

Syilx Water Perspectives: Valuing *siwɬkʷ* Knowledge

Local Indigenous Knowledge in the Okanagan



Marlowe Sam, Ph.D. & Jeannette C. Armstrong, Ph.D.

siwlṭk^w - Water

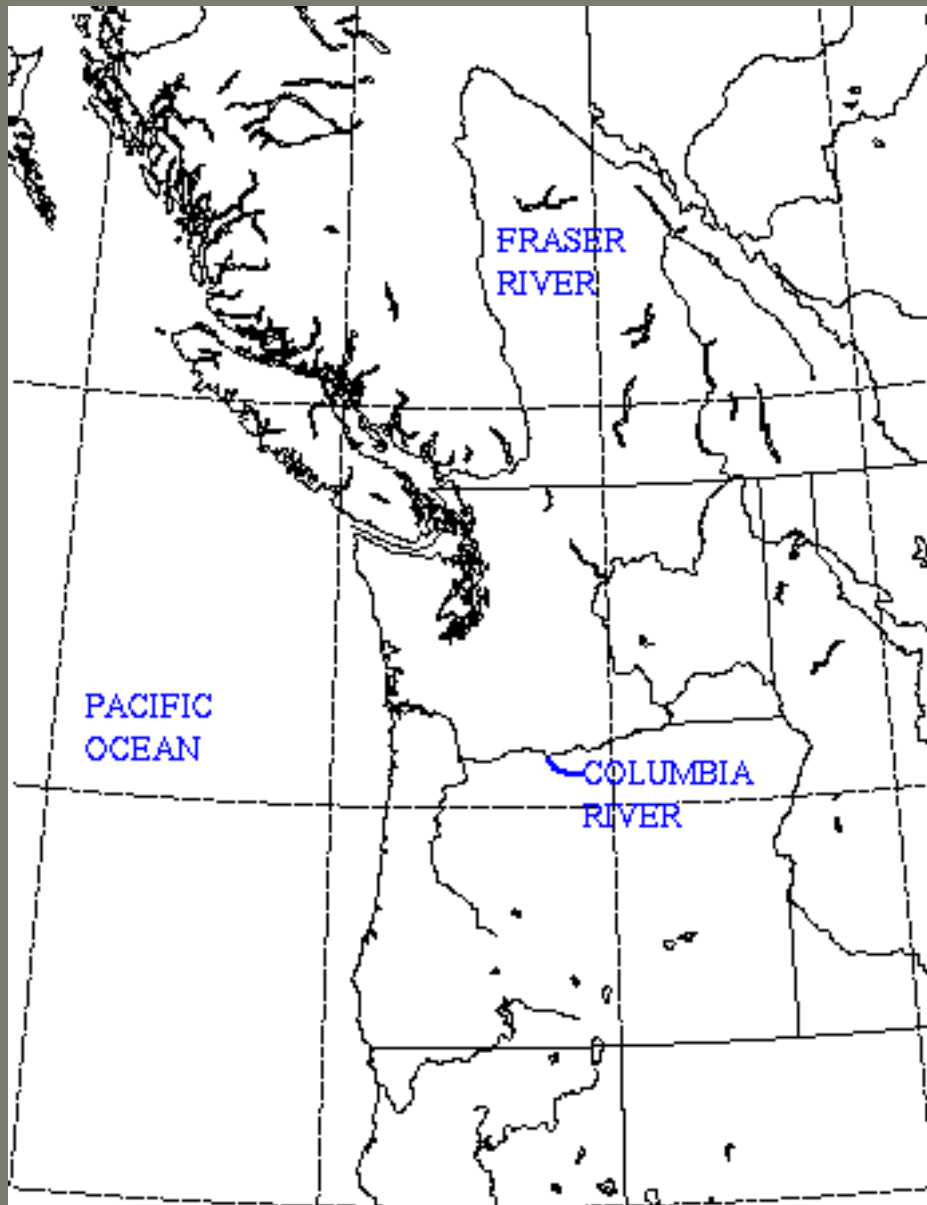
siwlṭk^w is the nsyilxcən word for water.

