

Dear Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the September 17th Roundtable meeting. I found the session to be very informative and am impressed with the level of commitment so many of you have with regards to the health of the Cowichan watershed, including the Koksilah. I found Wayne Haddow's presentation on the value of agricultural lands to be particularly informative considering the challenges many communities face with on-going development pressures on agricultural land and the need to ensure farmland and water resources are protected for future generations.

With regards to the discussion about Dinsdale Farm and The Nature Trust of British Columbia, I feel it is important to provide additional information to the group prior to your October 15th meeting. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations holds a long term lease on the property and is an active partner in the management of the farm via the Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program (VICLMP)<sup>[1]</sup> As a regional program we collaboratively work together to acquire and manage lands throughout Vancouver Island, the Central Coast and Haida Gwaii; to date we have secured over 100 conservation areas totalling more than 11,000ha many of which are coastal wetlands and estuaries. A steering committee made up of representatives of each partner organization helps direct the work of our conservation land manager who in turn implements management, restoration, and enhancement plans on the conservation lands including Dinsdale Farm.

Dinsdale Farm is part of the conservation land holdings in the Cowichan estuary, some of which have been restored to intertidal marsh, and some are farmed and provide winter forage for migrating waterfowl. Other elements have also been encouraged for other wildlife (hedgerows for songbirds and riparian forest for fish and bird species). Dinsdale provides a wildlife-friendly agricultural component of the mosaic of lands in the lower Cowichan (residential, recreational, other farms managed in different ways, riparian areas, intertidal lands). I believe that enhanced practices could be encouraged in many ways on adjacent lands to complement the marsh and farm properties managed by the VICLMP so that certain issues (e.g. mosquitos) are addressed in a systematic way.

Just to put the appended e-mail (August 25<sup>th</sup>) into context, our conservation land manager recently responded on behalf of the program to some concerns that were raised via the Ministry of Agriculture with regards to the management of Dinsdale Farm (this response is provided below). The VICLMP partners have reviewed this response and are confident that it addresses the concerns that were raised, accurately reflects our management objectives/goals, and highlights the unique nature of our partnership and how we strive to balance multiple uses and mandates while acting as good stewards of the water and land. I would encourage everyone to review the website links that our land manager provided in his August 25<sup>th</sup> e-mail for information on how the management of the farm is assisting us in meeting many important conservation objectives and to also visit the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust website <http://www.deltafarmland.ca/> for information on farm management for wildlife purposes.

Further to the information in the August 25<sup>th</sup> e-mail below, and public concerns with regards to crop types on the farm itself, I note that as part of the annual crop management cycle in our farm agreement, we have recently seeded a cover crop of winter wheat and Italian ryegrass for waterfowl and soil conservation purposes. Folks accessing the dike system for hiking and waterfowling should soon see new shoots that will sustain ducks and geese this winter.

As a program, we are greatly encouraged by the level of engagement and interest in the management of our conservation lands by your group, and by the CSRT's and the Cowichan Watershed Board's on-going commitment to sustaining the Cowichan Valley environment.

[1] VICLMP partners: Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), The Nature Trust of British Columbia (TNTBC), Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO), Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada (CWS)

Sincerely,

Ron Diederichs  
Section Head  
Ecosystems Section  
Ministry of FLNR

2080A Labieux Road  
Nanaimo, BC V9T 6J9 Ph: [250-751-3223](tel:250-751-3223) Fax: [250-751-3208](tel:250-751-3208)

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August 25th, 2015

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Sent via Email

Dear Ray, Rodger, Goetz, Genevieve and Lori,

**Re: Management of Dinsdale Farm Conservation Area (Cowichan Estuary)**

I am writing this letter to respond to the concerns regarding the management of Dinsdale Farm property in the Cowichan Estuary (owned by The Nature Trust of British Columbia and Ducks Unlimited Canada and secured as part of the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program - PECP). This property is managed by the Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program and includes the partners identified below (many of which are cc'd here); all of which are also founding and active members of the PECP.

The Dinsdale Farm property is an active farm and is managed to provide habitat to migratory and wintering waterfowl, Avian Insectivores, raptors, owls and shorebird species and, to

continue to produce high quality food/crops for our local farmer. The activities on the farm support our partner's goals as members of the Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture ([www.pacificbirds.org](http://www.pacificbirds.org)), as signatories to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP); supports the goals for herbaceous habitat of the Bird Conservation Strategy for the Northern Pacific Rainforest Region (<http://www.ec.gc.ca/mbc-com/DF49C9A5-E2A7-466F-B06C-2DF69B0E0664/BCR-5-PYR-FINAL-Feb-2013.pdf>); and finally, support the goals and management objectives of the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan. In addition to meeting many environmental and species goals and objectives, the on-going operation/management of Dinsdale Farm also contributes to achieving the stated agricultural objectives of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) for farm land and food security.

Since the 1980's the partners of the VICLMP have invested a significant amount of resources to enhance this property for wildlife, farm management and compatible recreational purposes.

