

DATE: November 3, 2021

FILE: 5210-01

TO: Chair and Directors
Committee of the Whole

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: Comox Valley Watersheds, Elected Officials Forum – Follow-up

Purpose

To provide an overview of the October 12, 2021 Elected Officials Forum (EOF) – Comox Valley Watersheds, including action items supported by the meeting.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

This report is presented for information only.

Executive Summary

On October 12, 2021, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) hosted an EOF focused on the watersheds of the Comox Valley. The forum was well attended by representatives from the Village of Cumberland, City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, CVRD electoral areas, K'ómoks First Nation, Ministry of Agriculture, Islands Trust, Ships Point Improvement District, School District 71 and the Comox Valley Conservation Partnership.

The forum focused on the state of water supply within the CVRD and included staff presentations related to watershed function, recent work in the Tsolum River watershed and a profile of Comox Lake. K'ómoks First Nation provided an overview of their work related to a multi-year water usage study on the Tsolum River, and the Comox Valley Conservation Partnership presented their community-based watershed stewardship work. Also featured were presentations from the Regional District of Nanaimo and from Cowichan Valley Regional District regarding their organizations' efforts towards watershed stewardship within their regional districts.

The forum provided participants with broad information related to local watersheds and the state of water supply, highlighting both challenges and opportunities. Elected officials, as well as other participants, were able to ask questions, discuss issues and make observations about future opportunities and priorities. Some of the items presented and discussed included:

- Water is not confined by political boundaries
- Climate change will have an impact on future water quantity and quality
- Surface and ground water resources are already stressed across our region
- Watersheds are natural assets
- Watershed management is complex with overlapping authority
- K'ómoks First Nation has a keen interest in water management and in the exercise of their rights
- There is a strong and important connection between water supply and development of the Rural Settlement Areas provided in the Regional Growth Strategy
- Participants share common goals around preserving and protecting water quality and quantity

- Regional stewardship of watersheds can provide a more holistic approach than current piecemeal methods
- Logging practices on private managed forest lands in the upper watershed has an impact on both surface and groundwater quality and quantity
- COVID-19 has increased outdoor recreation within watersheds
- Water supply is a limiting factor for agriculture in the Tsolum watershed
- A regionally scaled community forest could be a tool for greater control of watershed lands
- Systematic, region-wide water monitoring can bring together key decision making information

Following the session and based on the discussion and observations provided, staff continue to support the following two initiatives:

Watershed Governance and Stewardship Scoping Study

This work has been recently initiated in response to the Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan presented to the Electoral Areas Services Committee at their July 12, 2021 meeting where the following resolution was approved:

THAT staff be directed to proceed with a watershed stewardship service scoping study to investigate options for improved service delivery by the Comox Valley Regional District.

Study work will be completed over the next several months with presentation of results to elected officials in spring 2022. The scope of work includes the following tasks:

- Review and interpret legislative tools and points of access that support regional district participation in watershed management
- Complete a high-level analysis of watershed pressures and challenges in the CVRD, then group and categorize these challenges and identify actions and initiatives that may help to address them
- Review opportunities for moving forward in collaboration with K'ómoks First Nation
- Review opportunities for community participation and partnerships
- Identify and summarize opportunities presented by recent/upcoming senior government watershed initiatives
- Compare and assess precedents and best practice from other jurisdictions
- Compare and assess CVRD watershed stewardship service delivery options including but not limited to:
 - Electoral area service delivery options that could be expanded to a regional service in the future
 - Expanded stewardship activities delivered through CVRD drinking water supply service areas
- Identify a preferred option and develop recommendations for next steps

Management of Public Drinking Watersheds on Vancouver Island

This work was recently initiated in response to a letter submitted to the CVRD Board by Director Arbour regarding logging activities in the Langley Lake Watershed. At their June 15, 2021 meeting the board approved the following resolution:

THAT Comox Valley Regional District board plan for, and invite relevant Vancouver Island jurisdictions and the Province to a sharing session and discussion on how to best manage public drinking watersheds on Vancouver Island.

In response to this resolution staff propose the following possibilities aimed at developing a common understanding and then bringing together relevant Vancouver Island jurisdictions and the Province to share information.

Possibility One – Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) workshop:

- Apply to the 2022 AVICC Annual General Meeting scheduled April 1st to 3rd, 2022 for a workshop with other impacted local governments.
- If application accepted, organize and complete workshop as part of 2022 AVICC convention. If application not accepted then proceed as follows

Possibility Two – CVRD-hosted workshop:

- CVRD staff to reach out to staff at Cowichan Valley Regional District, Regional District of Nanaimo, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, City of Nanaimo, City of Port Alberni and Village of Cumberland to develop a common understanding of shared issues
- Review the Private Managed Forest Land program review including feedback submitted, and identify shared interests and opportunities
- Bring together elected officials and senior staff representatives from the above-noted local government to meet with the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development to present and share information

Prepared by:

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Government Partners and Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

Village of Cumberland	✓
City of Courtenay	✓
Town of Comox	✓
K'ómoks First Nation	✓
Ministry of Agriculture	✓
Islands Trust	✓
Ships Point Improvement District	✓
School District 71	✓
Comox Valley Conservation Land Trust	✓