



**REPORT TO REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2024**

SUBJECT **2023 Public and School Tours Summary - Greater Victoria Water Supply Area**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide the Regional Water Supply Commission a summary of the 2023 public and school tours of the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area (GVWSA) and water supply facilities.

BACKGROUND

For the past 34 years, Integrated Water Services (IWS) has provided free bus tours of the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area and Water Supply Facilities to the public. School tours have been offered to various grades over the past 11 years, with a focus on grade 5 for the last eight years. Technical tours have been provided to post-secondary institutions, professional associations and partner agencies by request.

The tour programs for 2020 and 2021 were impacted by Public Health Orders due to COVID-19. Time and funding were used instead to develop several videos about the water supply area, water treatment and transmission, valuing and conserving water and GVWSA access orientation.

With the easing of COVID public health orders in 2022, school, public and technical tours were again offered.

2023 Public Tours

The public tours provided participants with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of:

- where Greater Victoria's drinking water comes from
- the high quality of water in source reservoirs
- the characteristics of the water supply area and drinking water infrastructure
- the care taken to safeguard the drinking water resource
- future plans for the water supply area with regard to climate change and population growth
- how source water is disinfected
- the value of water conservation
- water pricing

The tours also offered a chance to inform the participants of the 2022 Regional Water Supply Master Plan and water conservation bylaw.

Public tours were offered four days per week (Thursday to Sunday) in the month of June. The five-hour tour followed the path of water from source to tap, with stops at the Sooke Reservoir North Basin Viewpoint, Rithet Creek, a forest walk, Sooke Dam and the Goldstream Water Treatment Facility (viewing of the ultraviolet disinfection pipe gallery). Capital Regional District (CRD) Water bottles were given to all participants.

The following table compares tour participation statistics from 2018 to 2023 (no tours were offered in 2020 and only school tours in 2021). There were 583 participants on the public tours. CRD's online registration system (Sitefinity) was used and most tours were fully booked with a waitlist. Coach buses had 42 seats reservable with an average occupancy of 36 participants (or 87 % full), due predominantly to no-shows on the day.

Tour Type	2018		2019		2021 (Covid impact)		2022		2023	
	Tours	Participants	Tours	Participants	Tours	Participants	Tours	Participants	Tours	Participants
School	18	426	26	770	18	467	23	641	22	627
Public	16	547	16	584	0	0	16	467	16	583
Total	34	973	42	1,354	18	467	39	1,108	38	1,210

2023 School Tours

There were 22 free school tours provided to grade 5 or grade 4/5 classes over a span of six weeks in April and May. The 2023 school tours visited Goldstream River, Japan Gulch Reservoir, enjoyed a walk in the forest and on the suspension bridge before visiting the Goldstream Water Treatment Facility. The tour ends with the wildfire fighter challenge relay race and a CRD water bottle as a memento of the field trip.

The school program covered the following topics:

- water on a global scale and the water cycle
- defining a watershed
- learning about our forest and native plants
- where our drinking water comes from and how it's delivered to our homes
- how our drinking water is disinfected
- the risk of a wildfire to our water supply
- what we can do to conserve drinking water

There were 548 students that attended the tours with 79 accompanying adults, for a total of 627 individuals. The online registration information was sent to all schools (public and private) in the Greater Victoria area via the CRD Educator's Newsletter and bookings were made on a first come, first served basis.

The elementary schools that participated in sending one or more classes in 2023 were: Marigold, Oaklands, Campus View, Sir James Douglas, Braefoot, St. Joseph's, Poirier, George Jay, Hillcrest, Lake Hill, Torquay, Deep Cove, and Prospect Lake.

While the school tours remain popular with teachers and students as an outing, staff increasingly feel that the purpose and content is not being received and absorbed as much as hoped. Requests for more in-class resources, free time and games on the already shortened tours lend to this view that perhaps funds and efforts should rather be re-pointed to efforts to inform the general public and actively interested older students and provide information on the water supply system to the in-class program on water provided by outreach staff in Parks and Environmental Services.