The meaning comes from (siw) and (ṭk^w).

- The (siw) from siwst-to drink (human)
- The (ṭk^w) from ṭk^witk^w-to lap (animal)
- Together the two parts identify the Syilx ethic that the right to water is equal for animals and humans.
- siwlṭk^w is sacred as the source of all life on the tmx^wulax^w.



Syilx territory from the interior of British Columbia through the Colville Confederated Tribe is nourished by its vast lakes and river waterways.



Waterways
were
significant
connections
to all other
neighboring
Indigenous
Nations of the
Columbia and
Fraser River
Systems



Tribal distributions in the Plateau (based on Ray 1939). Salishan area non-stippled; Sahaptin area stippled.

From Smith 1977

The Nsyilxcən Speaking Nation includes the North and South Okanagan, the Sanpoil, the Lakes/Slocan, the Kettle/Colville, and the Similkameen.

Syilx territory is the Waterway Centre of Many Plateau Nations.

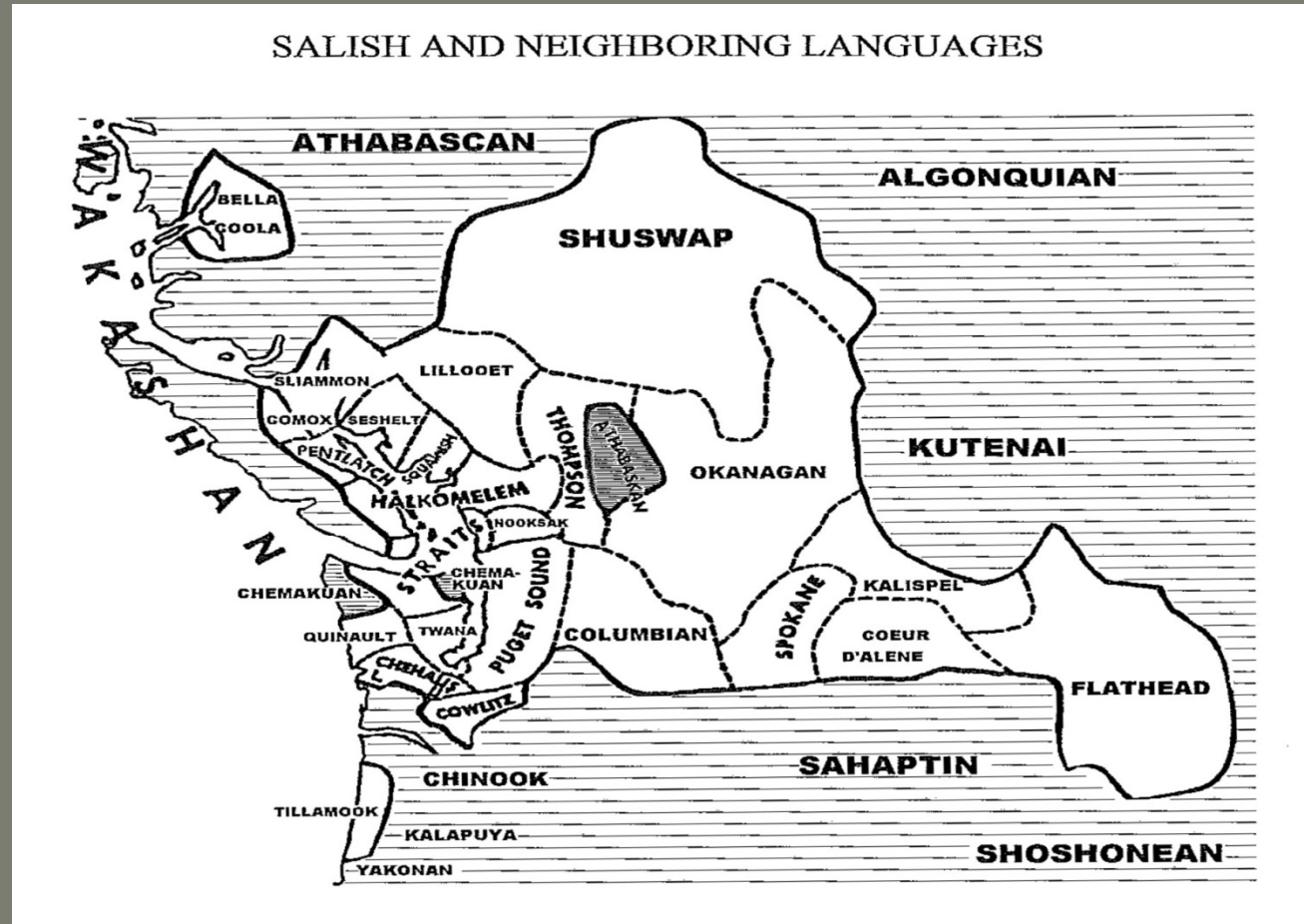
The Syilx: One of 25 Salish Speaking Nations Interconnected by Waterways

