

Xwulqw'selu/Koksilah Watershed Planning NEWSLETTER

February 2024



Above: University of Victoria's Xwulqw'selu Connections Research Team explains their work with community volunteers to understand how and where groundwater feeds the Koksilah River, using temperature and conductivity as indicators. See page 2 for more.

What's in Store for 2024?

1. **Publishing a draft Watershed Plan Framework.**

This strategic outline will include a community vision and desired outcomes, signal what elements we expect the planning process to explore. Community Advisory Tables are giving input to this Framework.

2. **Launching Workstreams.** Task groups will be appointed to conduct technical analysis and recommend options for watershed solutions. This will include more detailed conversations about the pros and cons of potential actions, and learning from community members who rely on and care for Koksilah water and land every day.

3. **Establishing a Cowichan Tribes Guidance Table.**

Through this table, Quw'utsun knowledge holders and community members will provide important knowledge and support to Cowichan Tribes as they co-develop this plan with the Province.

4. **Convening the Collaborative Community Advisory Table.**

Through this table, appointed community representatives will be involved in setting direction and co-developing the plan, in parallel with the Cowichan Tribes table. Meeting #2 (March) will focus on giving input to the draft Watershed Plan Framework.

5. **Website Update & Resource Library.**

Look inside this newsletter for a taste of resources already on our website to help us understand the watershed. Everyone is learning as we all move forward together. (Website improvements coming!)

6. **Involving more People.** Opportunities for information sharing and learning, relationship building and cultural exchanges between First Nation and non-First Nation people will be offered, and youth will be engaged.

Visit our Online Library!

Below are 4 examples of resources you can find in our growing library.
Much more to explore at koksilahwater.ca/resources

1. Streamflow Snapshots (7 editions)

Published in 2023 by: Xwulqw'selu Connections (ongoing)



SUMMARY:

Easy-to-read updates from a 5-year Citizen Science study of the Koksilah watershed's:

- groundwater-surface water connections
- connections between people and the watershed
- water science and governance connections

"Surface water and groundwater connections naturally vary through space and time. One spot at a stream or river can change its connection with groundwater as the seasons change. However, groundwater-surface water connections are becoming less reliable ..." (Snapshot 2)

2. Koksilah Water Supply & Options Feasibility Project.

Published in 2021 by: Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Scoping Committee (Elucidate Consulting)

SUMMARY:

Identified possible water supply options for:

- meeting summer water demand
- maintaining environmental flows

Considered:

- impact
- affordability
- ease of implementation
- ease of use
- reliability

Map: Lakes over 2 ha (p.39) including Grant, Dougan's, Kingzett and Keating Lakes.



"...the following water storage and supply options were identified for consideration: greywater reuse, cisterns, dugouts, water storage tanks, extraction pits, existing lakes, natural features, municipal water supplies, municipal wastewater, Cowichan lake, aquifer storage and recovery, and forest management." (p2)

3. Twinned Watershed Project Reports (various)

Published by: Cowichan Tribes & Halalt First Nations & Cowichan Watershed Board, 2021



"...as water levels dropped, field crews walked the two rivers to monitor how various habitats were impacted by declining flow rates. Pool, riffle, and glide habitats were inventoried to see if there was enough water for fish..."

SUMMARY:

Reports and videos from an indigenous-led partnership to study the Koksilah and Chemainus Rivers, both impacted by extremely low flows.

- Local field crews gathered previously unavailable data about water flows, fish habitat, and riverbank ecology in 2021
- Experts (Geomorphic Consulting) analyzed the data, including indigenous knowledge, to understand the relationships between these elements. Findings will inform continuing government and Advisory Table discussions about flow levels and water use/supply options.
- The project is ongoing to determine fish species and abundance.

4. Ecosystem-Based Assessment of the Koksilah River Watershed (2 reports)

Published by: Cowichan Station Area Association, Koksilah Working Group, 2019

SUMMARY:

- A community project to provide the first "whole of watershed" overview of the watershed's composition, structure, and function before European settlement, including both indigenous and western sources of information.
- Provides an ecosystem-based analysis of the current condition of the watershed, based on publicly available information (e.g. desktop research, satellite imagery, government data) and interviews/public meetings.
- Recommends restoration actions.



Above: Canoes on the Koksilah River. Report 1, p7
Below: Western Toad, Species of Special Concern. Report 1, p21

"Koksilah Ridge (Hwsalu-utsum) is the "place having rush-mat shelters" (Abel D. Joe, as told to Rozen, 1985). The origins of this name date back to the first Quw'utsun' people when two Sooke women travelling to find Syalutsa made a camp of rush-mat shelters on Deerholme Mountain (Abel D. Joe, as told to Rozen, 1985)... The area also features caves that were used by wolves (Arvid Charlie, pers. comm.) and black bears during hibernation, and was also a known elk hunting area (Abraham Joe, as told to Rozen, 1985)." (p.7)



Message from the Planning Team

A scientist once taught me about “stationarity” – a concept that basically means historic weather patterns can be reliably used to predict the future. For decades and still today, much planning and decision-making is based on stationarity. But as we're all witnessing, weather patterns are becoming extreme. It's getting harder to predict what will happen.

This is a problem because everyone needs water surety – and not just for right now, or for a hot week in August. No, we need to know what we can count on in the future – a farmer investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in new equipment needs to know she'll be able to harvest her crop; a salmon who deposits her eggs in Bright Angel Park needs to know there will be deep cool pools for her fry to shelter in.

That's why a new watershed plan is needed. As 2024 kicked off with almost no snow cover on Hwsalu'utsum (Koksilah Ridge), we were reminded that this process isn't easy, but it's essential.



Sincerely, on behalf of the Planning Team,

Natasha Overduin, Jointly Appointed Executive Director, Xwulqw'selu Watershed Planning Process

*Hiiye'yutul tst'u to' Mukw'
stem 'i 'u tun'a Tumuhw 'i'
tu qa'.*

Everything in the natural world is connected as part of our family; we are all relatives.



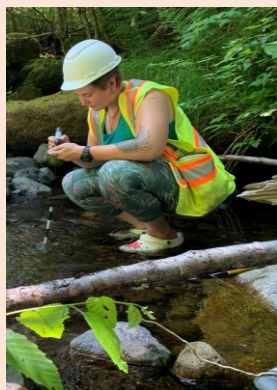
Other Watershed News



PLANT! An Elder-lead "Xpey' Project" is working to protect and restore Cedar stands within the Xwulqw'selu and other watersheds. Get involved!

JourneyOfOurGeneration.ca/projects

Check out other Xwulqw'selu/Koksilah Watershed initiatives happening this month.



JOB POSTING: Xwulqw'selu Connections is hiring a Field Resch Assistant to hike, swim, wade, drive, and visit with Xwulqw'selu creeks from May-September. Apply by Feb. 29 at: xwulqwselu.uvic.ca

FREE WORKSHOP with Ted van der Gulik: On Farm Water Management for agricultural producers. Free resource materials and lunch provided.

Feb. 15, 9am-4:30pm
Cobble Hill Community Hall
Register by Feb 11.

Space is limited.
Register using QR code or [here](#).
Contact: Bejay.Mills@gov.bc.ca



ABOUT US: The Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) Watershed Planning process is co-lead by Cowichan Tribes and the Province, working together to create a whole-of-watershed plan, drawing on both Cowichan Tribes' laws and teachings and provincial legislation, with guidance from community and technical teams.

Xwulqw'selu / Koksilah Watershed Planning
www.koksilahwater.ca / contact@koksilahwater.ca