



Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

1845 Cowichan Bay Road, Cowichan Bay, BC www.cowichanestuary.ca admin@cowichanestuary.ca

Final Report – July 31, 2012



Summary of our Journey to Create the Nature Centre.....	2
Summary of Work and Results.....	4
Project Objectives, Achievements and Economic Impact.....	7
Financial Report.....	10

Summary of our Journey to Create the Nature Centre

The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Project, which was originally conceived in February 2011. We receive our letter of Intent for funding through Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) in June 2011 and major funding through the West Coast Community Adjustment Program was approved by the end of August 2011. We initially focussed on raising funds, building local partnerships and engaging with partners through the spring, summer and into the fall of 2011.

One of our most important tasks was to find an appropriate site for the Nature Centre that could be approved by the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), provincial conservation authorities, our major funders and the local community. This proved to be one of the project's biggest challenges. Over a number of months the CVRD approved three separate locations for the Centre. After each of these sites encountered opposition from either the province or locally, a site on the Cowichan Bay waterfront overlooking the Cowichan Estuary at Hecate Park was finally chosen, very close to the original proposed site. This required a change of scope application to ICET, which was approved in December 2012. Even then, the classroom building was designed to be moveable in case a more appropriate site was found at a later date. Since the Centre opened in April 2012 the community's response to the Centre's current location at Hecate Park has turned out to be almost entirely positive, so in the end our search for the right location was well worth the effort.



Because of the challenges in finding the right site, and the time spent planning, obtaining permits for and clearing invasive species from more than one location prior to the CVRD's final site decision, once we had final site approval, time was of the essence. The CVRD offered us the services of Norm Olive, Manager for CVRD Capital Projects, as project manager to oversee construction and this was critical to completing the project on schedule. We engaged award winning local builders MacDonald and Lawrence Timber Framing to work with us to design and construct both the Wildlife Viewing Platform and the 1,000 sq. ft. cedar timber frame Nature Centre building.





The Rotary Club of Duncan provided both additional funding support and sweat equity for these two aspects of the project, which helped us to create solid attractive structures within our budget. Construction began early in January 2012, 2011, and was complete before the end of March.

A Green Shores restoration of the eroded shoreline west of Hecate Park was completed by the Land Trust's JCP crew working under the direction of CLT staffer Kai Rietzel in collaboration with CVRD Parks. Invasive species were removed and replaced with native plantings in a design created by Graham Gidden from CVRD and Dave Polster. 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 professional designer, Patricia Walker from Salt Spring Island, with the support of a team of local naturalists, to show the diversity and scope and of life in the 400 hectare Cowichan estuary ecosystem and its rich intertidal zone and lead visitors through the park along the waterfront to a viewing platform with 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 wildlife viewing telescope and binoculars are available for visitors to observe birds and other wildlife, including nesting ospreys, in the estuary.



The Centre's indoor classroom, built on the west edge of the parking area at Hecate Park overlooking the estuary's intertidal zone and eel grass meadows, has large windows overlooking the estuary and is just a short walk to the foreshore. The Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre [opened](#) on April 21, 2012 with music, First Nations dancers and a crowd of about 250 people in attendance.



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.



Displays are designed for all ages, both the general public and school groups, ranging from elementary to secondary school. The classroom space accommodates a school class for programming during the school year, and groups of children for day camps in the summer months. There are two washrooms (one accessible, with a change table), a welcome and sales area with guidebooks, T-shirts and local marine themed art for sale, and a small office space.



Currently the Centre employs a ¾ time volunteer coordinator/educator and a full-time summer student in charge of the [summer science camps](#), and is largely staffed by a cadre of volunteer docents who welcome visitors, lead groups, participate in delivering programming, and maintain and update displays. We are open Thursday afternoon from noon – 4pm and Friday through Sunday from 10am to 4pm. School programming tends to be scheduled from Monday through to

Thursday noon. Volunteer orientations are offered monthly and as our volunteer team grows, we will expand the hours we are open to the public.

By year-two of operations we hope to have the funding to employ a full-time coordinator. After only three months of operations we are finding we are already drawing visitors from the local community, the region and beyond. Admission is by a suggested donation of \$2 per person or \$5 per family, and memberships are available for \$20 per person or \$35 per family or \$100 for supporting members. As visitors come to learn about the estuary, they stop and patronize the many local businesses along the waterfront, as well as visit existing tourist attractions, such as the Maritime Centre and the Fishermen’s Wharf.

Overall the Nature Centre is a great fit for the community of Cowichan Bay, which is both a community in transition from the forest and fishing industry and the first fully accredited Cittaslow community in North America, with an increasing focus on both tourism and preserving the natural environment.

The Cowichan Land Trust very much appreciates the major support of Island Coastal Economic Trust and the West Coast Community Adjustment Program in making this community project happen, as well as the support of the CVRD, the Rotary Club of Duncan, the Island Savings GIFT Program Fund, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Pacific Salmon Foundation and all the individual, organization, and business donors who contributed to our local fundraising campaign.