- The 25 Salishan Nations originated from one original language group which spread out over at least the last 12,000 years to occupy a vast area of BC reaching down to cover most of Washington State, Northern Idaho and part of Northern Montana.
- The practice of deep kinship systems within strongly autonomous local groupings is the foundation of Syilx reciprocity relationships with neighbouring Salish Nations.
- Reciprocity insured a sustainable peaceful order controlling one of the most water bountiful places on earth .

SALISH TERRITORY

At contact, Salishan language speaking peoples occupied vast areas of BC, Washington State, Northern Idaho, and parts of Northern Montana.

(Kuipers, 2002)



Syilx Water Culture Based on an Inter-Areal Construct of Reciprocity

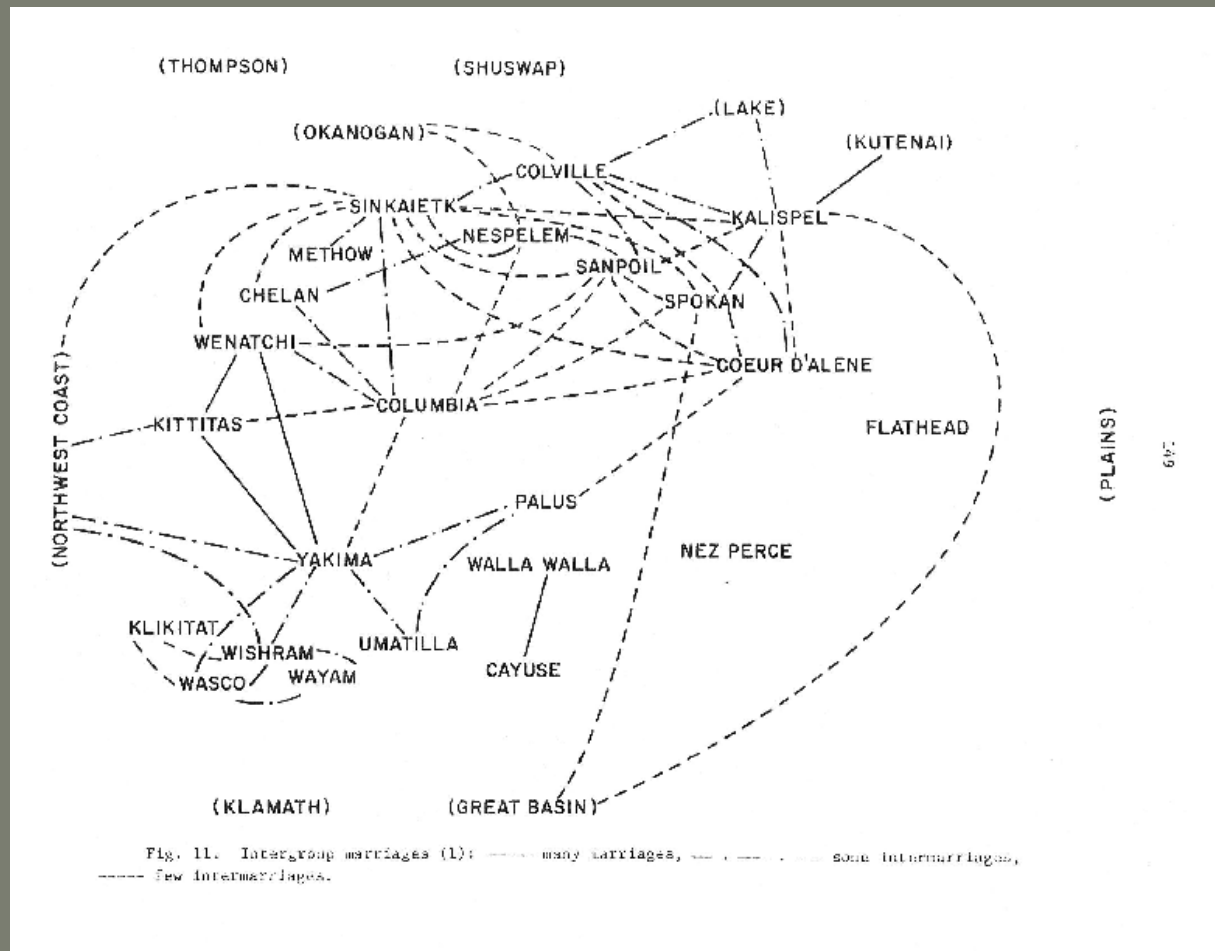
- Interaction based in reciprocity with other Salishan Nations was maintained through ceremonial and celebration gatherings at intertribal salmon fishing sites.
- Intertribal water protocols are laws based in interlocutory reciprocity of mutual benefit, respect and sustainability which protected Syilx territory and its resources.
- Salish groups provided each other peaceful access to large fisheries resources on both the Columbia and Fraser River Systems.

Local Inter-Group Interlocutory Mechanisms of Water Reciprocity

- Angelo Anastasio (1985) in his research of Inter-group Relations in the Southern Plateau, highlighted specific mechanisms that underpin protocols regulating inter-group relations of Salish Nations on the Columbia River System. Research agrees there is little difference between Salishan groups on the Fraser River System.
 - regulated co-utilization of resource sites.
 - on-going peaceful congregations of large multi-tribe groups.
 - constant property exchanges and trade between tribal groups.
 - complex kinship between tribal groups through marriage.
 - diplomatic peaceful settlement of inter-group disputes.
 - Inter-group cooperative defense from external hostilities.

Anastasio's diagram below while focused on groups in USA, his sources included Teit, Ray, Hill-Tout and others whose research in other reports also supplied focus on the Okanagan and their relationships on the Fraser.

Their research demonstrates that the Syilx water relations with the Thompson, the Shuswap, the Lillooet, the Hope and Coastal Groups was as complex.



