



## Learn about the Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project Our Coast, Our Future

As a member of the Cowichan community, we wanted to share facts with you about the largest estuary restoration project to ever occur on Vancouver Island. Positioned on the traditional territory of the Quw'utsun people (Cowichan Tribes), the Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project aims to restore vitally important fish and wildlife habitat, improve ecosystem function and enhance the resilience of the estuary in the face of a changing climate. The project will rejuvenate habitat crucial for the survival of key fish and wildlife species, including wild pacific salmon, dungeness crab, shellfish, migratory and breeding birds as well as various species-at-risk.

### Estuaries are among the most productive ecosystems on earth.

Estuaries only make up 2.3% of B.C.'s coast but support over 80% of all coastal fish and wildlife. Economically, 75% of all commercially and culturally important seafood in the Pacific Northwest rely on estuaries including pacific salmon, clams, oysters, crabs and forage fish. Estuaries are also critically important natural assets for local communities as they provide essential climate services such as flood water absorption and protection from storm surges, as well as being a powerful carbon sink.

### #RestoreBCEstuaries

### Partners

The Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project is being led by a collective, including The Nature Trust of British Columbia, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Cowichan Tribes, the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, Ministry of Forests, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

### If we do not do this project, 60% of the estuary marsh habitat will be lost.

This will directly impact the ability of the Cowichan Estuary to continue to provide habitat for fish and wildlife; support the local and coastal economy; and continue to provide the natural environmental services to the Cowichan community.

### What this project will involve:

- The removal of the 1.6 km dike at Dinsdale Farm and the removal of 1.3km of remnant agricultural berms at Koksilah Marsh.
- The creation of intertidal channels and salt marsh habitat that are critical for the survival of juvenile salmonids, crabs, shellfish, breeding and migratory birds.
- The restoration of marine riparian and flood fringe forests.
- The reconnection of areas that have been historically cut off from tidal influence.

# Common Questions

## Q: Who owns this land?

It is private property owned by The Nature Trust of British Columbia and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

## Q: Was the farm operator on the land consulted?

Yes. Cowichan Estuary Restoration project partners have consulted with the farm operator for several years regarding the ongoing monitoring and the development of the project. The farm operator voluntarily amended the existing license agreement to enable this project to happen and was, as mutually agreed, compensated accordingly.

## Q: Will this project result in flooding of adjacent land and roadways or extend flooding up river?

No. The development of this project included in depth and extensive engineering and hydraulic reviews of flood conditions and scenarios utilizing up-to-date modeling, historic records and field observations. The project was reviewed and approved by the Deputy Inspector of Dikes under the Dike Maintenance Act which included an assessment of risk transfer. The project was also presented to the Cowichan Flood Management Working Group. Overall the project will improve flood water conveyance to the estuary from Koksilah River flood waters.

## Q: Is this land being taken away from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)?

No. The land is not being removed from the ALR, only the dike is being removed. Biodiversity and conservation is a permitted non-farm use under the ALR Regulations (no land use regulations have been changed for the restoration to proceed).

## Q: When will the project take place?

The project will commence in the summer/fall of 2023 with the enhancement and berm removal work at Koksilah Marsh (Westcan Terminal Road) followed by mitigation and enhancement work adjacent to Dinsdale Farm. Dinsdale dike removal will be completed in summer 2024.

## Q: Will this project ruin this year's harvest?

No. Timelines of project implementation and phasing were adjusted to allow the farm operator an additional farming season (free of rent) to transition off the land and to ensure that the crops currently on the field reached maturity and could be utilized.

## Q: Is this project essential? Are there other options?

Filling, draining and, diking for conversion to other uses has resulted in 70% loss of the original wetlands in the Fraser River delta and 60% of estuarine marsh habitat in the Salish Sea. Given only 2.3% of BC's coast is made up of these important ecosystems we cannot afford to lose more.

Monitoring data has determined that the Cowichan Estuary will not be resilient to sea level rise and will 'drown' or suffer from 'coastal squeeze' if this project is not undertaken. If we do not proceed with the restoration project, 60% of the marsh habitat in the estuary will be lost under current scenarios by 2100 and will greatly impact fish, wildlife and the local community. The Cowichan Estuary Restoration project is essential to protect the crucial estuarine ecosystems and surrounding communities in perpetuity.

## Q: Will there be access to the estuary during this project?

**Year one (2023):** Access may be restricted temporarily, subject to the construction schedule and the need to maintain job site and public safety. The Maple Grove Park will remain open in the first year and access to the Dinsdale Farm dike will be maintained subject to project operational requirements.

**Year two (2024):** The Dinsdale Farm dike trail will be closed during the second year of the project and will no longer be accessible going forward. Access to the estuary will still be provided along Westcan Terminal Road where there is a parking area and an interpretive trail. Opportunities to provide other trail connections/routes in the conservation area are being explored.

## Q: Were neighbouring landowners consulted about the change in diking?

Yes. As part of the Provincial Guidelines for Decommissioning a Regulated Dike all impacted landowners (those specifically on Lochmanetz Road) were consulted **over several months** and provided with detailed assessments of risk transfer for review.

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## Learn More:

[www.estuaryresilience.ca/cowichan-estuary-restoration-project/](http://www.estuaryresilience.ca/cowichan-estuary-restoration-project/)

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3fe2a2c09cd84baeb9c60cb6cd9feee8>

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