



February 6th, 2026

**The Honourable Joanne Thompson**  
Minister – Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
200 Kent St  
Station 15N100  
Ottawa ON K1A 0E6

Dear Honourable Minister,

As Co-Chairs of the Cowichan Watershed Board<sup>1</sup>, representing the Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District, we write with shared concern regarding the termination of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Restoration Centre of Expertise (RCOE) staff in the Pacific Region. We understand the difficult fiscal realities facing all government departments, and the purpose of this letter is to seek clarity on the path forward in our collaborative work.

In our territory, salmon are the lifeblood of our community - a cultural keystone species for Cowichan Tribes and the foundation of both the social fabric and the economic resilience of the Cowichan Valley. RCOE's role in working side-by-side with our communities to understand and alleviate barriers to fish health has been deeply valued. These staff provide crucial federal representation within our [unique governance model](#) and are actively engaged in finding solutions to prevent a recurrence of the catastrophic 2023 fish kill - an event that shook our community and captured national and [international attention](#). RCOE staff participation in our collaborative water quality and cold-water refugia monitoring is vital, particularly until ongoing efforts to improve water flows through the Cowichan Lake weir replacement project is complete. The removal of this direct, on-the-ground support will be sharply felt and viewed as a step backward in this critical work to restore fish habitat.

The Cowichan Watershed Board is a proven, long-standing model for effective collaborative governance and delivery. We represent a ready-made partnership that leverages the authorities, resources, and leadership of both Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD to advance shared priorities of all orders of government: from restoring salmon, protecting habitat, and upholding constitutionally protected rights. In light of new funding realities, we wish to explore how we can continue to work together effectively. We are keen to understand how DFO envisages maintaining its essential technical support and federal presence in multi-party initiatives like ours.

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<sup>1</sup> The Cowichan Watershed Board is a local governance model created in 2010 to provide leadership for sustainable water management in the Cowichan/Koksilah watersheds, ancestral home of the Quw'utsun First Nation. The CWB is co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District and represents a unique partnership between First Nations and local government. Through this model, Cowichan Tribes and the CVRD work together to advance whole-of-watershed health, demonstrating a commitment to moving down the path of reconciliation.

The CWB is committed to finding solutions that ensure our projects continue without disruption. We believe our Board can be a key partner in helping DFO meet its mandate efficiently in this region and protect our shared watershed and the salmon and other species who call it home.

We would welcome an early conversation with you or your designate to discuss what continued, meaningful federal engagement could look like, and how we might structure our partnership to navigate this changed landscape together.

Respectfully,



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Chief Cindy Daniels  
Co-Chair Cowichan Watershed Board  
Chief, Cowichan Tribes



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Chair Kate Segall  
Co-Chair Cowichan Watershed Board  
Chair, Cowichan Valley Regional District