This has included:

- The breaching of dike systems off of Westcan terminal road and working with BC Hydro to bury power lines along the road to limit bird strikes.
- The construction of field swales to enhance the capacity of the property to "pond" water over the winter migratory season.
- The construction of wetlands to provide further habitat complexity for the property AND, to act as natural filtration system for any surface water run off coming from the fields.
- The installation of a water control structure that allows us to manage/manipulate the water levels on the property as well as any discharges from the property itself. Any run off must go through the constructed wetlands before being discharged from the property.
- On-going enhancement of hedgerow habitat both on the fringe of the farm property, within the constructed wetlands themselves, around the irrigation pond, and on the dike itself. This has also included the installation of nest boxes.
- Working with the CVRD to create a community park at the Maple Grove to protect the historic maples as well as to provide the public with a parking area and walking path out to the dike.
- Maintenance work on the diking system itself in order to meet our obligations under the Dike Maintenance Act as well as the Occupiers Liability Act for public purposes (e.g. walking, bird watching, retriever trials, hunting).
- Installation of interpretive signage outlining the significance of the area for wildlife as well as agriculture along with the construction of a viewing platform to provide wildlife viewing/interpretation opportunities.
- Working with our partners to provide targeted Goose hunts on the property to support initiatives that aim to reduce the impact of geese on the Cowichan Estuary and adjacent/regional farmlands.
- On-going support for local conservation initiatives.

Much of the PECP/VICLMP partners' conservation and restoration activities on the farm and the greater Cowichan Estuary as well as the linkages to the CEEMP process can be found in Rodger's 2005 report, "A review of the Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Plan" (<http://www.naturecowichan.net/Cowichan%20Estuary%20Plan%20Review%20Final%20Report.pdf>) section 5.1.1.

Since our acquisition of the property, coupled with our on-going enhancement/management efforts, we have conducted on-going inventory/monitoring work to gauge the effectiveness of our management actions in terms of bird use days, bird density, species diversity, and invasive vs native species cover on the property itself. The results of this work has shown that since our acquisition and active management of the farm property we have increased the bird use days, density, and overall native flora and fauna diversity on the property.

With regards to our farm operations we have been working with the same family on the site for over 20 years. As mentioned above this is an active farm that needs to produce both quality crops for our operator as well as quality winter cover crops/forage with high nutritive value(e.g. corn, oats, fall/winter rye, barley, and forage grass crops) to meet the bio-energetic needs of migrating and wintering waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway; thus contributing to the Pacific Birds Habitat JV and NAWMP goals.

TNTBC has a long term lease arrangement with this family that stipulates the time of year for access, crop rotations, crop/field inspections, agricultural inputs (e.g. manure, fertilizers) as well as annual planning meetings; much of which is based on the Environmental Farm Planning Guide found at: [http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/EnviroFarmPlanning/EFP\\_Refguide/Refguide\\_toc.htm](http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/EnviroFarmPlanning/EFP_Refguide/Refguide_toc.htm). In addition we regularly engage with Wayne Haddow (Ministry of Agriculture) to discuss the property and its agricultural management.

The immediate concern/complaint regarding manure spreading was discussed on site with the Ministry of Agriculture on August 13<sup>th</sup>. While we will be working with our operator to implement practices to limit the smell generated from future applications and to maximize the retention of nutrients from the manure in the soil (e.g. tilling and irrigation), the present method and timing of application of manure itself has been confirmed to follow accepted agricultural practice, is within the terms of the lease, and follows the manure management advisories found at <http://farmwest.com/advisories> in terms of time of year and weather. As discussed above, improvements over the years have ensured that the farm is a closed system in that any runoff must flow through the constructed wetlands, where biological processes improve the water quality before it enters the estuary. In addition to the constructed wetlands much of the property remains in a cover crop which further contributes to nutrient cycling and prevents soil erosion.

There have also been statements, without the provision of any data, indicating that our farm practices are contributing to nutrient loading and/or the faecal coliform levels found within the estuary itself. If there is data to suggest that the operation of Dinsdale Farm is contributing to

the nutrient/coliform load within the estuary I would appreciate it be forwarded on to us for review. If there is solid evidence to suggest this is the case, we will take all reasonable steps in working with our farmer to address the situation. The VICLMP supports the efforts of the Cowichan Watershed Board in achieving their Estuary Health Target (<http://cowichanwatershedboard.ca/content/estuary-health-target>) and want to ensure that we are not contributing to the on-going challenges of water quality in the estuary.

In response to the comment regarding mosquito management on the property in relation to the nuisance to users of the Cowichan Bay Golf and Country Club. As relayed over the years to both the Regional District and the managers of the Golf Course and others, the land management policy for our conservation lands is as follows:

- 1) Control of mosquitoes in a wetland/conservation area should be approved for health and safety reasons and not for public nuisance. (Note: as indicated above one of the objectives of the conservation area is to provide habitat for Avian Insectivores of which mosquitoes are a critical food source); and,
- 2) Where a Medical Health Officer has identified a mosquito population within a conservation area and has determined that there is a risk to public health from transmission of West Nile virus from mosquitoes to humans, VICLMP will work with VIHA to explore necessary mosquito population control measures.

The Cowichan Estuary remains a top conservation, enhancement and restoration priority for all of the partners of the VICLMP. To date we have successfully secured over 300ha of critical fish and wildlife habitat and remain committed to meaningfully and respectfully working with our many community stakeholders and industry in achieving our collective local, regional and international management goals for the Cowichan Estuary.

Sincerely,

**Thomas Reid**, Manager  
Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program  
2080 Labieux Road, Nanaimo BC V9T 6J9  
Tel: [250-751-3218](tel:250-751-3218)  
Fax: [250-751-3103](tel:250-751-3103)

*Partners in Conservation*

[1] VICLMP partners: Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), The Nature Trust of British Columbia (TNTBC), Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO), Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada (CWS)