



# Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

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## Annual Report 2013 – 2014



### 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, we obtained development funding through the West Coast Community Adjustment Program (WestCCAP), Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), and locally through fundraising events and local partnerships with the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists and the Rotary Club of Duncan, which contributed both money and many hours of volunteer labour to help build the Nature Centre and the viewing platform.

The development project included a Green Shores restoration of the eroded shoreline west of Hecate Park and development of outdoor interpretive signage and maps that show the



diversity and scope of life in the estuary and its rich intertidal zone. Visitors are led through the park along the waterfront to the wildlife viewing platform which 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.



A biologically diverse intertidal area, providing vital habitat for resident and 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'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 Centre officially opened on April 21, 2012 with music, First Nations dancers and a crowd of about 250 people.



The Estuary Nature Centre remains 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.

### **New Developments**

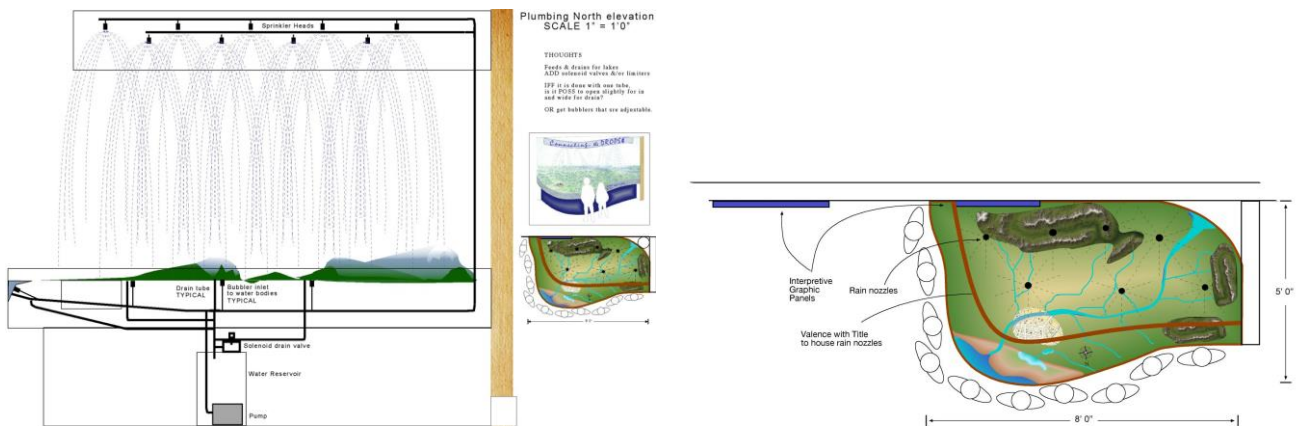
This year, with a grant from TD Friends of the Environment, we installed a photo-voltaic solar collector, which provides significant electricity to meet the Centre's needs. The Centre has a display about this solar installation and the advantages of solar energy. With support from the Nature Trust, we published an estuary bird viewing map available to the public by donation. This spring we are also installing a new fresh water aquarium with Coho fry for our "Salmon in the Classroom" program.



### **Interactive Watershed Exhibit in Development**

A hands-on three-dimensional interactive exhibit of the Cowichan and Koksilah Watershed designed to provide engaging learning opportunities for all ages is now under development with support from the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Cowichan Watershed Board and the CVRD. Once the exhibit is complete, visitors will be able to make it rain a little or a lot and see

the impact. Through a recirculating water system that allows the watershed to fill from below, visitors will be able to see in motion the ebb and flow of tides and the impact of rainfall events, floods, droughts and sea level rise due to climate change. Development of this exhibit is underway and fundraising for its completion is still ongoing.



## 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 station with a series of short videos of local elders, biologists, conservationists and historians talking about First Nations' culture and the estuary's biological and historical importance. An interactive touch screen map nearby provides information on many aspects of the watershed.



