

# Report

Date April 1, 2026

File:

Subject Only Rain Down the Drain – Yellow Fish Catch Basin Marking Initiative

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## **PURPOSE**

To inform Council of North Cowichan’s sponsorship of the “Only Rain Down the Drain” Yellow Fish catch basin marking initiative, a community education pilot led through the Leadership Vancouver Island program and supported by North Cowichan.

## **BACKGROUND**

North Cowichan Executive Management Team (EMT) has supported staff participation in the Leadership Vancouver Island (LVI) program for the past three years. The program focuses on leadership development, community engagement, and collaborative project delivery. Participants complete a team-based community project in partnership with a local organization. In 2026, two North Cowichan staff members are participating in the program as part of a multi-member project team, with North Cowichan serving as their community partner.

The “Only Rain Down the Drain” project aims to raise awareness about the connection between storm drains and local waterways. The yellow fish storm drain marking program, developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, is a national public education initiative designed to raise awareness of the direct connection between storm drains and local waterways. Volunteers mark catch-basins with a yellow fish symbol and distribute educational materials reminding residents that anything entering these drains flows untreated into nearby streams, rivers, and lakes. The program promotes community stewardship and highlights the importance of preventing pollutants such as soaps, oils, and chemicals from entering stormwater systems. Numerous municipalities have implemented variations of the catch basin awareness program, with adopted practices ranging from painted fish symbols on catch basin covers to the incorporation of permanently stamped fish markings directly onto storm drain covers.

The initiative aligns with municipal objectives related to watershed protection, aquatic ecosystem health, climate adaptation, and community environmental stewardship as reflected in the Official Community Plan and emerging biodiversity policy work. Municipal sponsorship enables the LVI team to pilot the program locally and develop tools to support longer-term community participation in stormwater education.

## **DISCUSSION**

The project will proceed in two phases. The LVI project team will create the painting kits and test implementation as the first phase of work in partnership with a local school. The second phase of work will transition this project to North Cowichan to enable community implementation.

### Phase 1 – School-Based Kickoff

The project will begin with a launch day involving a local school group. Students and volunteers will mark drains in a selected area and help gather photos and video content that can later be used by municipal communications to promote public understanding of the program.

This approach allows the project team to pilot operational procedures, assess safety considerations, and test data-collection methods before a broader rollout.

### Phase 2 – Community Implementation

Following the pilot event, painting kits and educational materials will be transferred to North Cowichan for ongoing community use. The team will stock a series of storm drain marking kits, which will be transferred to North Cowichan and made available to community members and organizations interested in contributing to ongoing awareness efforts. Each kit will include equipment and materials for painting, safety equipment, instructions, and data sheets for recording marked catch basins.



*Figure 1: Example of fish painting  
(Source: City of Vancouver)*

Providing funding from the Climate Action and Energy Plan (CAEP) Reserve Fund will enable this project. The Terms of Reference authorize the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to expend up to \$20,000 for actions supporting corporate emissions reductions. While the CAO has delegated authority to approve this project, the CAO is bringing this forward for Council's consideration as information.

Several other municipalities have active fish painting programs, including the City of Vancouver, Surrey, Delta, New Westminster, Coquitlam, and Kelowna.

## **OPTIONS**

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council receives the report titled "Only Rain Down the Drain – Yellow Fish Catch Basin Marking Initiative" dated April 1, 2026, prepared by Jennifer Aldcroft, Climate Change Specialist, for information.
  - This option provides Council with advanced awareness of the program prior to public implementation.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Financial:

Up to \$5,000 from the CAEP Reserve Fund will be allocated to support the pilot initiative. Funding will be used to develop reusable catch basin marking kits and initial program supplies, including stencils, safety equipment, and educational materials. Once assembled, the kits can support multiple future marking activities, allowing North Cowichan to continue the program with minimal additional cost beyond periodic replenishment of consumables.

Existing staff resources will support implementation, including coordination with participating groups, communications support, oversight of kit lending and data collection. No additional staffing resources are required.

**Environmental:**

The initiative advances watershed protection by increasing public awareness that stormwater entering catch basins flows untreated into local streams and marine environments. By visibly marking catch basins and distributing educational materials, the program aims to reinforce the message that only rain should enter the stormwater system. The program supports improved community understanding of watershed health and complements municipal objectives related to aquatic ecosystem protection and climate adaptation.

**Social:**

The pilot engages students and community groups in a visible environmental stewardship activity. Participation encourages shared responsibility for protecting local waterways. The initiative also supports leadership development through the LVI program and demonstrates collaboration between municipal staff, schools, and local organizations.

North Cowichan will promote this project on social media and on its website so the public is aware of the fish symbols and why we are supporting this project.

**Operational Implications:**

The pilot phase allows North Cowichan to test procedures, safety protocols, and data collection methods before broader implementation. Catch basin data sheets completed by participants will identify marked infrastructure and support municipal tracking.

**Communications Implications:**

The project team will work with Communications staff to develop clear messaging explaining the purpose of the markings and the connection between storm drains and local waterways. Door hangers, educational materials, and community outreach will support awareness and help ensure residents understand the environmental purpose of the initiative.

**Risk and Liability Considerations:**

The project team has consulted with North Cowichan Health and Safety staff to ensure the initiative aligns with municipal risk management and insurance requirements. Risk mitigation measures include the use of participant waivers, supervision requirements for youth participants, selection of low-traffic residential locations, provision of traffic control cones and high-visibility safety vests, and advance site review to identify potential hazards. The phased approach further reduces risk by limiting the initial scope of activities and allowing procedures to be refined prior to broader community rollout.

**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council receives the report titled "Only Rain Down the Drain – Yellow Fish Catch Basin Marking Initiative" dated April 1, 2026, prepared by Jennifer Aldcroft, Climate Change Specialist, for information.

Report prepared by:

*Jennifer Aldcroft*

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Climate Change Specialist

*Tristan Webb*

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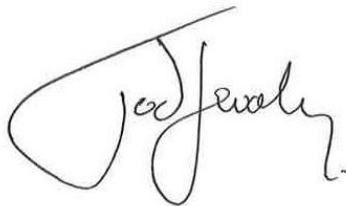
Report reviewed by:



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David Conway PEng  
Director, Subdivision and Environmental Services

**Approved to be forwarded to Council:**



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Ted Swabey  
Chief Administrative Officer