



**Cowichan Lake & River  
Stewardship Society**

## ***January/February 2025***

CLRSS acknowledges and appreciates that our virtual newsletter is being shared on the unceded territories of the following nations:

***Quw'utsun (Cow-ut-zun)***  
***Pauquachin (Pak-quw-chin)***  
***Ts'uubaa-asatx (Tsoo-bah-seht)***  
***Malahat (Malah-hat)***  
***Halalt (Ha-lalt)***  
***Penelakut (Pen-EL-ah-kut)***  
***Stz'uminus (Stuh-mee-nus)***  
***Lyackson (Lay-ik-sen)***  
***Ditidaht (Dee-tee-dot / Dee-tee-dat)***  
***Pacheedaht (Pah-chee-da / Pah-chee- dat)***

CLRSS will be emailing member newsletters every six weeks. Thanks to contributions from members: Judy Brayden (editor), Jacqueline Sherk, Genevieve Singleton, Jean Atkinson, Christoph Steeger, Maureen Quested and many others. Any questions, comments or feedback please see [Home | Cowichan Lake & River Stewardship Society British Columbia \(cowichan-lake-stewards.ca\)](#)



**Our next regular CLRSS Board meeting  
Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 6:30 – VIA ZOOM  
**Watch for Zoom link announcement**  
Everyone welcome!**



**In this Edition:**

**2025 and the Earth's Climate** from the United Nations – 5 Things to Watch Out For in 2025 [The climate crisis: 5 things to watch out for in 2025 | UN News](#)

[From Trump to a 'game-changing' lawsuit: Seven big climate and nature moments coming in 2025](#)

**Turning to Native Ferns** by naturalist, Genevieve Singleton – the second in a series of articles about native ferns that CLRSS will be incorporating into a new CLRSS fern garden by the Kaatza Museum

**Youth Outreach and *Witnessing the Water*** – by Jean Atkinson

**Exeter Creek Update with thanks to Joe Saysell** – article courtesy of the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable and Fisheries and Oceans Canada

**Let's Talk Bats** – by Christoph Steeger <https://www.nanaimobulletin.com/local-news/dead-and-dying-trees-important-to-bc-ecosystems-says-biologist-7687478>

## News from the Cowichan Watershed Board – by Jill Thompson

**Turning to Native Ferns -** CLRSS members Lois Atchison and Jacqueline Sherk are busy planning a fern garden addition to the GTMNP Garden.

Last edition we talked about our old favorite, the hardy and prolific, Western swordfern.

This time, naturalist and CLRSS honorary lifetime member, Genevieve Singleton, tells us about the lovely, lacey licorice fern.



*From Genevieve...*

Tl'usiip is the Hul'q'umi'num' word for licorice fern. In Latin the name is *Polypodium glycyrrhiza*. The Hul'q'umi'num' language is the ancient language of the Cowichan Valley. Great efforts are being taken to keep the language alive.

Licorice fern with its bright green colouring and interesting name is fun to find. Common in the Cowichan Valley it is often seen on Bigleaf maple trees, sometimes at quite a height. It is also seen on rocky slopes and nurse logs. It is called licorice fern due to the rhizome (similar to roots) tasting like dark licorice with a note of dirt!

A tip for identification is that the fronds have no sharp tips like the sword fern, everything is gently rounded. It is one of our smaller ferns, about the length of your hand. And is rarely seen growing out of the ground. It is the only fern likely to be seen growing on a maple tree. Flip the frond over and see if it has orange or green sporangia (spore cases). These are full of tiny spores, which will blow away and perhaps germinate. Each species of fern has its own beautiful pattern of sporangia on the back of the frond.





It is an important medicinal plant in Quw'utsun culture (Cowichan). Note it was a sweetener. Our palate is used to sugar and honey, which are many times sweeter than licorice rhizomes. It is used for treating coughs and colds.

It is a nice plant to have in a shady garden, spreads by a horizontal rhizome and should be planted on an old log or mossy places to have the best results. I have been trying to grow it on my maple, but they have not taken yet!



