



# Big Ideas\* Growing Here

## Idea #11: 'Audit and protect our assets'

### Our first physical sounds alarm.

We all treasure the Cowichan's beauty and natural wealth. So we should all be concerned when a recent check-up reveals that our local environment, far from being preserved, is buckling under the stress of human demands and a changing climate.

Responding to strong citizen support for its '12 Big Ideas' vision for our environment, the Cowichan Valley Regional District Environment Commission earlier this year undertook a state-of-the-science review of every available indicator of our region's natural health. It was the first time the Cowichan region's environmental health had ever been subject to a comprehensive check-up, and just like a personal physical its report shed light on what needs work as well as what's in good shape. Its findings rang alarm bells over several of our most valued and essential natural assets.

To be clear: the CVRD State of the Environment Report didn't commission any brand-new research. It did bring together existing data from many public and private sources, tapping a wide range of indicators of the environment's health, from the amount of 'protected' habitat in the CVRD to the number of children admitted to hospital with respiratory complaints. The full report is available free online at <http://www.12things.ca/12things/uploads/FinalSoEReport.pdf>. It shows what more than 80 indicators revealed about eight critical aspects of the region's ecological health and wealth.

So, how healthy is our environment? There's no simple answer. Compared to some places, the Cowichan still enjoys clean air and water (most of the time) and hosts farmland with the potential to grow far more of the food we consume here in

the region. But while there's much to be grateful for in our landscape, the majority of indicators showed that its ecological health, resilience and ability to provide essential services to society and the economy, are all in decline. The overall trend is in the wrong direction.

Examples? Fall runs of Coho and Chinook salmon, significant to many of us for cultural and spiritual reasons as well as ecological ones, have plummeted. At the same time Chum returns flourish. A history of logging and decades of development have left standing only scraps of old-growth Coastal Hemlock and Douglas Fir forest. We're recycling more than ever from our homes, but we're also buying more—replacing old items, buying new ones, disposing of associated packaging—so that overall, we're sending more garbage than ever for disposal.

The good news in all this? The Cowichan is bursting with efforts, organizations and people determined to turn those negative environmental indicators around into positives. There's a lot already going on to prepare us for the new climate that's coming, and important choices that face us. There's plenty of opportunity to get involved and make a difference.

We'll be writing more in this space over the weeks ahead about what the CVRD Environment Commission is doing to help. And if you have any thoughts or ideas, we'd love to hear from you at [12things@cvrdenviro.com](mailto:12things@cvrdenviro.com).

## WHO ARE WE?

The CVRD created the Environment Commission in 2007 to develop a strategic environmental plan for the region and address emerging environmental issues. Twelve of its 15 members are volunteers drawn from the community, including one delegated by the Cowichan Tribes; three others are CVRD Directors. The term of public members is two years. If you are interested in serving, drop us a note with a brief outline of your interest and qualifications, to [12things@cvrdenviro.com](mailto:12things@cvrdenviro.com).



\* In 2009, residents of the CVRD overwhelmingly endorsed the '12 Big Ideas' vision for a Cowichan region that will support a growing population, adapt to a changing climate, and preserve its natural wealth for future generations.