Since opening on April 21, 2012 we have had over 10,500 visitors, averaging over 5,000 visitors a year, with a good mix of tourists and local residents. New displays and new creatures in the touch tank bring many visitors back for repeat visits. This year we also had over 1,100 school program participants come through our doors – more than double our first year. We are open to the public Wednesday through Sunday in the summer and Thursday through Sunday afternoons from September to June. We are also open holiday Mondays.



## School Programs & Summer Science Camps

We have developed marine school program curricula for different grades and ages linked with the Province's Prescribed Learning Outcomes. We have also partnered with the Cowichan Watershed Board to deliver a Cowichan River and Watershed program focused on grades four and five. For pre-school aged children, a dedicated volunteer who is a retired librarian hosts and brings in guest story tellers for regular story-time events with up to 20 children and parents in each week.



Our school programs are a popular educational resource for both public and private schools within School District 79. This year we hosted over 18 school programs and five week-long summer science camps for school aged children - both full-day and half-day camps were offered. Campers participated in beach seine netting, bird surveys, canoe expeditions through the estuary, and explorations aided by microscope and telescope. We have also hosted Professional Development Days for teachers to increase access for those wishing to integrate river, ocean and estuary-related knowledge into the classroom.



We plan to expand both our school and summer science camp programs in 2014-15 as word spreads about our centre and what we offer. We also provide programming for S.E.A. Programs, a residential ocean learning program for students from Calgary, giving us the opportunity to provide hands-on learning to up to 1,000 additional students each year.

## Community Events

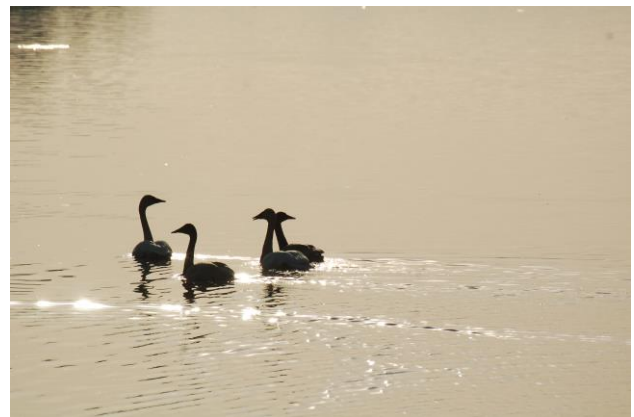
The Nature Centre regularly hosts and participates in community events that increase outreach and access to environmental education, including offering regular film nights throughout the year. This year we hosted an Eelgrass Ecology workshop with Nicki Wright

from SeaChange as the kick off to a week-long Eelgrass Restoration Project. We had displays and a workshop on native pollinators with bee advocate Ted Leischner, and a July wild food walk co-offered with Cowichan Green Community with ethno-botanist Genevieve Singleton.

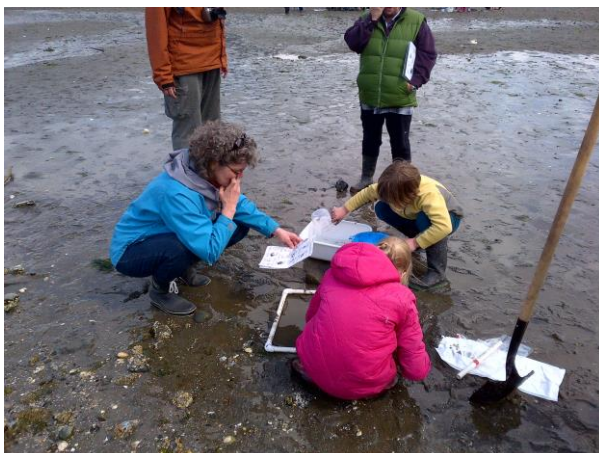


### Citizen Science

The Nature Centre continues to partner with Bird Studies Canada to complete monthly bird surveys identifying and counting shore birds found along a designated stretch of shore in Cowichan Bay. Volunteers also 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 and who come out to count birds in all weather.



