



Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

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Annual Report 2012 - 2013



Introduction

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre, located in Hecate Park in Cowichan Bay, BC, is an interpretive centre that provides interactive educational opportunities for both children and adults to learn about the Cowichan estuary, its watershed, marine and other wildlife, and natural and cultural history. The Centre includes an indoor classroom with an aquarium and touch tank, microscopes and interactive displays, an outdoor wildlife viewing platform and interpretive trails. Visitors have access to a wildlife viewing telescope, maps and interpretive signage showing the diversity of the 400 hectare estuarine ecosystem.

The Journey to Create the Nature Centre

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre was originally conceived in February 2011 by a small group of local Cowichan Bay residents, including parents, educators, naturalists, fishermen and business people, who saw the estuary as both a natural treasure, rich in tradition, history, and wildlife, and also an ecosystem at risk from development and industrial activities. Working under the auspices of the Cowichan Land Trust, a non-profit society and registered charity that holds conservation covenants, the group obtained \$300,000 in development funding through the West Coast Community Adjustment Program (WestCCAP) and Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) and raised over \$60,000 locally through fundraising events and building local partnerships with the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and the Rotary Club of Duncan. The Rotary contributed both money and more than 300 hours of volunteer labour to building the Nature Centre and the viewing platform.

In early 2012, with funding in place and the building site approved by the CVRD, a Green Shores restoration of the eroded shoreline west of Hecate Park was completed by a Land Trust Job Creation Partnership (JCP) crew working in collaboration with CVRD Parks. Working with a restoration ecologist, invasive species were removed and replaced with native plantings. Logs for the restoration were donated by Timberwest. In mid-April the design and the crew's work withstood the test of a combined high tide and 30 year storm.



Outdoor interpretive signage and maps were developed by a professional designer, with the support of local naturalists, to show the diversity and scope and of life in the estuary and its rich intertidal zone and lead visitors through the park along the waterfront to the wildlife viewing platform. The platform offers views looking up the Koksilah and Cowichan Rivers to the west, north toward Mt. Tzouhelum and east toward Salt Spring Island and the Salish Sea.



The Centre's indoor classroom, built on the eastern edge of Hecate Park overlooking the estuary's intertidal zone and eelgrass meadows, has large windows overlooking the estuary and is just a short walk to the foreshore. The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre officially opened on April 21, 2012 with music, First Nations dancers and a crowd of about 250 people in attendance.



The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre was constructed to meet both local tourism goals and address a regional educational gap identified by the Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection. A biologically diverse intertidal area, providing vital habitat for migratory birds and commercially important fish, the Cowichan Estuary was severely degraded over a number of decades. Environmental monitoring, management, and restoration activities are underway and having a positive impact. Public education and awareness is critical to the ongoing recovery of the estuary. The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre is currently the only indoor and outdoor classroom space where students learn about the Cowichan Estuary and the Cowichan and Koksilah Watershed. The Centre provides hands-on environmental education for youth and their families with a balance between science education and stewardship.

Visitors

The Centre is an inviting open space with a mural, three-dimensional eelgrass meadow, and a number of interactive displays, including an aquarium and touch tank, a series of two minute videos touching on the estuary's history and importance biologically and to First Nations culture, and an interactive map touch screen with stories of the watershed.



Between our opening on April 21, 2012, and March 31, 2013, we have had over 6,000 walk-in visitors, including a good mix of tourists and local residents, and close to 500 school program participants come through our doors. At this writing (mid-July 2013), we have already delivered programming to 750 students in the first three and a half months of our 2013-14 fiscal year.

School Programs & Summer Science Camps

In our first year of operation we developed estuary school program curricula for different grades and ages through work donated by an Environmental Education master's degree student as her thesis project. This means our programs are completely linked in with the Province's Prescribed Learning Outcomes. We also partnered with the Cowichan Watershed Board to deliver a Cowichan River and watershed program. For pre-school aged children, a dedicated volunteer who is a retired librarian has been hosting regular weekly story-time events bringing up to 20 children and parents in each week.

Our school programs are quickly becoming a popular youth educational resource for both public and private schools within School District 79. We hosted over 15 school programs in our first year and, in Partnership with the Cowichan Valley Parks, Recreation and Culture department, we hosted 3 week-long summer science camps for school aged children. Camp participants were able to participate in beach seine netting, bird surveys, canoe expeditions through the estuary, and explorations aided by microscope and telescope. We have also hosted Professional Development Day workshops for teachers to increase access and knowledge for those wishing to integrate ocean and estuary related knowledge into the classroom.



We expect to provide between 40 school programs in 2013-14 as word spreads of our centre and what we offer. We have connected with S.E.A. Programs, a residential ocean learning program for students from Calgary, giving us the opportunity to provide hands-on learning to over 1,000 additional students each year. Six summer science camps are also planned for the summer of 2013.

Community Events

The Nature Centre has hosted and participated in several community events that increase outreach and access to environmental education, including hosting regular film nights through the fall, winter, and early spring. We have also hosted a presentation by the Vancouver Aquarium on local cetacean populations, and DFO's Stream to Sea workshops.

