

Vancouver Island Nature Viewing Region

Duncan/Cowichan Area

Cowichan River Estuary & Nature Centre, Duncan



Cowichan Estuary: photo by Krista Kaptein



Great Blue Heron Rookery: photo by Krista Kaptein

The Cowichan Estuary is formed by the Koksilah and Cowichan Rivers which share the same floodplain, a highly productive estuary which provided the livelihood of Qu'wut'sun First Nation people who continue to the present day.

[Nature Cowichan](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

Geographical Description	The estuary of the Cowichan River between Mt Tzouhalem & the community of Cowichan Bay.
Area/ Trail Length	Estuary approx. 400 ha. Nature Trust of BC property: 89.8 ha.
Seasons to Visit	Year-round. Winter & spring for waterbirds.
Habitat	Estuary, riparian.

Viewing Highlights The Nature Centre bird list includes 68 species including Osprey (nesting on pilings), Bald Eagle, Trumpeter Swan, Black Oystercatcher, Caspian Tern, Purple Martin (nesting in boxes).
A large heron rookery is located across the road from the Nature Centre, up Wessex Rd.

Harbour Seals year round. In the fall, California & Steller Sea Lions come into Cowichan Bay and haul out on the floating breakwater near the Government Dock.

Low tide life including numerous clam species, mussels, crabs, limpets, shrimp.

Other Features

Main Access Nature Centre located at 1845 Cowichan Bay Rd. in Hecate Park.

Secondary Accesses

Cautions

Jurisdiction The Nature Centre is managed by a committee of the Cowichan Land Trust which includes representatives from the Land Trust Board of Directors, the Area D Parks Commission, and the Cowichan Valley Naturalists.
Nature Trust of BC owns properties in the estuary. Over 300 ha. is under the protection of the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program.

Regulations No camping.

Facilities At the Nature Centre: parking lot, benches, picnic tables, information maps, interpretive signs, telescopes, viewing tower, nest boxes.

Other Recreational Activities
Other Connections

History

The Qu'wut'sun (Cowichan) people harvested fish & plants in the estuary for thousands of years. With the arrival of settlers in the 1860's log sorting & booming reduced the marine life. Dykes were created so the land could be farmed, but many have been opened and side channels enhanced to improve wetland habitat. The Cowichan tribes & community stewardship groups are working to restore the health of the estuary.

The Building of the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre was a project of the Cowichan Land Trust in cooperation with the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, and many volunteers, including the Rotary Club of Duncan, in building the Nature Centre and the Viewing Tower. The Nature Centre's official opening was held on Saturday, April 21, 2012.

[Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre History](#)

FMI**Links**

[Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre](#)

[Cowichan Land Trust](#)

[Cowichan Valley Naturalists Society](#)

[Nature Cowichan](#)

[Nature Trust of BC](#)

[Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas](#)

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