

Cowichan Watershed Board

Protecting Riparian Habitats

Draft Target Backgrounder for Discussion by CWB

Target Focus

- Riparian Habitats
- *"We want to protect and enjoy the benefits of healthy stream, lake front and estuary habitats."*

Proposed Target

- **X% increase in area of riparian habitats protected in watershed by 2021.**
- **Y% riparian habitats restored/enhanced and at or in process of achieving healthy condition by 2021.**

CBWMP Goals Supported

- Goal 1 – Maximize efficiency of use and minimize impacts of low water levels
- Goal 2 – Manage water supply to meet human needs
- Goal 3 – Ensure sufficient water is available to sustain aquatic ecosystems
- Goal 4 – Reduce impacts of high water level and respect importance of winter floods to natural systems
- Goal 5 – Educate, engage, and empower citizens

Technical Considerations

- Riparian habitat is critical for sustaining ecological services e.g. cooling of water temperatures, enhancing water quality, support of fish populations, mitigating impacts of flooding and erosion and cultural social objectives.
- Currently only A % is protected and there are issues surrounding current legislation and related compliance that put riparian habitats at risk.
- Although there is a general view that much of the riparian habitat of the estuary, river mainstem and lake requires restoration, the status (health) of riparian habitats has not been classified.
- Because of the seriousness of impacts on riparian habitats and the importance of the habitats to ecological and human well-being, implementing measures to protect them is a priority.
- Much of the watershed is private land and impacts are land and water use related.

Regulatory and Governance Considerations

- Current regulatory frame work is diffuse and complicated and involves:
 - Environment Canada
 - Fisheries and Ocean Canada
 - BC Parks
 - MOTI, MAL, BC MOE and MFLNRO
 - Cowichan Tribes
 - Municipalities, CVRD
- NGO's and private land owners have and will continue to have a critical role to play in habitat acquisition, preservation and management.
- To successfully address management/protection issues long term collaborative/cooperative plans must be developed and implemented.

Impacting Factors

- Vegetation removal associated with development -industrial/commercial and residential/recreational
- Sewage/septic fields
- Agricultural practices
- Storm water management infrastructure and practices
- Invasive species
- Transportation corridors
- Complicated framework, diffuse leadership, lack of protocols and reduced capacity of regulators.
- Significant funds required for acquisition and some management initiatives.

Potential Partners

- Cowichan Tribes
- CVRD
- North Cowichan
- Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Steering Committee
- Ministry of Agriculture, BCMOE, MFLNRO
- Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Private Forest Companies
- NGOs e.g. Living Rivers GB/VI, Nature Conservancy Canada, Ducks Unlimited, local stewardship groups etc.
- Cowichan agricultural community

Action Plan

- Achieving this target will require a systematic approach including several interim targets (milestones) including:

Securing Properties

- October 2011 - Inventory and classify riparian habitat for the estuary, Cowichan mainstem and lakeshore;
- November 2012 - Determine the feasibility of alternatives to acquisition for securing lands and prioritize areas for acquisitions and alternate mechanisms;
- December 2011 - Confirm appropriate target;
- March, 2012 - Establish a formal partnership to spearhead the initiative;
- March 2013 Seek/secure funds; and
- Ongoing to 2021 Execute plan.

Restoration/Enhancement Target

- October 2011 – Inventory and classify status of riparian habitat, estuary, mainstem and lake;
- November 2011 - Identify practical restoration options and prioritize areas for restoration;
- December 2011 - Determine appropriate target;
- March 2012 - Establish formal partnership to spearhead initiative;
- April 2012 and ongoing – Seek/secure multi-year restoration funding based on priorities.
- Ongoing to 2021 -Execute the plan.

Resource Requirements

- Funding will have to be obtained to address many of the above actions. Some work can be fleshed out by the TAC and its working groups. However, finding champions for land acquisition, restoration and improved stewardship and compliance/enforcement will be essential.
- Significant acquisition funding i.e. contributions from all levels of govt., conservancy NGOs, foundations etc. (\$millions). Possible linkages to carbon/conservation credits??
- Major infrastructure refits and habitat restoration/enhancement projects (e.g. Broadway or storm water or sewage treatment) could require will one time investments and funding streams for maintenance. Large projects can be funded on a project by project basis through partnerships similar to the Stoltz project.
- Local stewardship groups and related on the ground support will be a major asset.

Bottom Line

- Ambitious targets with many linkages. Achieving targets will require significant changes to the status quo in the Cowichan Valley.
- Targets expected to be meaningful to Cowichan Valley residents and have strong resonance with Cowichan Tribes members.
- Individual accomplishments will be progressive and worthwhile on their own but establishing priorities and protocols will be essential to maximize return on investments.
- Requires significant investments and commitment over a long period of time.
- Establishing a formal Stewardship Protocol among regulatory agencies would ensure clarity and promote accountability and efficiency.

Proposed Supporting Action

Regulatory Related Initiative

Establish a multi-jurisdictional riparian protection/enhancement protocol between all levels of government by June 30/2012.

Action Plan

- January 2012 - Based on inventory and classification work and with targets confirmed, establish a formal stewardship working group.
- June 2012 - Stewardship working group agrees on need for BMPs and most appropriate BMPs for situations/sectors/stakeholders and identifies incentives/disincentive for good practices, education and compliance and enforcement options (Stewardship Plan) and a formal Protocol for implementing it.
- July 2012 and ongoing – Execute plan under Protocol encouraging stakeholders (governments, developers, residents, industry, agriculture and other interests) to adopt and follow BMPs. Supported by education, incentives/disincentives and compliance measures as appropriate.