

COWICHAN CLIMATE GATHERING SYNOPSIS

DEC 9 & 10, 2024



We would like to thank each and everyone of you for attending and supporting the first-ever large-scale climate gathering for the Cowichan Region. It was our dream to host a two-day session and through the many hours and efforts of the leadership, “nitty gritty” planning team, community Indigenous partners, volunteers, youth and supportive funding, we were able to make this dream a reality.



Planning Team (left to right): David Reay (Thetis Island Community Climate Resilience Group); Fernanda Gutierrez Matos (Island Health); Katie Mosewich (CVRD); Cindy Lise (Our Cowichan Communities Health Network); Sandra Thomson (Social Planning Cowichan); Keith Lawrence (CVRD)

It was not only the “nitty gritty” team that made the gathering a success, it was also the valuable input we received from many community partners who met with us throughout the year. Their guidance and advice contributed to the planning process, presentation development, and community engagement, ensuring that everyone that attended the gathering walked away with something special and valuable.

What made this gathering even more meaningful was the decision to ground everything under the auspice of “Cowichan.” This approach ensured that that presenters, Elders, food providers, vendors, participants, displays, and even the photography for the brochures, came from our region. We also had the privilege to welcome Michael Blackstock from Blue Ecology and Gail Hochachka and Lisa Gibson from Wayfinding Climate in Polarized Times (Sensemaking Action and Leadership Training (SALT)), who work from outside our region, to provide rich learning opportunities for our community.

Our Vision

The Cowichan Climate Gathering was an opportunity to celebrate the remarkable climate action work in the Cowichan Region. By hosting this gathering, we aimed to strengthen the important relationships that allow us to build a stronger and more aligned collective approach to caring for our environment and increase our resiliency to the changing world. The gathering provided us an opportunity to learn, unite, and build relationships across diverse partners engaged in this important work. Key note speakers, plenary presentations, workshops, both large and small conversation sessions, display tables, and interactive art through 84,000 fishes filled the days with many opportunities to share and learn.



The event was grounded in cultural teachings and guided by Elders 'T'awahwiye' Philomena Williams and 'Qwiahwult-hw' Robert George from Cowichan Tribes 'Thiyuas' Florence James and August Sylvester from Penelakut Tribe, and 'Sulseeemulwut' Jennifer Daniels and 'Xwatimet' Randy Daniels from Malahat Nation. Through an Indigenous lens, our keynote speakers, Tim Kulchyski, Robert George and Michelle Staples, reminded us of the importance of caring for our land and waters. They emphasized that resiliency comes from a blend of science and the practices of nurturing the land, ourselves, and our mental health. Each day concluded with the opportunity for a traditional cedar brushing from Molly Paige and Adele Joe, inviting us to experience the healing properties of the cedar and forge a deep connection to the land and community.



From top left to bottom right: Tim Kulchyski; Jennifer and Randy Daniels; August Sylvester and Philomena Williams; Robert George and Michelle Staples.



Keynotes and Plenaries:

- Place, Change and Hope
- Strengthening Climate Resilience and Community Health
- Taking Care of Tumuhw (Earth)
- Cowichan Adapts- Local Solutions to Help Us Prepare
- From opposition to catalyst- the role of human dimensions in advancing climate action

Themes of the Breakout Sessions

- Culture, Land, and Climate
- Building a Shared Vision of Climate Risk
- Conserving Cowichan Watersheds (2 parts)
- Our Place in Nature
- Climate Resilient Forestry and Ecosystems
- Project 84,000 Fishes
- Xwulqw'selu Watershed Management for Sustainable Land Use and Water Supply
- Community Climate Action
- Wayfinding in Polarizing Times
- Municipal Climate Action
- Blue Ecology and Supporting Water Reconciliation
- Airshed Protection
- Shorelines and Estuaries
- Electrification, Energy Conservation and Renewable Power

To see agenda will full details:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAGYaCOPEXs/1Ybs9yG3h8zli85jKu96Og/view?utm_content=DAGYaCOPEXs&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=uniquelinks&utlId=h067e07043b

