



**REPORT TO REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2024**

SUBJECT **2024 Public Education Summary - Greater Victoria Water Supply Area**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide the Regional Water Supply Commission a summary of the 2024 classroom education and public tours of the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area (GVWSA) and water supply facilities.

BACKGROUND

For the past 35 years, Integrated Water Services (IWS) has provided public tours of the GVWSA and Water Supply Facilities to provide transparency, trust in regional drinking water and confidence in its management. School tours were additionally offered for 11 years with a shift in 2024 to focusing on in-class programs on watershed and water conservation. Technical tours are provided to post-secondary institutions, professional associations and partner agencies on request and based on staff availability.

2024 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; and,
- water pricing

The tours also offered a chance to inform and answer questions on the 2022 Regional Water Supply Master Plan, recent amendment to the water conservation bylaw and thinning to promote a more resilient and fuel reduced forest.

The spring public tours ran four days a week (Thursday through Sunday) for seven weeks during May and June. The five-hour bus tour traced the journey of water from source to tap, with stops at key sites including the north basin of Sooke Lake Reservoir, a forest thinning site, Rithet Creek, a forest trail, Sooke Dam (lunch break), and the Goldstream Water Treatment Facility where participants could view the ultraviolet disinfection pipe gallery.

New for 2024 was a trial of six fall tours with three public-oriented tours picking up at recreation centres and three tours aimed at post-secondary students picking up at University of Victoria and Camosun College. The student tours had an added focus on careers in the drinking water industry. Partnering with the Crystal Pool & Fitness Centre to host a tour in the fall provided an excellent, free community event, showcasing the value of such collaborations. This approach has promising potential for future partnerships with other recreation centers in the region.

2024 Classroom Education

In 2024, school tours of the watershed discontinued and additional effort was placed on classroom education at participating schools. The school program is still in progress, with 908 registered participants in 40 classrooms. The 45-minute presentation utilizes a variety of education tools such as CRD watershed videos, a watershed model demonstration, ‘A Drop In the Bucket’ demonstration, and CRD watershed and drinking water maps (with schools labelled). All participants receive a CRD ‘Every Drop Counts’ educational activity sheet. Topics include:

- location of Greater Victoria’s drinking water supply;
- high quality of reservoir water due to watershed protection measures ;
- treatment and transmission of drinking water supply;
- importance (value) of water as a resource for all living things;
- interconnections between water, people, and the environment; and,
- how to conserve drinking water and prevent watershed pollution.

Additionally, watershed models and the “Every Drop Counts” kit have been loaned to 13 schools, reaching an estimated additional 650 participants.

The following table compares tours over the last seven years and 2024 classroom education participation. There were 1,006 participants on the 2024 tours and 908 participants in classroom education. On average tours were 75% full (1,334 available seats); which is slightly lower than past years due to low participation in the new fall tours which ran at 53% full (133 attended with 252 available seats). No shows on the day of the tour remain an issue in maximizing tour capacity.

| Year | School Tours/2024 In-Class | School Participants | Public Tours | Public Tour Participants | Total Events (Tour & Classroom) | Total Participants |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| 2017 | 13 | 390 | 18 | 490 | 31 | 880 |
| 2018 | 18 | 426 | 16 | 547 | 34 | 973 |
| 2019 | 26 | 770 | 16 | 584 | 42 | 1,354 |
| 2021* | 18 | 467 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 467 |
| 2022 | 23 | 641 | 16 | 467 | 39 | 1,108 |
| 2023 | 22 | 627 | 16 | 583 | 38 | 1,210 |
| 2024 | 40 | 908 | 32 | 1,006 | 72 | 1,914 |

* Due to Covid, no tours were offered in 2020 and only school tours in 2021

Budget

The budget for the 2024 tour program was \$70,500. The cost to deliver the program was \$61,920 or \$62 per participant. Bus rental remains the greatest cost factor for the tours. The remaining 2024 budget will be used to replace the Sooke Lake Dam displays that were damaged by wind, and to purchase a tent for tour check-in.

The classroom education program costs roughly \$3,000 per year for materials.

Advertising

The classroom education program is advertised at no additional cost through a teacher e-newsletter, word of mouth and the CRD website.