Summary of Work and Results

Planned Activity	Completion Date	Actual Results
Fundraising, Research, Preparation & Planning	August 2011	\$42,500 raised locally through events and donor campaign (plus \$25,000 raised)
Contract Tendering Process	November 2011	6 applications for construction, interviewed 3 applicants; 3 applicants for interpretive design mgmt., interviewed 2
Contract Project Management	November 2011	Contracted with CVRD
Obtain Final Approvals - Contract with Building Contractors	December 24, 2011	Contracted with MacDonald and Lawrence Timberframing
Contract for Interpretive Design Project Management	January 9, 2012	Contracted with Sheila Harrington; signed agreement to terminate contract March 19 th ; balance of interpretive design coordinated by CLT project manager and Nature Centre Committee volunteer chair.
Obtain necessary permits and approvals	January, 2012	Obtained on time and within budget
General site preparation	January, 2012	Completed on time
Landscaping and trail	February 24, 2012	Green Shores restoration and trail completed extending Hecate Park to the west
Build Viewing Platform	March 3, 2012	Completed and opened to the public
Build Nature Centre Classroom	March 23, 2012	Services connected, building inspected and keys turned over to CLT Nature Centre Committee
Create and install outdoor interpretive signage	Created March 30; installed	5 interpretive signs were installed along the path on the waterfront and

	April 16, 2012	2 larger interpretive signs on the viewing platform.
Outdoor Signage on Nature Centre	Installed April 19, 2012	Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre sign carved by Herb Rice, Salmon Cycle and Founding Donor sign installed on building
Create & install indoor interpretive and interactive displays	Last exhibit Installed April 20, 2012	Mural, multi-media silk eelgrass meadow, 3D watershed map, Aquarium & touch tank and interactive displays installed.
Purchase & install scientific & audio visual equipment	Installed April 20, 2012	Microscope stations, telescope, web cam, video station and computer touch screen of watershed installed.
Opening of Nature Centre	April 21, 2012	Opening ceremonies with speeches, music, food, Tzinqwa Dancers, and interpretive tours.

Project Objectives, Achievements and Economic Impact

Objective	Target	Actual Achievement
Create jobs	Construction jobs, contracts with local artists, crafters and technical experts, 1 permanent employee & 1 summer student	Temporary Jobs: 1) Through local construction firm, MacDonald & Lawrence, a foreman & construction team worked full time Jan-Mar to build the centre & viewing tower (approximately 12 man/months); 2) The project obtained funding to hire a local JCP crew of 4 through Jobs Canada from Nov 2011 – Feb 2012 for trail building & green shores restoration at Hecate Park (14 man/months); 3) The project contracted with many local, Vancouver Island and Gulf Island artists, crafters and technical experts to create and install interpretive displays (approximately 17 man/months); 3) In May the Centre received funding & hired a summer student to run our summer science camps through to September (4 man/months). Permanent Job: The Centre hired a ¾ time volunteer coordinator as of April (9 man/months for 2012/13);
Create a tourist destination and local community amenity in Cowichan Region & Cowichan Bay	Provide an additional interesting tourist destination (especially for birders and wildlife	Since the Centre opened April 21 st we have had over 3,000 visitors come through our doors from Vancouver Island, BC,

	viewers) and a local amenity for residents in the Cowichan Region and Cowichan Bay; encourage visitors to stay longer; support local hospitality related businesses;	across Canada, and as far away as France, Germany, Australia and Hong Kong. Grandparents are coming back with their grandchildren (and vice versa); local people are bringing their out of town guests. We are gathering data each day so that we will be able to identify seasonal trends; we have hosted
Partnerships with local businesses and organizations to enhance tourists experience in Cowichan Bay	Enhance the experience of tourists coming to the region for cycling, kayaking, canoeing & whale watching	We are developing partnerships with local ecotourism businesses such as having a visit to the Nature Centre included in a kayaking or canoeing package. We are partnering with the local Maritime Centre in offering school programming as well as hosting a nature photography course for parents and children offered by a local group. Our first group booked was a high school on a kayak tour. We provided a tour to the BC Land Trust Alliance Conference held at the Ocean Front Suites Hotel in May. We have an art wall which offers local artists opportunities to display and sell nature and marine related art. We are applying for highway signage to attract cycling tourists to the Centre and are working on shared marketing and programming with the Cowichan Bay Maritime Centre.
Education for young people	Offer watershed and marine ecosystem educational programming & resources to local schools & the school district so that families & school groups do not need to travel outside the region for marine science and nature-related education.	Six elementary school classes & one high school class (215 kids; w/40 adults accompanying) have already come to take advantage of learning opportunities at the Centre, using our microscopes and telescope and getting hands-on experience learning about intertidal life in our touch tank and on the shore. We have also hosted the Cowichan Valley Naturalists' & Young Naturalists' picnic. This summer we are holding three 5-day summer science camps scheduled. We also participated in Cowichan Bay's annual Low Tide Day &

		Critter Count.
Public Education	Raise awareness about the role & importance of estuary ecosystems	We have interactive educational displays and outdoor interpretive signs on the cultural and natural history and biological diversity of the Cowichan Estuary & watershed that are regularly used by visitors to learn about the estuary. We participated in the annual Spot Prawn Festival, with a display board on the life cycle of the spot prawn and live spot prawns visiting our touch tank.
Integrate First Nations	Integrate First Nations historic and cultural components, including culinary aspects reflecting the importance of the estuary	We have interviews with 2 Cowichan elders about the history and importance of the estuary to aboriginal peoples as a part of our “Estuary Voices” video display, and First Nations’ perspectives are included in a large interpretive mural. The sign for the Centre was carved by a local First Nations carver. The culinary aspects are still to be developed.

COWICHAN ESTUARY NATURE CENTRE - FINAL PROJECT FINANCIAL REPORT

Project Income

WCCAP	210,000
ICET	87,500
Rotary Club of Duncan	20,000
Pacific Salmon Foundation	5,000
Other Grants	8,500
In-kind donations	11,048
Cowichan Land Trust Donations	22,904
Total Income	364,952

Project Expenditures

Project Management	20,807
Hecate Site Services	35,814
Classroom and Viewing Platform	212,957
Trails, Foreshore Restoration and Interpretive Elements	89,971
Other (Wessex Site Services)	5,403
Total Expenditures	364,952

Balance

0

I hereby certify that this statement accurately represents all sources of project funding and all project expenditures.

Financial Officer:  Larry Lenske

Date: July 31, 2012