We also link to existing local 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 a part-time paid volunteer coordinator, Meghan Loop, and a part-time marine educator, Madeleine Southern. In partnership with Canada Summer Jobs, this year we were lucky to have two full-time summer students 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 50 volunteers. It is primarily through our volunteers and donations from the public that we are able to keep our doors open to visitors and offer accessible educational programming. School programs rely heavily on volunteer support. We offer regular seasonal volunteer orientations for new volunteers and updates, knowledge-building events and programs to support our volunteers, whose contributions are essential to our success.

## Financial Report

As a small centre we are careful with our finances. We are committed to offering accessible educational programs that are affordable within the budgets of families and the public school system, and to having admission to the centre accessible to all visitors, regardless of income. While we suggest an admission donation of \$5, our doors are open and we do not turn visitors away for lack of funds.

In our first two years of operations (April 2012 - March 2014) the Nature Centre generated revenues of \$88,000, the majority of which was earmarked grants to develop educational programs and exhibits, leaving a minimal amount of money available to deliver programming and cover general operations. This resulted in a cumulative shortfall of \$4,700 as of March 2014. In order to be economically healthy over time the Nature Centre needs to raise an additional \$25,000 annually to continue to deliver its programming.

We are working on developing multiple revenue streams and exploring new opportunities to make the centre a sustainable and self-supporting place of learning. The generosity of our donors makes a huge difference.

We encourage Cowichan Valley residents to support the centre by becoming members: \$20-individual membership, \$35-family membership, or \$100-supporting members. Donations can be made at Canada Helps <https://www.canadahelps.org/dn/6042> - use the drop-down menu and select "Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre". We also hold two annual Beer and Burger fundraising events, which are a lot of fun, with live music and a silent auction.

We have a small gift shop that brings in a small amount of revenue, primarily from selling t-shirts, field guides and cards. And we have some beautiful pieces of local art on consignment. Currently we accept cash or cheques for purchases, and are looking for a simple volunteer-friendly system that would allow for debit purchases.



**We also have Limited Edition Giclée**

**Estuary Prints by Artist Peter Spohn - \$140 - call the Land Trust (250) 746-0227 for information.**

# Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Financial Report

## 2013-14 Actual

### STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	Total	Operations	Programs	Interpretive Displays	Store
<b>INCOME</b>					
Grants	15,117	500	1,708	12,909	
Fundraising events	5,608	5,408		200	
Donations	10,281	10,281			
Membership dues	1,230	1,230			
School program fees	6,396		6,396		
Camp fees	2,378		2,378		
Store sales	428				428
Facility rental	-				
	-				
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>41,438</b>	<b>17,419</b>	<b>10,482</b>	<b>13,109</b>	<b>428</b>
<b>EXPENSE</b>					
Project expenses	15,117	500	1,708	12,909	
Wages and benefits	18,359	15,725	2,634		
Consultant services	876	876			
Staff travel	1,394	1,021	373		
Utilities	1,370	1,370			
Telephone/Internet	1,120	1,120			
Insurance	1,414	1,414			
Repairs and maintenance	7,805	3,751		4,054	
Allocation for major repairs	-				
Security	367	367			
Supplies and small equipment	607	214	374	19	
Office expenses	477	477			
Bank charges and interest	23	23			
Advertising and promotion	377	377			
Accounting and legal	1,307	1,281	26		
Event expenses	-				
Store purchases	548				548
Contingency (budget only)	-				
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>51,161</b>	<b>28,516</b>	<b>5,115</b>	<b>16,982</b>	<b>548</b>
<b>Net Income (loss)</b>	<b>(9,723)</b>	<b>(11,097)</b>	<b>5,367</b>	<b>(3,873)</b>	<b>(120)</b>

### ACCUMULATED SURPLUS (DEFICIT)

	1
Beginning accumulated surplus (deficit)	5,068
Net income (loss) for the year	(9,723)
<b>Ending accumulated surplus (deficit)</b>	<b>(4,655)</b>