Please do not harvest in protected areas and only take part of the rhizome to try tasting it. Enjoy looking for this delightful fern!

Photos by Genevieve Singleton

## Youth Outreach and *Witnessing* – by Jean Atkinson



On October 15, 2024, a group of elementary and middle school-aged students from Grove School visited Saywell Park, Skutz Falls, and Sandy Pool with their teachers and some parents. The Grove is Cowichan Valley’s Open Learning Centre. The students were from the Nature Collective Program which emphasizes connecting K to 9 learners with the natural world, while exploring their particular interests.

Lead teacher, Karin Farquhar, had chosen these locations from *“Witnessing the Water – an authentic relationship,”* a book published by CLRSS in 2023. She intends to take her students to all of the access points listed in the book over the course of the school year. They are currently studying the broad topic “Water.”

Photos by Jean Atkinson

Jean Atkinson of CLRSS met the group at Saywell Park. She explained that the book was an outcome of CLRSS’s contribution to the valley-wide “Watershed Through the Lens of Art” project in 2019. CLRSS had posted signs at 12 locations from Cowichan Lake to the estuary, asking visitors to “rest and witness the water passing by ...” and to consider “how is this moment affects them.”

Jean also spoke briefly about the weir and the plan to increase water storage in Lake Cowichan in response to climate change and the droughts we have been experiencing.





Karin collected water samples from the dock and tested for turbidity, temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen, while students recorded the results on their own data sheets. From Saywell Park the group continued to Skutz Falls and Sandy Pool. At Skutz Falls they saw fish jumping. At Sandy Pool they ended the day reflecting in their journal and sharing stories on how the river and water affect them personally.

It was gratifying for CLRSS to see how the teachers

had encapsulated the intent of the original project in their activity. The students did science, “witnessed the water,” and felt their connection to it. It was an amazing day for all involved.

## Exeter Creek Update with thanks to Joe Saysell and Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Update on the work at Exeter Creek presented at the September Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Mouth of creek blocked with gravel since 1968 – historically a significant cold water refugia as it entered the Cowichan. CLRSS member, Joe Saysell, championed the restoration of the creek.

BEFORE  
2023  
WORK

- Site before work in 2023
- Red arrow = direction of stream flow (narrow, steep drop, only passable at high flow)
- Yellow arrow = suggested new direction of stream flow



AFTER 2023 WORK

- Site after work in 2023
- Red arrow = previous direction of stream flow
- Yellow arrow = new direction of stream flow





AFTER  
2024  
WORK



- Gentler slope and wider mouth should help improve fish passage

STILL TO DO

- Longer term monitoring of the site to see how it responds to winter rains.
- Installation of a post-assisted log structure that will encourage continuous scouring of the created pool habitat.

Watch for further updates from CLRSS



## Let's Talk Bats – by Christoph Steeger

<https://www.nanaimobulletin.com/local-news/dead-and-dying-trees-important-to-bc-ecosystems-says-biologist-7687478> with permission Nanaimo News Bulletin

Dead or dying trees, also called snags, are sometimes viewed as an eyesore, but a B.C. scientist is warning that if they don't present a safety hazard, it's important to leave them be. "There's systematic elimination of those roost trees and habitat trees because of forestry and safety concerns, residential and agricultural development – we have so few snags in our environment and so many species require them," said wildlife conservation biologist Christoph Steeger at a presentation this month in Nanaimo.



Steeger has spent a career researching wildlife trees, and his work has included a preliminary assessment of the effectiveness of wildlife tree retention. "Because of forestry and other forces there are hardly any left and that's of grave concern." His talk at the Beban Park Social Centre on Dec. 3, hosted by Nanaimo and Area Land Trust, was titled 'The Importance of Wildlife Trees for Bats,' but according to Steeger, bats are just one drop in a much larger bucket that includes martens, fishers, black bears and birds. Even caribou rely on the lichen from dead trees for food.

