



*Our Mission: to support, promote and protect the natural values of land and water in our area.*

November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024

To: The School Trustee Board, School District 68

**Re: The School Water Stewards Program and the Environmental Stewardship Action Plan**

Dear Chair Keller and School Board Trustees,

In 2018, in collaboration with educators from the now named syuwén'ct Elementary School, The Nanaimo & Area Land Trust (NALT) began to dream, design and develop curriculum connected watershed stewardship lessons. In 2020 NALT launched the School Water Stewards (SWS) pilot project which has since become an ongoing program delivered in School District 68 (SD 68).

Implementation of a primarily outdoor learning program proved to be popular during the modified learning environment imposed by COVID-19. We take students out of their classrooms and connect them to nearby natural water features like creeks and wetlands. Alignment with SD 68's Environmental Stewardship Action Plan (ESAP) also made it natural for classrooms to participate in the program. The program supports the plan objectives of integrating environmental stewardship in the curriculum, opportunities to learn about environmental stewardship of the land, creating a culture of environmental stewardship, and community connections and collaboration. By June of 2024, the program was present in 13 schools and 45 classes in the district. Features of the program included no cost to students or schools to participate in watershed stewardship lessons and restoration projects delivered by NALT's expert staff.

To date, excluding related administration expenses, direct costs of delivering the program have totaled \$167,596. The annual cost of delivering the program is almost \$45,000. We receive \$15,000 of program support from the Regional District of Nanaimo Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Program (RDN DWWP). NALT funds the remaining \$30,000 expense. To date we have been unsuccessful in securing funds from other sources. We estimate we will have funds available to continue the program through 2025 but are unlikely to be able to continue in 2026 without additional funding. We are currently operating at the very edge of our capacity in a manner that cannot be sustained. Without support, the program will end.

We appeal to SD 68 for two outcomes:

1. We ask that SD 68 consider adding funding the SWS program to its budget considerations. When NALT is seeking grants for the SWS program, our position would be strengthened by SD 68 showing its willingness to provide financial support.
2. An acknowledgement of the value of the SWS program to the School District in achieving some of its ESAP objectives. Neither the School Water Stewards program nor NALT are mentioned in the ESAP progress monitoring report even though SWS has been operation since before adoption of the Plan. If we are to seek funding from other sources, we need to be able to



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show the value received by the students and recognized by the School District. A letter of support from the SD 68 Board would be a useful tool to leverage funding.

NALT sees the benefit of the SWS program to students and school catchment communities and wishes to continue providing the valuable program to SD 68 students. We appreciate the funding we receive from the RDN DWWP but cannot sustain funding the bulk of the program on our own. We need your help.

Sincerely,

Dean Gaudry, NALT Co-Chair

Nina Locke, NALT Co-Chair

Cc: Robyn Gray, Superintendent SD 68