

REPORT TO REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION MEETING OF JANUARY 21, 2026

SUBJECT 2025 Regional Water Supply Watershed Tours and Classroom Education

ISSUE SUMMARY

To inform the Regional Water Supply Commission about the outcomes of the 2025 public tours and classroom education programs for the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area (GVWSA) and water supply system, and to outline plans for 2026.

BACKGROUND

For the past 36 years, Infrastructure and Water Services (IWS) has provided public tours of the GVWSA and Regional Water Supply System to promote transparency, build trust in regional drinking water, and instill confidence in its management. School tours were offered for 11 years, with a shift in 2024 to 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.

2025 Public Tours

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 water supply area and drinking water infrastructure;
- the care taken to safeguard the drinking water resource;
- plans for adapting to climate change and population growth;
- how source water is disinfected; and,
- the value of water conservation and water pricing.

The tours also provided an opportunity to share information and address questions about the 2022 Regional Water Supply Master Plan, amendments to the water conservation bylaw, and forest thinning practices that aim to promote a more resilient, fire-resistant forest.

Public tours ran four days a week (Thursday through Sunday) for nine weeks during May and June for a total of 30 tours. The five-and-a-half-hour tour traced the journey of water from source to distribution, with stops at key sites including the north basin of Sooke Lake Reservoir, a forest thinning site, Rithet Creek, a forest trail, Sooke Dam, and the Goldstream Water Treatment Facility where participants could view the ultraviolet disinfection pipe gallery.

2025 Classroom Education

In 2025, the additional effort on elementary school classroom education that began in 2024 was continued with 940 participants in 39 classrooms receiving programming. The 45-minute presentation utilizes a variety of education tools such as Capital Regional District (CRD) watershed videos, a watershed model demonstration, 'A Drop In the Bucket' demonstration and a watershed map (with schools labelled). All participants also receive a CRD 'Every Drop Counts' educational activity sheet.

The focus of the education is on:

- location of Greater Victoria's drinking water supply;
- high quality of source water due to watershed protection measures;
- treatment and transmission of drinking water supply;
- the 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, a loan program allows the watershed models and the “Every Drop Counts” kits to reach an additional nine schools and approximately 396 participants.

Participation

The following table compares tour attendance over the past seven years. There were 871 participants on the 2025 public tours and 940 participants in classroom education. On average, tours were 69% full (13 available seats per tour on average) and no-shows on the day of the tour remained an issue (in 2025 there were an average of 5.5 no-shows per tour). See Appendix A for details.

Year	School Tours/ Classes	School Participants	Public Tours	Public Tour Participants	Participants per Public Tour	Total Events (Tour & Classroom)	Total Participants
2017	13	390	18	490	27	31	880
2018	18	426	16	547	34	34	973
2019	26	770	16	584	37	42	1,354
2021*	18	467	0	0	n/a	18	467
2022	23	641	16	467	29	39	1,108
2023	22	627	16	583	36	38	1,210
2024	40	908	32	1,006	31	72	1,914
2025	39	940	30	871	29	69	1,811

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

Participant Feedback

A total of 561 individuals, representing 64% of public tour participants, completed a feedback survey. Of those respondents, 86% were attending a tour for the first time. As in previous years, the tours were very well received, with 91% rating their experience as “excellent.” Participants most appreciated the quality of information and interpretation provided, the opportunity to see where their water comes from, the natural setting and wildlife viewing opportunities, learning about forest management and wildfire mitigation, the Goldstream Water Treatment Facility, and the overall comfort and quality of the tour.

Most respondents felt there was no need for improvement; however, a few suggested adding more walking or shortening the tour duration. Some expressed interest in receiving the presentation poster boards as handouts or in digital format, while a handful noted challenges in locating the tour meeting point.

Overall, feedback from the 2025 public tours was overwhelmingly positive and reinforces the public's strong appreciation for the opportunity to visit and learn about the watershed and water supply system.

In addition, the tours served as a visible demonstration of CRD's corporate priorities in action, including:

- **Climate Action:** The tours incorporated sustainable practices, including the use of an electric escort vehicle, brochures printed on recycled paper, the distribution of reusable non-plastic water bottles, and a "pack-in, pack-out" approach to waste management.
- **Reconciliation:** Each tour began with a territorial acknowledgment recognizing and highlighting that a number of First Nations have long standing relationships with the lands and waters of the GVWSA, and that the Region benefits from these critical lands. Indigenous plant names and traditional uses were shared throughout the day, complemented by open dialogue on CRD–IWS partnerships and ongoing relationship-building with local First Nations.
- **Accessibility and Inclusion:** Tours were offered free of charge and promoted broadly to encourage participation from across the community. A fully accessible coach bus was available on most tours equipped with a wheelchair lift, seatbelts, air conditioning and an onboard washroom which supported participant safety and comfort. These features were particularly important given the tour duration and varying weather conditions.