2023 Technical Tours

Technical tours were requested throughout the year and varied in focus and length. In 2023, a record number of technical tours were requested and provided to approximately 150 people. Technical tours require additional support from staff subject matter experts and are only conducted when staff can be made available.

- University of Victoria Hydrology class
- University of Victoria Restoration of Natural Systems class
- District of Saanich Engineering Department
- Natural Resources Canada, Pacific Forestry Centre
- Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship, Water Protection and Sustainability Branch
- University of Victoria, Science Venture STEM (Grade 9-12)
- Chief Medical Health Officer and Staff
- Camosun College, Civil Engineering, Water & Waste Management class
- Environment and Climate Change Canada International Conference: Indigenous and Urban Approaches to Climate Adaptation – tour with delegates and Minister Guilbeault
- Regional Water Supply Commission, Water Advisory Committee and Juan de Fuca Water Distribution Commission

In addition to the technical tours, two CRD Staff tours were provided, one in June and the other in October with a total of 49 CRD staff attending.

Tour Program staff collaborated with other CRD educational program staff (Parks Interpretive Programs, Climate Action and Environmental Protection) on two events:

- Earth Day event hosted at Beaver Lake. This family focused event was an opportunity to promote CRD educational environmental programs; Integrated Water Services staffed a booth and provided a scavenger hunt relating to historic water infrastructure located in the park.
- Teacher Pro-D Day Workshop – Hosted at the Hartland Learning Centre. Presentations to teachers on CRD educational programs and the local environmental resources available, followed by a tour of Hartland Landfill.



CRD Staff tour June 29, 2023, Sooke Intake Tower

Budget

The budget for the 2023 tour program was \$69,125. The cost to deliver the public and school tour program in 2023 totaled \$71,200 (overspending of \$2,081 or 3%) with \$36,480 spent on buses, \$20,820 on auxiliary staff time, and the remainder on advertising, rental of a tent and sanitation facilities, printing posters and brochures, and use of a fleet vehicle.

Advertising

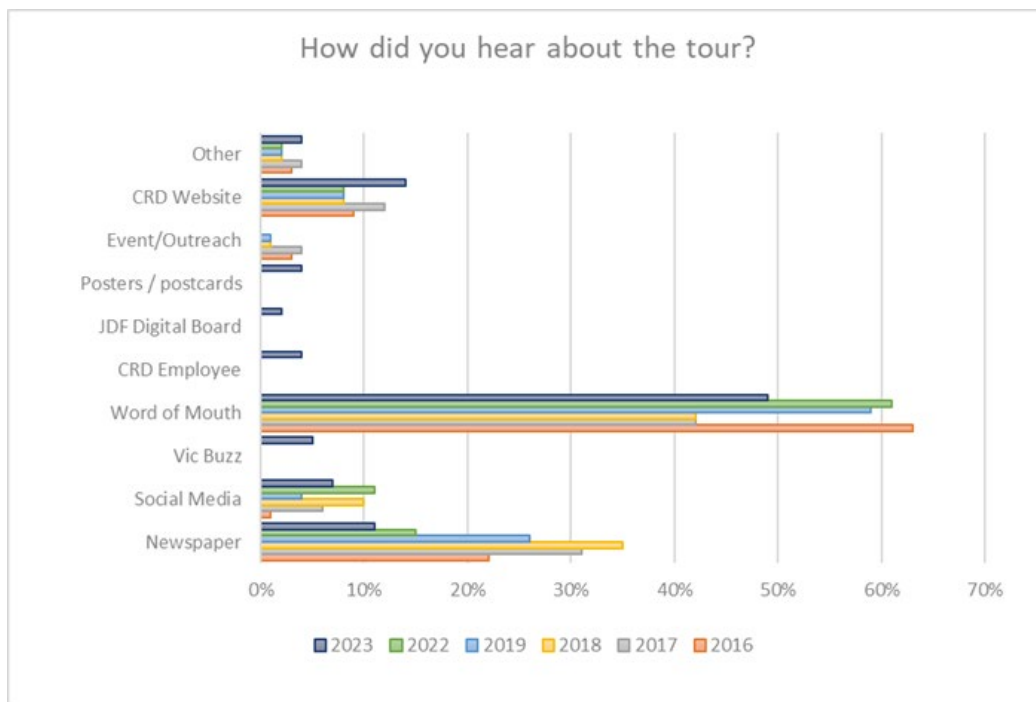
Advertising for the public tours kicked off with a social media campaign on World Water Day (March 22) with online registration open for the June dates. Other advertising was carried out on the CRD Website and social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, and X). Posters and postcards were created with a QR code that linked directly to the registration page and were distributed to strategic community locations like libraries and community centres. New this year was advertising on the Juan De Fuca digital board, using Victoria Buzz for an advertorial, and staff attending a CRD hosted Earth Day event to promote the public tours.

