COWICHAN TRIBES
5760 ALLENBY ROAD, DUNCAN, BC V9L 5J1
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February 20, 2025

Agricultural Land Commission
4940 Canada Way
Burnaby, B.C.
V5G 4K6

Dear Members of the Agricultural Land Commission,

I am writing on behalf of Quw'utsun Mustimuhw and all supporters of the Cowichan Estuary Revitalization Project (CERP) to voice Cowichan Tribes' wholehearted support for the decommissioning of Dike #49 (Dinsdale dike) to restore natural estuary processes and maintain the area's resilience to sea level rise.

For over 50 years, Cowichan Tribes has been working to restore the Cowichan Estuary to support our long-standing responsibilities of stewarding critical habitat for juvenile salmon, shellfish, and our traditional food and medicinal plants, in keeping with our traditional Quw'utsun teaching:

***Hiiye'yutul tst 'u to' mukw' stem 'i'u tun'a tumuhw* (Everything in nature is part of our family – we are all relatives).**

Since 2018, in support of this work, Cowichan Tribes' Lands and Natural Resources Department (Lulumexun) has partnered with the Nature Trust of BC (NTBC), leading to our Nations' direct involvement in the *Quw'utsun Food Systems Revitalization Project* and the broader CERP.

As part of this partnership, Cowichan Tribes has organized several events at the estuary, including, but not limited to, traditional *piquan* feasts and multiple planting events at the newly constructed 4.5 acre native plant nursery *Hulitan Spulhxun Tumuhw* (Nurturing Fields). These events which aim at re-establishing our intertidal food system mark important cultural milestones for our Nation. They have been guided by our Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and attended by our Members and students from Cowichan Secondary School's Indigenous Education program. Through the recent seeding of over 15,000 traditional food and medicinal plants, we look forward to restoring our traditional agricultural practices and advancing economic opportunities through the propagation of perennial, native plant species.

I understand that a key part of your review involves the mischaracterization of Indigenous food systems as "speculative." As you may be aware, Quw'utsun Mustimuhw have been cultivating crops such as camas and wapato in this area for millennia. These practices are well-documented, and any claims to the contrary are remiss of our peoples' deep-seated history of natural resource management and sophisticated agriculture on these lands.

I also understand that there are unfounded concerns surrounding the displacement of waterfowl as a result of planned dike removal. To help preserve the Cowichan Estuary—an internationally designated Important Bird Area—Cowichan Tribes biologists work closely with Birds Canada,

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the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada, and local conservation groups, and participate in monthly bird counts as part of the BC Coastal Waterbird Survey. Our history demonstrates that this area was rich with waterfowl for millennia under Quw'utsun stewardship and prior to the implementation of dikes. The CERP is endorsed by the Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture as a project aiming to restore core natural habitat for migratory waterfowl. Any implication that Cowichan Tribes would purposefully displace waterfowl in our traditional territory is patently false.

The provincial government has already noted the need for the Dinsdale dike to be removed or replaced in consideration of forecast sea-level rise. Extensive flood modelling demonstrates that removing the dike is essential to safeguard Cowichan Tribes territory from severe flooding and extreme weather events and is the most effective option for disaster mitigation. The Cowichan Estuary Environmental Management Committee, on which Cowichan Tribes is a sitting member, is unlikely to approve the installation of a replacement super dike. In the interest of avoiding a bathtub-effect flooding event, and preserving the area for agricultural use for generations to come, the removal of the dike is necessary.

Lastly, I will note that Cowichan Tribes and NTBC are currently working toward a formal agreement to further support Quw'utsun Mustimuhw responsibilities as long-term rights holders and stewards of this land. We regard the CERP as having direct implications to our Nation's economic, self-governance, disaster mitigation, and cultural future.

Thank you for considering our longstanding and steadfast support for the Nature Trust of BC and the Cowichan Estuary Revitalization project, and I look forward to your timely decision on this matter.

Sincerely,

Chief Cindy Daniels
Cowichan Tribes

Cc:
The Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture and Food
Alistair MacGregor, MP (Cowichan-Malahat-Langford)
Debra Toporowski, MLA (Cowichan Valley)
The Nature Trust of BC