

Round table Report
June/2023 SEHAB meeting
SEHAB Rep Ian Bruce, Southern Van Isle.
Alternate Steph Cottell
CA: Heather Wright

Summary

1. **Any issues that are affecting groups and their projects that are directly related to DFO.**
 - SVI: Several groups, many Angler groups who have freshwater and salmon habitat: As I attend the different meetings, GRR, ACS, BCWF, Goldstream Hatchery, the overwhelming theme recurrent in all is the deep distrust of and lack of respect from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Raingardens are being installed by groups but would like official support from DFO.
 - Stewards are wondering when PSSI will show itself in our area. I reached out to Andrea Goruk and spoke briefly with her but never heard back.
 - Mixed reviews from SEP workshop – great effort by organizers but support on the ground and availability of facilities was weak in places.
 - Cowichan Area: Ongoing uncertainty about RAR particularly in Lake Cowichan area- who enforces? Seems like a hot potato. Issues with QEP model.
2. **Any positive things that are directly related to DFO**
 - New CA Heather Wright is a great support! She was enthusiastically responsive and
 - involved in community learning activities early this spring.
 - FFHPP - their new young staff are doing well and being responsive to the restoration community.
3. **Any things coming up that DFO should know about**

New Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project just announced:

<https://www.estuaryresilience.ca/cowichan-estuary-restoration-project/>
4. **Any issues that are affecting groups and their projects that are related to other agencies.** Again. Better support/coordination WRT raingardens

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Group reports

Peninsula Streams: New changes in Staff with Kyle Armstrong becoming Executive Director and our Freshwater biologist getting her RP bio status.
PSS had their AGM a few weeks ago – 21 years. New Directors Peter McCully and Derek Miller
Entered into a 5-year Collaborative Agreement with DFO Science for forage fish egg validation :
Will include a training session at the Institute to support our fellow members of the BC forage Fish Monitoring Network
PSS leads the province in numbers of forage fish eggs found and volunteers in the field.
Our beach volunteers are segwaying into green crab monitoring.
PSS coordinating and developing joint activities around cutthroat on habitat and marking/tagging
World Fisheries Trust operated a successful smolt trap program this spring on Craigflower Creek

Cowichan

Group reports (salmon/watershed related notes from recent Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable meeting)
Cowichan Tribes Cheri Ayers, Fisheries Biologist

Local British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF) project info

- We are in our third season (the first was designing stock assessment on Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) and Chemainus). Both rivers now have a comprehensive stock program running. We have sonar units on both rivers to monitor adults coming back. We are in the spring and the fall. The spring is interesting because that is when we think there is a low abundance run of early chinook in Xwulqw'selu and Chemainus.
- Spawner Surveys
 - walking the river from below the canyon down to the estuary in the fall and swimming through the canyons in the summer time to look for adults. We are collecting samples of any spawned out adults we encounter (scale samples and carcass measurements, DNA sampling).
 - We are also looking in the tributaries, particularly Kelvin Creek on

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Xwulqw'selu, Norrie Creek and Glenora Creek

- Juvenile Monitoring Program (Screw Traps)
 - catching fry/smolts using rotary screw traps. We measure and weigh them and put a PIT tag in anything that is big enough to be tagged. The screw trapping starts in March. We have three traps now. One on Kelvin Creek (4 ft) and then two six-foot traps on the Xwulqw'selu and Chemainus.

- DNA Work
 - looking for a genetic marker for early run chinook to get an idea of the productivity of early and late run fish, which hasn't been done before in either river.

- Habitat Mapping:
 - Mapping meso-habitat (pool, riffle and glides) primarily in the lower reaches of both mainstem and some tributaries through desktop exercise and field inventory. The goal is to undertake a Riverscape assessment to look for restoration opportunities where we can slow the water down and re-establish connectivity to the floodplain. Pilot project will be on Kelvin Creek.

- Low-Tech Restoration Course for August
 - Plans for an August a low-tech restoration course on Kelvin Creek taught by low-tech restoration specialist Joe Wheaton. The course focus initially will be on Quw'utsun participants to bring in the guardian piece to begin low-tech restoration work in the watersheds. Because we are looking at tributaries, we are looking to re-engage those systems, including riparian restoration.

- Timeline For the Work
 - For funding timelines, we have officially until March 2025 and have applied for a second set of funding from British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF) that will take us to 2027. And, the Chemainus Watershed Initiative, through Halalt and AHRF funding will be until 2026.