On May 1, Black Press ran a free public interest piece informing residents that the CRD watershed tours were back, and that registration was open. The same story was predominantly featured on the six Greater Victoria Black Press webpages (Victoria, Saanich, Sooke, Goldstream/Westshore, Oak Bay, and The Peninsula News) and print stories were run in two to three papers. The digital stories linked to the watershed overview video, which accounts for a significant increase in viewership from May 1-3. The free news story increased registration to the point that a newspaper advertisement was not required.

Link to Black Press Story

<https://www.saanichnews.com/community/crd-brings-back-watershed-tours-for-the-summer-328811>

The public tour survey provided data on how participants heard about the tours. The below graph illustrates that word of mouth is still the number one mechanism for advertising the public tours with the CRD website, for the first time, taking second place.



Feedback

A public tour survey was completed by 396 individuals or 68% of the tour participants. Of those who responded, 81% were on a tour for the first time. As in previous years, the tours were well received with 92% of those surveyed rating the tour as “excellent”. The aspects respondents enjoyed most were the forest walk, information presented during the tour, knowledge of tour leaders, seeing Sooke Lake Dam, wildlife, and the opportunity to tour an otherwise restricted area.

Most respondents did not think there was any aspect of the tour that needed improving. However, some wished for more public tour dates and the opportunity for tours in the fall. A few respondents expressed a desire for a longer forest walk or other opportunities to do more walking. The only recurring complaint was regarding the lack of air conditioning on the bus as well as the lack of shade at the lunch stop on the dam during hot days at the end of June. Overall, feedback from the 2023 public tours was very positive and reinforces the public’s appreciation for the opportunity to visit and learn about the watershed and water supply system.

Feedback from teachers on the 2023 school tours was positive, rating the tour as good to excellent. When asked if teachers would use a pre-tour resource kit, the majority answered yes. Feedback from teachers at the Pro-D Day workshop expressed they would like more in-class programs.

Plans for 2024

Plans for 2024 tours (budget of \$70,500; 2% increase) include:

- providing more tours for the public in the spring and offering tours in the fall
- re-directing school tour efforts to:
 - a) in-class outreach on the topic of drinking water and watersheds in collaboration with CRD Environmental Services schools outreach; and,
 - b) a trial of one or more tours in the fall aimed at students at higher level education institutions – i.e., Camosun College, University of Victoria;
 - c) increasing awareness that technical tours can be requested by high school or higher-level education classes specific to trades, engineering, environmental studies, hydrology and biology.
- continue to work with CRD First Nations Relations and Regional Parks staff to elicit local First Nations context and history that can be provided on tours.

CONCLUSION

The 2023 “Get to Know Your H₂O Tours” of the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area and Water Supply Facilities were enthusiastically received by both schools and the public. A total of 1,210 residents participated in one of the 38 tours that were provided. A high percentage of public tour and school participants were on a tour for the first time. Tours will again be offered in 2024 with a new focus on reaching students at higher level education institutions as well as increasing public tour offerings.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

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