Advertising for the tours was a combination of paid advertising in the Victoria Buzz and social media, as well the following free advertising opportunities:

- community posters and postcards;
- online event calendars and CRD website;
- CRD window display at Fisgard;
- Westshore Parks and Recreation digital advertising board;
- coverage in local papers including the Sooke Mirror and other Black Press newspapers; and,
- emails to university/college professors and clubs.

Based on participant surveys, word of mouth is still the number one reason people sign up for public tours (54%) with paid advertising resulting in only 14% of the bookings. The table below shows the breakdown of advertising results. CRD did not place ads in print newspapers due to the high cost, therefore the option of “local newspaper” in the survey was due to the [Black Press article](#) about the watershed tours (Appendix A). The Times Colonist also ran a lengthy [“Islander” feature article](#) about the watershed tours, which created interest, but unfortunately the story ran after tours had finished for the spring (Appendix B).

| Advertising/Info Source | Number of Responses | Percentage of Respondents |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Word of Mouth - free | 303 | 54% |
| Local Newspaper (print or digital) - free | 69 | 12% |
| Facebook; Instagram; X (Twitter) - paid | 59 | 11% |
| CRD Website - free | 56 | 10% |
| Poster; Postcard; Events Calendar; Window Display – free posting | 29 | 5% |
| Do not remember; Other | 20 | 4% |
| Victoria Buzz - paid | 17 | 3% |
| Westshore Parks & Rec Digital Board - free | 8 | 1% |
| Total | 561 | 100% |

Participant Feedback

The public tour survey was completed by 569 individuals or 65% of the tour participants. Of those who responded, 85% were on a tour for the first time. As in previous years, the tours were well received with 93% of those surveyed rating the tour as “excellent”. The aspects respondents enjoyed most was the tour leader/interpretation provided, the quality of information, seeing where their water comes from, being in nature, learning about forest management and wildfire mitigation, the Goldstream Water Treatment Facility and the overall comfort and quality of the tour.

Most respondents did not think there was any aspect of the tour that needed improving. However, some wished for more walking or a shorter tour. A few respondents expressed interest in having the presentation poster boards as a handout or available digitally, and a handful of respondents raised issues with finding or getting to the tour meeting point. Overall, feedback from the 2024 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.

2024 Technical Tours

Technical tours were requested throughout the year and varied in focus and length. Technical tours require additional support from staff subject matter experts and are only conducted when

staff can be made available. In 2024, seven tours were provided to approximately 164 people as per below:

- Planning Institute of BC
- Water is Life – International youth conference on water issues
- Youth Climate Anxiety Project
- University of Victoria Hydrology class
- University of Victoria Restoration of Natural Systems class
- Camosun College, Civil Engineering, Water & Waste Management class
- Canadian Forest Service / South Korean climate modelers

In addition to the technical tours, one CRD Staff tour was provided and 25 staff members attended.



CRD Staff tour June 27, 2024, Sooke Lake Reservoir Intake Tower

Plans for 2025

Given ongoing success and public appreciation of tours, and teacher appreciation of in-classroom education, plans for 2025 include:

- continuing with spring public tours and in-class education in elementary schools;
- increased budget spending and effort on advertising to maximize participation;
- a review of tours from an equity, diversity and inclusion lens to see if adjustments can be made to make tours accessible to a wider audience;
- continue to work with CRD First Nations Relations and Regional Parks staff to incorporate local First Nations context and knowledge on the tours as appropriate;
- trial further collaboration with recreation centers to host watershed tours as part of their seasonal events offerings; and,
- consider further fall tour offerings to post secondary students and the public.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 “Get to Know Your H₂O Tours” of the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area and Water Supply Facilities were enthusiastically received by the public. A total of 1,006 residents participated in one of the 32 tours that were provided, with a high percentage of first-time tour participants. To achieve awareness of the drinking water service, staff provided cost-effective and easily accessible in-class learning to 40 classes with 908 participants, with an additional 14 schools borrowing supplemental educational materials for approximately 650 participants.

Tours and in-class education will again be offered in 2025 for education and to provide opportunity for two-way dialogue with the public about the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area and our Regional Water Supply System. Advertising and collaboration with recreation centres will be leveraged to maximize participation.

RECOMMENDATION

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

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ATTACHMENT(S):

- Appendix A: Black Press Article (June 5, 2024)
- Appendix B: Times Colonist Article (July 7, 2024)