchyski, Kristine Sandhu, Jenna Sutherst, Alison Nicholson. **Advisor:** Oliver Brandes.

Staff/Project Leaders: Danielle Paydli, Tom Rutherford, Jill Thompson, Julia Kidder, Isabel Ransom (**minutes**)

Not attending: Chief Cindy Daniels, Michelle Staples, Arlette Malcolm, Christopher Alphonse

Agenda

8:30am Coffee and Conversation

55 Station Street/Lhq'utssulhshe' 'i' Ihq'etsus Liloot Shelh

1. **Welcome/Prayer (9:00am)**
2. **Regular Business**
 - a. Agenda Review / Revisions
 - b. Review and approve September 29th, 2025 Draft Minutes
 - c. Announcements and Correspondence (see bottom of agenda)
 - d. Staff updates (Danni)
3. **Hul'q'umi'num Watershed Lesson (9:15am)**
4. **Cowichan Weir Technical Update (9:30am)**
5. **CWB Impact Plan - Board Input (10:15am) - For Discussion**
6. **Proposed changes to BC'S Natural Resource Permitting processes (10:30am) – For Discussion and Decision**
7. **Other Business (10:45am)**
8. **Adjourn (11:00am)**

Welcome/Prayer [9:00 - 9:08]

- Kate Segall (Chair, CVRD) opens meeting & acknowledges territories of the Quwut'sun People, gratitude for recent rains; Quorum achieved
- Welcome Prayer from Calvin Swustus Senior

Regular Business [9:08-9:20]

- Agenda moved by David, seconded by Jenna – consensus achieved
- Minutes from September 29 approved – moved by Kristine, seconded by Alison
- Announcements and correspondence
 - Based on concerns outlined in a training webinar on cybersecurity, it was suggested that CWB is fairly exposed. The webinar recording and chat links were sent to Jill & Danielle.
 - PSF state of Salmon webinar Oct 29
 - Academics from SFU & UBC convened a “Watershed Pathways” gathering convened by – economists, forestry, salmon, health. [Jennifer Grenz](#) and [Deana Machin](#) were among participants. The gathering explored scenarios of approaches and ways to support watersheds moving forward, including creating reference materials and mapping different ways (Indigenous governance vs business-as-usual).
 - Beyond Fires and Floods – Indigenous Narratives in a time of Climate Extremes
 - How Indigenous narratives can inform and heal. Will be 20 webcasts/podcasts created from that material. Shannon was on a panel re: water from Tara Atleo (Nuu-chah-nulth) and Zoe Todd (Metis fish philosopher)
 - New staff Julia Kidder (Communications Coordinator) and Isabel Ransom (Administrative Assistant) were introduced.
 - Heather Pritchard will be retiring from the Watershed Board.
- **Motion** to recognize Heather Pritchard’s longstanding commitment and contribution to the board and ensure it’s on record (moved by David Froese, seconded by David Slade).

3. H’ul’q’umi’num Watershed Lesson [9:20 - 9:36]

- Lesson from Tim Kulchyski. Tim recognizes Tom speaking Hul’q’umi’num at the Cowichan Watershed Board meeting in Cowichan Bay and appreciates what this symbolizes in terms of efforts to uplift and celebrate Quw’utsun culture and language by non-Indigenous participants in the CWB.

4. Cowichan Weir Technical Updates [9:36: - 10:53]

A. Presentation from Brian Houle (Manager, Domtar Crofton Mill)

- 2024 was the first year with new guidance from provincial/federal governments to keep the lake 100% full as long as possible. After fish kill, more focus to keep the lake full. Wet spring, followed by droughts, and some rainfall in August. The lake has risen to a comfortable level thanks to recent rains. Without rain, would have required pumping in late September. Flow to 7 cms on May 16 and 4.5 cms on August 15.
- In 2025, Domtar hosted weekly conference calls with key regulators (Cowichan Tribes) and consistently sent action updates to 128 people in the community. Brian invited CWB members to submit ideas for revisions on how the watershed is managed for consideration by Domtar.
- Next steps for weir management:
 - Providing DFO with 2025 year end report (as guided in authorization).
 - Submit DFO application for 2026-2030 for further authorization.