The public tours continue to exemplify CRD's commitment to environmental stewardship, reconciliation, and equitable community engagement.

Budget

In 2025, the public tours program cost \$98,067 (\$6,767 over budget). Expenses included \$35,408 in auxiliary wages due to an unexpected staff medical leave, \$30,562 for bus rental, and \$7,711 for advertising. The additional auxiliary wages were offset by salary savings in the regular operating budget. The classroom education program costs roughly \$3,000 per year for materials.

Advertising

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

Paid advertising for the public tours was placed across a variety of media platforms, including:

- CFAX AM radio and Virgin Radio FM radio
- *Times Colonist* and *Black Press* newspapers
- SEAPARC's *Active Living Guide*
- *Victoria Buzz*
- Facebook boosted posts

In addition to paid advertising, free promotional opportunities were leveraged through the CRD website, social media channels, the Westshore Parks and Recreation digital sign, and Eventbrite, where tour registration was hosted.

Based on participant surveys, word of mouth, followed by newspaper advertising, remained the most common reason for public tour participation. When grouped in categories in the table below, the many forms of free advertising, followed by paid advertising led to the most participation.

Information Source	Number of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Free ads – posters, digital signs, newsletters, social media, eventbrite, tax bills, CRD outreach	158	39 %
Paid ads – newspaper, radio, digital	133	32 %
Word of Mouth	95	23 %
Don't remember/group outing	23	6 %

2025 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 2025, eight tours were provided to:

- University of Victoria Hydrology class
- Camosun College Engineering Tech.
- Medical Health Office
- Science Venture Youth STEM Camp
- City of Langford – Engineering
- Camosun College – Environmental Field Skills
- Forest Enhancement Society of BC

In addition, two CRD staff tours, two First Nations tour, and one RWS Commission tour were provided in 2025 with 84 attendees.

Plans for 2026

A key challenge this year was a high number of registered participant no-shows, accounting for 16% (165 spots) of total registrations (see Appendix A for details). Additionally, a few tours had low attendance (e.g., only 11 and 15 participants attended the May 22 and 23 tours, respectively, with a bus capacity of 42 per tour). To improve program efficiency and better align resources with demand, staff plan to reduce the number of tours offered in 2026 from 30 to approximately 26. This is based on attendance data from 2024, where 26 spring tours achieved similar total participation levels to 2025 (when 30 tours were offered) with 33% fewer no-shows. A reduced number of tours will help consolidate attendance and reduce bus costs and the staff time required for planning and delivery.

Additional measures to be implemented in 2026 aimed at improving attendance and operational effectiveness will include:

- expanding advertising to increase public awareness;
- enhancing the registration software to streamline the process for the public and reduce administrative effort;
- increasing available bus seating capacity to better anticipate no-shows; and,
- partnering with recreation centres to offer watershed tours as part of their seasonal programming.

If no-show rates remain high in 2026 despite these changes, staff will recommend introducing a nominal registration fee for 2027 tours. A recent survey of other water utilities found that about half charge a fee to help reduce no-shows.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 “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 871 residents participated in one of the 30 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 39 classes with 940 participants, with an additional 9 schools borrowing supplemental educational materials for approximately 396 participants (end of October totals).

An increase in the number of public tour no-shows has meant that on popular days there are members of the public on a waitlist while there are empty seats on the bus. Given the considerable cost to deliver the watershed tours, each empty seat that could have been filled reduces the effectiveness of the program. Streamlining the program by reducing the number of tours and increasing advertising are expected to increase participation rates, reduce no-shows and improve program cost effectiveness.

Public tours and in-class education should continue to be offered in 2026 to provide opportunity for direct education and two-way dialogue with the public about the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area and the Regional Water Supply System.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Submitted by:	Annette Constabel, M.Sc., RPF., Senior Manager, Watershed Protection
Concurrence:	Alicia Fraser, P. Eng., General Manager, Infrastructure and Water Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: 2025 Spring Public Tour Data