

# Council Member Motion

Notice given on: February 21, 2023

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Meeting Date      Wednesday, March 1, 2023

From                Councillor Toporowski

Subject             **Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan (CEEMP)**

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## Background

The Diamond Head report (2022) endorsed by Council recommended that the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan (CEEMP) be updated citing that the plan references old agreements and legislation; industrial parties that no longer exist, and the likelihood of new ones are likely active in the estuary.

Also,

- Sea level rise and changing precipitation/river discharge patterns are changing the physical boundaries an ecological community of the estuary
- Nature of consultation with First Nations has changed
- Use of the estuary as a moorage for Port Metro Vancouver has changed

More background information:

The Cowichan Estuary is located at the west end of Cowichan Bay on the east coast of Vancouver Island. It is the common estuary of the Koksilah and Cowichan Rivers. The Koksilah River begins at Waterloo Mountain, south of the Cowichan Valley and the Cowichan River originates at Cowichan Lake. These two rivers provide most of the freshwater inflow to Cowichan Bay.

The Cowichan Estuary is the traditional land of the Cowichan people, with European settlement beginning in the late 1800s. Before the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway was built in 1886, Cowichan Bay (then Harrisville) was the area's first port. Fishing, agriculture and logging have been the primary land uses within the estuarine intertidal and backshore areas. As well, the shallow water, marshes and tidal flats of the Cowichan Estuary provide some of the most biologically productive habitat essential to migrating waterfowl, anadromous fish and other species.

This area has changed greatly over the years as a result of human activities in the marine environment, the surrounding shores and intertidal flats, and in the watershed. In response to these changes, the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan (CEEMP) was developed through the late 1970s and was completed in 1987 to provide a framework for future management of the estuary.

The management plan area encompasses multiple jurisdictions and land-uses, including the village of Cowichan Bay, First Nations traditional lands, industrial leases of Crown lands and parcels under the management of the municipality of North Cowichan, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, national and international conservation organizations and private landholders. This multiplicity of tenure, jurisdictions and interests means that community and stakeholder participation is essential for sound environmental management.

## **Recommendation**

THAT Council direct the Mayor to write a letter to the Province requesting that the Province amend the 1987 Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan to reflect the current scientific knowledge of the role of estuaries in the ecosystem, land ownership and uses, and climate change;

AND to request support from the following organizations:

- Cowichan Tribes;
- Cowichan Valley Regional District;
- City of Duncan; and.
- Cowichan Estuary Restoration and Conservation Association (CERCA)