Discussion:

- This process is severely flawed; objection to rapidly reducing the levels in the Spring. It's bad for the fish. The guidelines are perceived as useless, empty words. Observes the river has been going at 7 all summer. Now we're supporting applying for 5 year pumping and rapid Spring reduction?
 - It's the provincial and federal government who are guiding Domtar; will work cooperatively to manage the watershed. Doesn't have fish centric processes; depends on the province/feds. Suggests feedback to DFO & BC.
- These discussions are difficult, and it's important to maintain water levels that support ecological sustainability for salmon and other species. Addressing these concerns would require pumping as early as July, with storage potentially reaching zero and lake levels dropping below invert soon after. These are hard, emotional decisions centered on managing limited water in a watershed everyone cares deeply about. Frustration will continue until the new weir is in place. There's strong representation for the river and fish at the table, despite disagreements and imperfect outcomes.
- Decisions are increasingly complex, difficult, and never made lightly. It often feels like choosing which fish will survive and when. It's important to reflect on data being collected and learn effectively from what's happening. While decisions that may lead to fish loss are frustrating, but despite the 2023 fish kill (notably coho and steelhead), fish continue to return. The ongoing struggle in flow discussions is finding a balance that "makes everyone equally unhappy." Thank you to those working on these issues; we need to keep learning, growing, and maintaining flexibility to respond to unpredictable, evolving conditions and needs.
- Developing relationships through these processes is powerful and the process is beneficial for making best possible decisions with available info. The fact conversations are happening is a win.

- Gathering information is the compelling piece now.

B. Presentation from Kirk Stinchcombe (Managing Director & Partner, Econics)

Kirk is the sole proprietor at Econics and has a working history in watershed protection and planning. Has supported CVRD with watershed planning for the region, and has been working on this file for 1 year. The Cowichan Weir process has been in motion since 2019. Currently, there are \$28m between federal and provincial funding commitments.

- Reviewed the regulatory approvals needed, including a water license (BC Water Sustainability Act, including Dam Safety Regulation requirements); federal *Fisheries Act* authorization; and a permit under the Federal *Species at Risk act* due to the presence of Cowichan Lamprey. He indicated that Federal and provincial governments have been cooperative, and highlighted other relevant regulations: the Canadian *Navigable Waters Act*; BC *Heritage Conservation Act*; BC Wildlife Act, and Town of Lake Cowichan Bylaws (Zoning Bylaw, Traffic Regulations, OCP, etc.).
- Highlighted the regulatory approval submissions process, confirming that engineering firms (KWL and Stantel) have completed the “Phase 1” report as of October 2025. Phase 2 of regulatory approval submissions with KWL begins imminently (budget/schedule under preparation), and should be complete in early 2026. Noted that Most information needs are addressed by previous work – 29 previous studies and reports. Gap analysis based on a review of existing studies informing the regulatory process found three key gaps: archaeology; First Nations engagement, and a vegetation study (already started).
- Reviewed project financing and budget: \$28 million has been secured. The construction budget developed by Stantec is under revision, specifically to capture “other” costs more accurately including operations and maintenance; permitting; insurance, etc. A significant budget shortfall is anticipated; exact amount TBC. Working with MNP to scope review of project costs; goal to begin in November. Complete cost review and work with partners to update funding strategy.
 - **Next steps:** regulatory approval submissions phase 2 and cost update.

Discussion:

- Navigating bureaucratic processes is hard work. Anything helpful to bring back to CVRD?
 - Working closely with Jeff Moore at CVRD. CVRD oversaw construction planning, recent work with Stantec to update O&M cost projections. Strong existing technical relationship. Otherwise – governance discussions to come, CVRD will be part of those. Financial contributions from CVRD welcome.
- While this project may include upgrades to boat locks and control structures, the most critical piece is raising of weir – is it possible to do the project in a phased approach with funding that’s available?
- Any information on where licensing is at? Which entity is the applicant for the license?

- Regulatory approval is sought for the water license. Working with Cali Melnechenko at the Province of BC. The proponent (name on license) is a governance question and not yet confirmed. Kirk is focused on preparing the application from a technical perspective.
- To what extent will there be a parallel strategy for building a suite of potential funding contributors?
 - Funding strategy outside of scope. Spoke to Matt @ WLRS recently. Working on getting a study from MNP LLP. Two possible approaches – front door, back door. Front door approach is what was planned, but challenging due to fiscal restraint. Back door approach is possible. Currently just focused on getting the funding that's been requested. Optimistic; already relatively close to target, project obviously critical and valuable. The water licensing process isn't binary (license/no license) – you can get a provisional license.
- Questions about cost/value: The initial price tag of 1.5 million/year caused sticker shock → benefit of that work was immediately realized. Understanding cost/value analysis for fish species (ex Cowichan Chinook – \$12-40m fishery at 2,000). Question: ce had divested crown assets, and the hospital was a huge expenditure. How best do we put forward the cost of not building the weir by 2027/2028, and how much more it will cost us? Value wise, how much are we potentially losing in fish stocks, jeopardizing investment \$ in the Cowichan valley, and jeopardizing healthy economy and reconciliation by gambling with resources? How can we distinctly frame the cost/value argument?
 - Money is a problem. Only \$20m – on a scale of money that the province contributes to construction, a “drop in the bucket” with overwhelming benefits and positive business case. Not a good time to approach the province (union discussions, strike, etc)
 - The next shot will be the last shot. Stresses importance of correct \$ figures. [MNP](#) conducting final revision of figures.