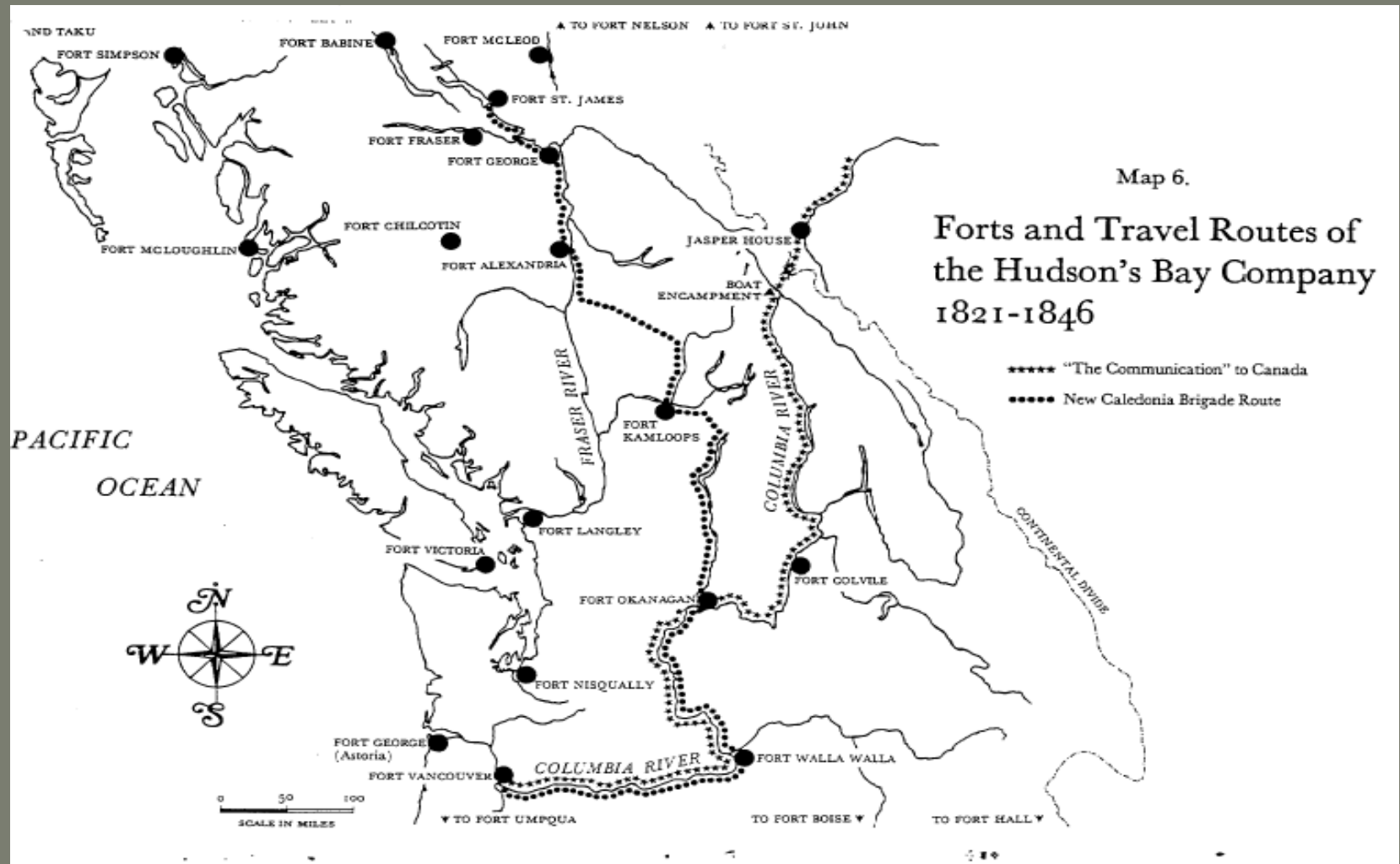
Example of Syilx Reciprocity Protocols

- The water protocols as laws were place-based for salmon fishing management.
- Salmon fishing is always officially opened by the local Nation Chief or for intertribal fisheries by the Salmon Chief (with a ceremony) only after enough days of upstream salmon passage.
- Strict protocols on how long and where salmon weirs (nets, baskets and traps) were to be set and how weir and trap holders were to receive permissions regulated by the community salmon Chief.
- Only specific sites were used for building a weir or a trap or falls fish baskets. Regulations included how long it was to be in place and its communal distribution season.
- No person ever owned an individual weir, salmon trap or basket at any of the major fisheries.