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- Other Notes on Most Recent Research on Re-engagement of Flood Plains
 - There has been a bunch of research on the size of fish. The fish that grow up in the flood plain are huge fish compared to fish in the mainstem (US research). In those studies, they looked at the eyeball lens growth rings to tell how long the fish spent in different types of habitats within freshwater zones. What they are finding, in a lot of these systems that have healthy wetland, river complexes, is that fish that grow up in the floodplain area, they grow way bigger, and they are the ones that come back at a higher rate of return. So, this interaction with the floodplain is very important. This research is also saying that there is 149x (149 times) the food production on the flood plain, versus the canal which is 6x (six times higher), versus the river with is x.
 - This is related to the traditional knowledge around how you could tell a fish is a Quw'utsun fish because they were so much bigger.

Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Genevieve Singleton cochair

- Freshwater Fisheries Event (June 24, 2023)
 - On June 24th, they will have an event celebrating their 20 year anniversary. They would like us to help. Anything we can do to help them is important.
- BC Parks grant: Salmon and Forests Connecting Children, thanks to Stephanie and Cowichan Land Trust overseeing the funds and assisting me.
- We just finished the pilot project of Salmon and Forest programs for schools. It was very successful and involved students visiting with me the back channels to learn about the relationship between Salmon and Forest, doing a tour of Cowichan Hatchery, doing hands on planting of Willow stakes with Ken Elliott of Elliott Native Plant Nursery and doing Salmon yoga and other activities. We would like to present this in the spawning season and are actively looking for more funds. Any ideas on this are appreciated.
- Our watershed walks were very successful. We hope for more funds to offer this again in the future.

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Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society Jim Deck

- Upper River Clean Up
 - In the past we had an upper river clean-up. We are no longer going to do this. There is now a new operation, the Tube Shack, which was getting garbage in the river, but the Tube Shack is now doing a good job of cleaning up after themselves.

- Annual Signature Event (Tentative Date August 19th)
 - We haven't got a better name for it yet, but we are identifying what to do, but will probably come up with a name here soon. This is something like a River Day celebration at Saywell park, where you have the weir, the lake, and the river within a viewing point, you can see what is happening, you can visit the lake, weir, and river, within an easy 5–10-minute walk. We are putting something together right now for this event and right now we have a tentative date of August the 26th, which I wanted to bring up to see if that conflicted with other groups. We would love the possibility of having others involved. Genevieve mentioned that the lower River clean up, sponsored by CWB and Cowichan Tribes is often around that date. Jim stated that the population in Cowichan Lake doubles during the summer and on weekends with the Victoria crowd, so that was our thinking around August.

- Witnessing the Water: An Authentic Relationship
 - Judy Brayden is putting together this book as a presentation of various spots in the river, what the river looks like, and what is happening. She did the Ribbon of the River project for the Cowichan Arts group. The book goes to print in the next couple of weeks and will be available for sale in mid-June. Hopefully, you will be seeing this book in your favourite bookstore or your favourite roundtable meeting where you can pick up a copy.

Friends of the Cowichan Joe Saysell

- Development in Lake Cowichan
 - Over the last couple years Chris Morley and myself with Friends of the Cowichan have been fighting this. We got the cease and desist order. The treed place is flattened out. We have some proper regulations. We have gone to get a new QEP in. They got a new RARR done. They have started again this week. At least, in the centre of that, is a natural spring that provides cold water underneath the road and goes into Stanley Creek, which is right alongside it, which is a supplier of cold water in the upper Cowichan area. They forgot about it in the

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original RARR. Now, they have fenced it all off. So, at least, a couple years of work, but we have some proper regulations on it. Even though it will end up an eyesore of houses, at least now there is some stuff to regulate it.

- Fry Rescue

- But now we are really exploding with water, so fry rescue will start late depending on how long it keeps raining. So, it will take quite a while for that river to drop.
- Also, for fry this year, even though there are a lot of salmon around, there are not a lot of fry. It is difficult to tell because the water is high. So, it is a little early, and it is not a science, but I am just a little worried about it.

- Boat Cleaning

- We are looking into the possibility of boat cleaning on highway 18. There is one on the road to Renfrew on Mesachie, and one on the road to highway 18. So, we want to get a station like that to check your boat. The people who are coming here are not just from Alberta, but also from the Okanagan, etc. So, Ian thought it was a great idea and he is going to try to get the first stage of this going that way we can get these invasive species out of the lake, because there are islands of them.