CWB Impact Plan - Board Input [10:56 - 11:10]

- There was lots of input last year. The key elements of the 3 year plan are: whole-of-watershed approach; lead/support essential projects; putting principles into action by establishing “ways of working” principles. CWS staff are working on incorporating whole-of-watershed visioning (April 2025 onwards) and coordinating review by Qwuy'um'aat (Eyvette) Elliot and EverPlan Consulting.
- Initial input from board needed as **DRAFT Impact Plan** is developed. Draft plan will be available Wednesday, November 19 for board review.
 - *Specific areas within our Impact Plan where we should add extra energy?*

- *Additions to our key priorities, projects of focus or our ways of working? Other areas we should put our energy?*
- *Anything we should consider dropping?*
- Cowichan Watershed Board is a provincial model, and hits provincial barriers – is there some way, when we're sharing the amazing things we're able to do locally, we can also have a stream of communication about the barriers we're reaching within provincial scope?

Proposed changes to BC'S Natural Resource Permitting processes [11:10-11:33]

Oliver Brandeis: Regaining Lost Momentum on Watershed Security

- Although the province previously committed to advancing watershed security, this work was de-prioritized over the last 1.5 years but is now regaining momentum. Key areas for initiating progress include strengthening Watershed Boards, investing through the Watershed Security Fund, conducting a Water Rentals Review, and advancing pilots, permitting improvements, and other WSA tools.
- There is an ongoing tension between identifying best practices and launching new initiatives, underscoring the need for clarity in direction. WLRS remains a central player in this space, with the minister serving as the key provincial voice on water.

Natural Resource Permitting Streamlining – proposed provincial changes (bundle) and response/input opportunity (LINK:

<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/engagement/natural-resource-permitting-improvements>)

- Proposed changes aim to make NR permitting more efficient, with several falling under the Watershed Sustainability Act (WSA). About one-third of the changes are housekeeping updates, one-third focus on improving restoration and habitat work, and one-third represent a substantive shift in risk. The central cross-cutting change is a move to a risk-based approach that would exempt low-risk proposals from permitting and licensing requirements, alongside other minor adjustments to definitions and timelines. Water issues are now explicitly on the agenda, with sixteen areas under review; the October 17 deadline has passed and the next deadline is December 12.
- POLIS's initial response emphasizes the need for clear "low-risk" thresholds across all proposed changes. Key concerns for the three highlighted water changes include cumulative impacts, potential over-allocation in the context of climate change, data gaps, and the absence of criteria for determining when streams or aquifers have "enough water." Additional priorities include ensuring detailed adjudication for expedited groundwater licensing, recognizing groundwater–surface water interconnectivity, and securing consent from Indigenous Nations based on confidence that water availability is sufficient.

- Additional considerations and focus areas for December include developing criteria and definitions for risk thresholds for changes in and about a stream, and a bundle of wetland-related changes.

Discussion:

- How does this intersect with forestry on private forestlands?
 - It would be easier to do restoration on private forestlands.
 - We see lots of infractions on land use in CVRD and the Ministry of Forests says WSA will address - but the province doesn't have capacity to enforce on existing regulations. So, how will they enforce enhanced regulations?
 - There is a possibility that freeing up capacity will enable this to happen.
- When does the invitation for comments extend to?
 - October 17 date is not as critical – December 12 date
- Motion to draft a letter for WLRS re: NR licensing streamlining process (Motion by David S, seconded by Kristine)
 - POLIS will support Watershed Board staff in developing a letter; POLIS advisor. Danielle will bring to CWB members, Cowichan Tribes and CVRD for review.

Other business

- No other business

Adjourn [11:35]

Action Items

Item	Responsible
Review webinar on cybersecurity – including chat links to Jill & Danni. Fairly highly exposed.	Jill, Danni and Isabel Others can reach out to request recording link from David (S)
Share PSF webinar details	Isabel
Invite Dr. Zoe Todd to the board meeting (or speaker series?)	Shannon
Board members/board as whole to consider submitting feedback on water flow guidance to DFO/WLRS Domtar is “open to revisions on how the watershed is managed” – provide Brian Houle with your ideas.	Any/all
Oliver and Brian to connect separately	Oliver/Brian H.
Board to consider providing initial input to staff as DRAFT Impact Plan is developed: Specific areas within our Impact Plan where we should add extra energy? Additions to our key priorities, projects of focus or our ways of working? Other areas we should put our energy? Anything we should consider dropping? Etc.	All board members
Send Danni a note if not available for a full day workshop – January 26 (full day); Board meeting in the AM, workshop in the PM	All board members
Review POLIS analysis of WLRS NR licensing streamlining process, provide input via engagement portal:	Any/all

https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/engagement/natural-re-source-permitting-improvements/	
Draft a letter for BC-WLRS re: NR licensing streamlining process for approval in November meeting	Danni to lead, support from Oliver & POLIS – review by Board

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