Water Ways Based on Sharing and the Rights of All Families

- Salmon to be shared equally through communal distributions by the fishermen to community families and visitor families with women as the receivers for families. (not traded or sold to them).
- Salish speaking communities and its selected allies had permission to camp at Syilx fisheries and rights to receive distributions.
- At Kettle Falls, the Spokane's, the Columbian's, the Kalispells, the Couer d'Alene's, the Chelans, and the Wenatchee's had access to distributions, just as the Okanagan's did at their territorial fisheries
- Families preserved and carried the distributed personal stocks with them to do with as they wished. Individuals could keep it for food, for ceremony, for give-away or to trade or sell their preserved surplus.

Salish Waterways Also Opened the Way for Traders and Settlers



Colonizing Powers Introduced and Favoured Individual Settler Capitalist Economics and Disabled Established Indigenous Local Water Reciprocity Economics

Hydro and Reservoir Dams are by far the most destructive to Water
Ways in Salish Territory and a loss to all local peoples .

The Columbia River Mainstem has 14 dams.

The Kootenay Dams include the Corra Linn 1932, the Brilliant 1944, the
Waneta 1954, the Duncan 1967, the Keenleyside 1965, the Seven Mile
1980.

The Columbia River Treaty Dams include the Duncan, Keenleyside and
Mica.

Pacific Northwest Reservoir System



The Grand Coulee Dam and the Great Sx^wanitk^w Fishery at Kettle Falls

Constructed from
1933-1942

Flooded vast areas of bottom
lands which had provided the
bounty of other Indigenous foods.

Blocked off 1,400 miles of
salmon spawning habitat on
the Upper Columbia much
of it in Canada.

Changed wild migration routes
and covered grazing lands,
farmlands, homes.

Cut off Salmon reciprocity
economics from all groups
with inherent established
rights to the gift of salmon.

Most severe losses included
ceremonial and burial sites and
the end of Salmon Ceremonial
Community Cohesion of the Kettle
Falls Great Intertribal Fishery.

Re-Assertion of Vital Water Ways Benefits All Local Inhabitants Toward Food and Water Security and Community Cohesion toward Future Reciprocity Economy.

- The Syilx People through the ONA and CCT work of Salmon restoration is a model of cooperation and renewed sharing protocol arrangements between respective governing agencies.
- Benefits to downstream Tribes and ocean fishermen creates need for reciprocity management protocols to protect spawning returns.
- Revitalizing water ceremonial feasting among and between Tribes along Columbia including inclusion of local non-Indigenous community.

Revitalizing Modern Salmon Ceremonies

Historic On-Going Salmon & Water Ceremonies.

- Celilo Falls-Longhouse Salmon Ceremonial Feast
- Lower Columbia River Bands not associated with long-houses- hold water and salmon ceremonies.
- Icicle River-Wenatchee Salmon Chief Opening of Fishing Ceremony
- Kettle Falls- Descendants of Salmon Chief maintain Salmon Calling Ceremony
- Others undocumented

Renewed Salmon & Water Ceremonies

- Chief Joseph- Salmon Ceremony
- Omak- Okanagan River Salmon Greeting Ceremony.
- Castlegar- Salmon Calling Ceremony
- McIntyre- Salmon Fishery Ceremony
- Penticton- ONA Salmon Release Ceremony.
- Okanagan Falls- Returning the Bones Salmon Feast and Ceremony.

What Could the Benefits of a Reciprocity Economy Look Like?

- The salmon release ceremony at Penticton has moved beyond being an Okanagan Syilx ceremony.
- Last spring a group of non-Syilx early grade school children composed a salmon song for the ceremony feast.
- These little people have taken ownership of the future responsibility and reciprocity of the Okanagan waters.
- Large scale restorations of water & land systems.
- Local communities cooperating units through water & salmon.
- New protocols for salmon place-based reciprocity management
- Salmon food bank gifting no child hungry & lifting malnutrition.
- Salmon ceremonial cohesion between settler and Indigenous peoples
- Shifting to a Reciprocity Paradigm

Limlɛmt to ONA for this Immense Work for the Water Ways of Our People