Summary of the Breakout Sessions:

Culture, Land and Climate

- Xpey' (Cedar) is a cultural and spiritual keystone species that is of great significance to First Nations communities up and down Vancouver Island and beyond.
- The Xpey' Restoration and Protection project is taking action to mitigate the loss of Xpey' that is threatened by climate change and the cumulative impacts of decades of land degradation across the territory on land stolen for the E&N land grant
- Team aims to establish an Indigenous-led land trust and engage youth and Elders to revitalize traditional culture practices for the stewardship of use of Xpey'
- Quw'utsun snuw'uy'ulh (cultural teachings) were shared about caring for xpey', the sunt'le (Elder sibling) and reciprocal relationships with the land.

Building a Shared Vision of Climate Risk

- Important to work together as a region as it is likely that all areas will be impacted by a climate event.
- Preparing and preventing by adapting before a crisis is the only way to move ahead
- Prevention and adaptation measures take time and money- setting priorities is important
- Engaging the broader community in prevention and adaptation also helps mitigate the impacts of a climate event

Conserving Cowichan Watersheds (2 parts)

- Different species of fish need different amounts of water at different times of the year, at different places, at different times in their life history
- Flow values matter. We need to protect pool habitat and strong riffles between each of the pools so fish can shelter and find food
- With climate change, the river is lower, later in the summer, and so fish can't navigate up the river in time, salmon eggs deteriorate, and they are predated upon in the Bay,
- Sometimes the river is so low salmon have had to be trucked up the river
- Mukw' Stem 'O' Shihukw'Tul - "Everything is connected"
- The new weir at Cowichan Lake will be vital to help keep the Cowichan River flowing well throughout the dry seasons. This is needed for everyone and everything the river sustains. Hilitun tst tu qa' (Water is Life).
- For millennia, the Cheewaht and Nitinat watersheds provided the Ditidaht First Nation community with one of its most valued food sources: salmon.
- The loss of forests in the Nitinat River watershed has been ongoing for many years, and has been widespread. This has impacts to water. And water is essential to all life.
- Need to protect the Cowichan and Nitinat watersheds so that streams have the right amount and quality of water. It's important to address forestry practices.

Our Place in Nature

- We need to teach and learn the nature-centric views and move away from an industry-centric worldview. This attitude then needs to reflect in our baseline laws and decision making.
- Native plant nurseries, the information around native plants, how to grow native plants with classes or workshops
- Need a way to break silos. We, as groups doing climate change action, don't know what each other is doing. We are reinventing the wheel.

Climate Resilient Forestry and Ecosystem Goals

- Disruption to governance is necessary, carbon offsets are part of the solution.
- Forests matter in solutions for climate. Re-evaluation current land use/development to require/incentivize the environment over money and personal wants
- We need to ensure these conversations are guided by First Nations and that any solutions prioritize benefits to them!

Wayfinding in Polarizing Times

- The sense people make about climate change varies because climate change a complex issue that is enmeshed with self-identity, culture, values, ideologies and beliefs and the context of climate change changes constantly
- Need to integrate human dynamics to catalyze greater action rather than just approach climate action from a technical lens
- Need to expand the sense of "we" and build relationships and increase openness, and empathy to reduce polarization related to climate action

Project 84,000

- Provide opportunities to gather together, reach out to find and help with needs, make the world a better place
- Opportunities to share without judgement safe place with heart on sleeve, opportunities to respond, plan, take action together, listen, truly listen to understand, look for opportunities to work together
- Predictable, stable funding should be available to allow diverse agencies, nations and governments to communicate and collaborate at a grass roots level around the shared territory

Xwulqw'selu Watershed Management for Sustainable Land Use and Water Supply

- Areas of conflict – pressure on local government to permit development (by Province and industry), lack of coordination and conflicting values across Provincial ministries and sections
- Challenges seen when working with stakeholders, rights members and community members include the differing goals and viewpoints
- Helpful to hear what is going on and develop a deeper understanding so my groups and I can be helpful moving forward