The Nature Centre has partnered with Bird Studies of Canada to complete monthly bird surveys to identify and count shore birds found along a designated stretch of shore in Cowichan Bay, and identify, count, and report any dead birds found on the beach. This citizen-based science initiative began with a workshop on bird identification for the volunteers who now run the program.

We have also linked into existing festivals and events related to the river, estuary and ocean in and around Cowichan Bay, such as the Cowichan Bay Spot Prawn Festival, International Low Tide Day, and BC River's Day, providing visitors with opportunities for estuary explorations.

Volunteering & Staffing

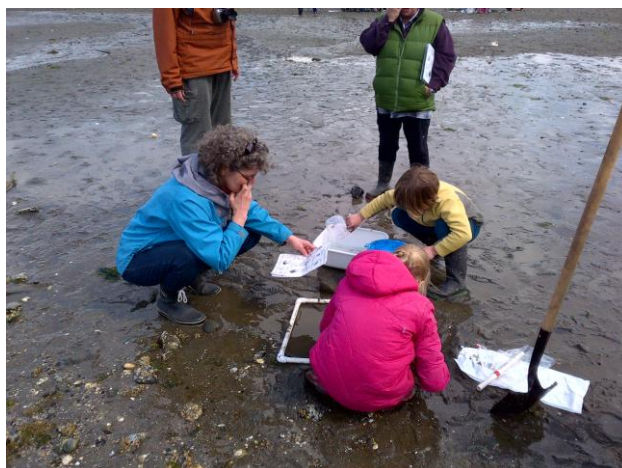
The Centre has had a part-time paid volunteer coordinator and, in partnership with Canada Summer Jobs, a full time summer student who provided leadership in our camp program. However, the Nature Centre is primarily staffed and operated by a volunteer committee of the Land Trust and a team of 40 volunteers. School programs also rely heavily on volunteer support. With the expanded volume of programming in the coming year, we hope to be able to pay our marine educator, who has volunteered many hours of her time over the past year.

We offer seasonal volunteer training and knowledge building events and programs to support our volunteers, whose contributions played a large part in our success during our first year.

Financial Report

As a small centre we are careful with our finances and are pleased to have ended our first year of operations with a modest surplus of \$4,700 and a break even budget for the coming year. In addition to adding a second part-time staff person, we hope to develop two new interactive displays in the coming year, working in partnership with the Cowichan Watershed Board. In order to cover our ongoing operational costs we are working on developing multiple revenue streams and exploring new opportunities to make the centre a sustainable and self-supporting place of learning. Creating new displays and further developing our programming will depend on donations and grant funding which we apply for throughout the year.

We are also committed to making sure the centre is accessible to everyone who wants to visit, suggesting visitors contribute a donation of \$2 per person, or \$5 per family per visit. We don't turn anyone away. Those living nearby are encouraged to support the centre by becoming members: \$20-individual, \$35-family, or \$100-supporting members. From donations and memberships in the past year we raised close to \$4,800. Our school programs and summer camps broke even, and we raised about \$5,600 through two fundraising events. We also have a small gift shop that brings in a bit of revenue, primarily from selling t-shirts and field guides.



COWICHAN ESTUARY NATURE CENTRE 2012-13 FINANCIAL REPORT

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	TOTAL	OPERATIONS	PROGRAMS	INTERPRETIVE DISPLAYS	STORE
INCOME					
Grants	14,180	9,750	4,000	430	-
Surplus from Building Phase	5,983	5,983	-	-	-
Fundraising Events	4,678	4,678	-	-	-
Donations	3,668	3,668	-	-	-
Wage Subsidy	7,507	1,887	5,620	-	-
Membership Dues	1,189	1,189	-	-	-
School Programs	1,715	-	1,715	-	-
Camps	2,036	-	2,036	-	-
Store Sales	2,033	-	-	-	2,033
Facility Rental	92	92	-	-	-
Miscellaneous Revenue	313	187	-	-	126
Total Income	43,395	27,435	13,371	430	2,159
EXPENSE					
Wages & Benefits	26,987	15,503	11,484	-	-
Consulting	2,715	2,715	-	-	-
Travel	746	746	-	-	-
Utilities	1,594	1,594	-	-	-
Telephone/Internet	700	700	-	-	-
Insurance	1,243	1,243	-	-	-
Security	396	370	-	-	26
Supplies	757	545	57	-	155
Office	642	572	70	-	-
Advertising & Promotions	641	641	-	-	-
Project Expense	870	4	437	430	-
Event Expenses	996	996	-	-	-
Purchases Gift Shop	2,011	-	-	-	2,011
Total Expense	40,298	25,628	12,048	430	2,192
Net Income	3,096	1,807	1,323	-	-34

STATEMENT OF SURPLUS

Beginning accumulated surplus	1,574
Net Income for the year	<u>3,096</u>
Ending accumulated surplus	<u><u>4,670</u></u>