Among B.C. bats, 14 of 15 species roost in trees, 11 roost in dead trees and eight of them roost exclusively in dead trees. Often the maternity nests are made out of unused woodpecker holes in recently dead trees. Other species, like chickadees and nuthatches, require trees that were dead for even longer, so their beak can penetrate the 'spongy' wood.

"In British Columbia, at one point it became clear there was a systematic elimination of snags from our forests. I say systematic because when you have a clearcut, everything goes, and people were getting injured and the workers compensation board by law demanded that all snags be cut down before every harvest," Steeger said. Combined with residential removing of trees, snags began disappearing en masse. A solution was

the wildlife danger tree assessor's course, developed as a partnership between the B.C. government and the University of Northern B.C., which teaches professionals to identify the differences between a safe snag and a dangerous one. These factors include the tree's root system and the direction the tree may fall. However, Steeger said the problem persists. The consequence of not having enough wildlife trees, he warned, is extinction. One example he gave was the ivory-billed woodpecker, which can no longer be found in the southern United States because its nest trees no longer exist.

The biologist noted just because a tree may be dead, its use in the ecosystem isn't over. "When it's assessed properly, and there's people who are certified to do so, you can leave a snag behind – you don't have to cut it down."

*Editor's Note: CLRSS Board member, Christoph Steeger, has applied for a project grant on behalf of Cowichan Cultural Connections Society. The funder is the Pacific Region Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, a federal program administered by Environment and Climate Change Canada. If approved this will become a four-year project that will see many community and CLRSS volunteers engaged in hands-on, citizen science. Stay tuned for updates and opportunities to become involved!*

*The project goals are to increase scientific understanding and public knowledge of bat populations and important riparian bat roosting habitats in the Cowichan Watershed, and to promote the stewardship and protection/securement of wildlife trees throughout the Cowichan Watershed.*

*His specific objectives would be:*

- *Species Diversity - Establish a confirmed list of local bat species through enhanced analysis of existing and new data;*
- *Forest Habitat Use - Determine wildlife tree use by roosting bats within the Cowichan and Koksilah valleys;*
- *First Nations Partnership and Capacity Building - In partnership with Cowichan Tribes, incorporate traditional knowledge and teachings in all aspects of this project and develop a bat habitat conservation and public outreach/education program with a focus on wildlife trees and surrounding forest stands and bat roost trees as a key habitat requisite.*

*and*

- *Develop a bat habitat conservation and public outreach/education program with a focus on wildlife trees and surrounding forest stands and bat roost trees as a key habitat requisite.*



## News from the Cowichan Watershed Board – by Jill Thompson



### Dates Announced for the CWB Speaker Series!

The Cowichan Watershed Board is delighted to share the upcoming dates for our Speaker Series, and to thank VIU-Cowichan for once again hosting the Series in their beautiful lecture hall in Duncan.

Note that due to conflicts with holiday Mondays, events are not consistently on the 3rd Monday this Spring. Mark your calendars for these inspiring and thought-provoking events:

- **Monday, February 24 (details below)**
  - **Monday, March 17**
  - **Monday, April 14**
  - **Monday, May 12**

Each session promises to deliver engaging discussions and valuable insights into topics that matter to our watershed and community. To find the latest information on the speakers and topics, [visit the CWB website.](#)

### **Monday, February 24th Speaker Night**

Ecological Foresters Kelly Loch RPF and Heather Pritchard RPF will team up to teach us about the critical role of riparian ecosystems.

From ocean shores to headwater creeks, the places where land and water meet are essential for protecting healthy watersheds and aquatic habitats yet are often not understood and appreciated for their vital role. Come to learn how best practices for riparian management can help protect these important spaces and what

we can all do collectively as engaged citizens to support the function and beauty of riparian areas.

This event will take place at 7pm at VIU Cowichan Campus, Lecture Hall 140. **Attendance is always free.**

***Watch for World Water Day – March 22, 2025 in Lake Cowichan – join us for tours of the existing weir with Tom Rutherford and Brian Houle.***

**More info to come!**