Community Climate Action

- We have a moral obligation to have hope and to act
- Include climate action as a standing item at meetings
- Be the change, organize and act together, connect with neighbors, do the on the ground work together - neighborhood projects, take positive ideas to local governments, to delegations on what climate actions they can do

Municipal Climate Action

- Try to have an integrated plan for the Cowichan Valley and not multiple plans.
- Important to bring in everyone's voice when identifying problems and finding solutions. More people = better outcomes

Blue Ecology and Supporting Water Reconciliation

- Practice humility and be open to interweave western science and Indigenous knowledge via blue ecology, to act now rather than leave to next generation
- Blue ecology offers a way to interweave Indigenous and western water stewardship knowledge. Blue ecology might be an appropriate framework to share the Cowichan watershed story with the Province
- Water is life, incorporate Blue ecology by respecting the water

Airshed Protection

- Accessible real time data for students/teachers to access and relate to as individuals.
- Health benefits are climate benefits, woodstoves are a major contributor to PM2.5

Shorelines and Estuaries

- "Food colonization"
- How about having a workshop just on climate change and native foods. Start with ½ day workshop.
- Eating local means foods from the land not just food grown on the land.
- Estuary restoration is a critical component of restoring Indigenous food systems! Indigenous agriculture has always existed

Electrification, Energy Conservation and Renewable Power

- New programs. Multi-unit residential research for retrofits, solar rebates, changes to caps are being explored
- Take care of remote island and communities with grants too
- Community energy and grids are supported and needed

What we heard from participants (overall summary):

- This gathering provided a level of hope and optimism despite potential to despair – it was refreshing
- This allows us to look and celebrate what we CAN do
- Let's find funding to do this again. Apply for grants to keep it going
- Inspired to get more involved in other initiatives in the region
- We would like to have a Climate Action Roundtable
- A desire to continue to meet and build relationships
- A desire for an annual opportunity to come together
- A continued desire to learn more about the actions and initiatives underway in our region. (There is more than we were able to learn about in this gathering) Examples include:
 - To have opportunities for field trips and hands on experiences with the current initiatives. Let's learn together on the shorelines, estuaries, forests and riverbeds
 - To travel to locations outside of the core and learn on the lands of other nations for example Ditidaht, Penelakut, Malahat, Stzuminus and others
- A desire for communication between each other
- A shared list of contacts so we can reach out on our own
- Loved the grass roots approach to this learning opportunity – because of us- for us- by us
- A desire to grow the number of participants and include those who were unable to attend
- More opportunities for learning about First Nations ways of being, traditional ways of caring for the land and how we can work together as one. This includes having First Nations guide future gatherings and climate action in Cowichan
- The desire to reach people outside of the representatives at the gathering and in the broader communities
- A desire to focus on prevention, public education
- A desire for a single platform for sharing

- Broader coordination
- Ways to work within the challenging times/noise from misinformation/ideological shift away from science to special interest groups that sabotage efforts
- It is time to change the narrative to what matters to everybody – please have more training from SALT
- Prioritizing the most critical actions for regional focus
- Identify small ways everyone can make a difference
- Tell the story- get the story out
- We valued the connections
- Continue to include youth
- Find ways to collect the data so important for telling the story as well as making decisions
- Find ways to evaluate current systems and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement
- Find ways for collective advocacy for our region
- Find ways we can advocate for resources as a unite region



Graphic Art was provided by Jenni Otilie Keppler:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/asu0ja1r23kmirmypptj7/ABo7vQFXu1VIWxqiN9KBnlc?rlkey=04vgb8knue8485jyemzyiyqb2&dl=0>

What to anticipate? What is next?

The planning team will be reaching out to see if there are any others who would like to make up a small and mighty team to find ways to develop opportunities to make some of the wishes a possibility. This includes meeting together again, finding ways to learn, and connecting throughout the year and more.



Katie Mosewich and Florence James



Philomena Williams and Jenni Otile



Jared Williams



Angelica Gavilanes & Jose Anibal Zuluaga

Key Partners and Funders:

