



MINUTES

Annual General Meeting

August 30, 2023

7:00 pm Providence Farm

Agenda: Approved

Minutes of last Meeting: Approved

Minutes taken by Goetz

Apologies: Numerous apologies were received mostly related to covid concerns, illness, and travels

7: 05 Introduction: Following the welcome of the attendees, the CERCA Chair introduced our latest member Adrian Fletcher who joined CERCA at the AGM having given his most welcome debut already by providing a high-quality orthophoto and video of parts of the estuary of special interest to CERCA. Adrian is an accomplished commercial drone operator who promises to be a great asset to CERCA's projects and cause.

7:10 Updates on CERCA Projects and Activities: The introduction was followed by a review from the Chair of completed and ongoing projects and activities by CERCA since the 2022 AGM, supported by a PowerPoint Presentation which is attached to the Minutes. Major projects highlighted include the **second Phase of the Microplastics Project** which is jointly implemented by CERCA with scientists from Simon Fraser University and UBC. This project is twinned with Project Watershed from the Comox watershed for a comparison of microplastic pollution of two distinctly different estuaries. For Phase II of the Project CERCA received a Mitacs Post-Doc fellowship. The successful recipient of the fellowship has assumed the responsibility for processing the large amount of sediment and bio-samples collected during the 2023 summer from

the Cowichan and Comox Estuaries, and the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers above and below the Duncan sewage outfall.

2023 is the third year of CERCA's highly successful and popular **bat survey** in the Cowichan Valley. Monitoring is conducted by two teams, one continuing the use of CERCA's Echometers as part of its awareness-raising campaign on bats, and the second group works with more sophisticated equipment eliminating an inherent bias by the Echometers in species identification. A total of 16 strategically located stations covering key bat habitats are monitored from May to late October for six nights per month. The data will be processed by a UVIC student. Two well-attended Symposia on bats in BC and the Cowichan Valley were implemented by CERCA in August, one at VIU, and the second at Providence Farm.

It is the second year for CERCA's participation in the **two Citizen Science Projects**, the first under the umbrella of the Hakai Institute aimed at monitoring Dungeness crab reproduction in the Cowichan Estuary using a light trap to be checked 3 times/week, the second monitoring sand lance habitat, a project supervised by MABBRI of the Vancouver Island University. Both Projects are spearheaded by CERCA's Co-Chair Bill Heath with the participation of students from Cowichan Secondary School.

Other projects include the proposed **removal of washed-up saw logs** from Mariners Island in cooperation with Western Forest Products. A drone survey was conducted by CERCA of the 35-acre salt marsh in late spring and used for a log inventory. Over 400 logs were counted washed up onto the salt marsh which hopefully will be taken off in March 2024.

CERCA's **tree swallow habitat enhancement** project has entered its seventh year. More than 100 nest boxes placed along the Cowichan South Fork, the fence of the Blackley Farm Trail, and a fence along the Heritage property of the estuary have been checked for successful occupation every year in late August delivering informative results on recruitment success, mortality of fledglings and numbers of un-hatched eggs. Although nest box occupancy shows a great variation between locations and years, the contribution to swallow population enhancement by providing nest boxes as a critical habitat requisite is significant.

CERCA's **outreach program** included lectures on the estuary and field visits by Cowichan Secondary School students, groups from CVRD's Elder College, and UVIC's class taking a course on coastal geography. CERCA Board members made presentations on CERCA Projects to the Cowichan Watershed Board, Duncan Rotary Club, and other groups.

CERCA's most important **lobbying activities** continue to address issues related to grounding out log booms in the estuary's intertidal zone, dredging of the WFP log transport channel, contamination from the Westcan Terminal, and the return of Crown Lease 103103 to the South of the Westcan Terminal for conservation management.

The Chair credited Board member Julia Bendtsen for her excellent work in converting CERCA's outdated website into a well-designed modern and attractive **new website** which allows for easy navigation and management.

At the end of the PowerPoint presentation, the Chair provided details on the proposed and seemingly controversial **Dinsdale Farm restoration project** to be implemented by the BC Land Trust, Ducks Unlimited, and Cowichan Tribes in 2024. This 3 Million Dollar Project involves the removal of all dikes surrounding the target area to restore the 70 ha "farmland", sold for nature rehabilitation many years ago by the Dinsdale family, into a functioning salt marsh as it was for centuries before the construction of the dike in the last century. CERCA intends to play an active role in this important restoration effort which will greatly benefit the estuary.

7:30 Election of new CERCA Board: All seven Board members had agreed before the AGM to continue for another year. Goetz Schuerholz Chair, Bill Heath Director and Co-Chair, Margaret Riess Director and Treasurer, Geoff Strong Director and Secretary, Bernhard Juurlink Director, Cliff Stainsby Director, John Atkinson Director, and Julia Bendtsen Director.

7:35 Financial Report: Unfortunately Margaret Riess had sent her apologies for not being able at the AGM due to travels abroad. She had provided the Board members with a detailed financial report before leaving. The report was unanimously approved by the Board and is available on request from CERCA members. As of August 31, the account balance is \$ 5,133.22 in the checking account and \$5,771.50 in Savings amounting to \$ 10,905 in Total Assets. Admin. Expenses for 2022/2023 are \$ 5,990.69 (mainly insurance, venue rentals,, materials, and the new website) and \$ 11,317.38 Project Expenses (All related to the Microplastics Project). Income received for 2022/2023: Membership Dues \$ 1,466.06, Donations 2,153.75, other (interest credit) \$79.63, and Grants received \$ 9,709.91.

**7:45 Feature Presentation by Freshwater Biologist Jay White on:
“Killer Algae”**

Jay was introduced and welcomed by the Chair as a seasoned and well-known freshwater biologist from Alberta where he was instrumental in designing water management policies, conducting comprehensive and leading-edge research on freshwater lakes, rivers, and wetlands, and combating the toxic algae bloom of freshwater lakes. His professionally designed and presented PowerPoint Presentation was informative and well received by the audience. The presentation triggered a lively discussion with many questions related to local lakes within the Valley which continue to experience toxic algae bloom exacerbated by heat domes.

8:40 Closure

The Power Point presented by the Chair is attached to the Minutes