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SYILX OKANAGAN NATION HONORS ANCESTORS AND PRAY FOR SALMON AT CASTLEGAR SALMON CEREMONY AND FRY RELEASE

stux^wqaynm (Castlegar), Syilx Territory: On June 24, 2019, as part of the Okanagan Nation Alliance's (ONA) ongoing effort to bring salmon back to the Upper Columbia, a sockeye fry release and *cpùta?stm i? xa?x?itat u? ck' a?xtm i? ntytyix* Salmon Ceremony took place at Millennium Park in *stux^wqaynm*, BC. These actions are central to Syilx Peoples responsibility to honor our ancestors and pray for the salmon, *siwl+k^w* (water) and *tmix^w* (land).

"The Syilx Nation adheres to our responsibilities to all parts of our territory, including that of the Upper Columbia. In the face of many challenges the Syilx Okanagan Nation remains committed to ensuring that not only is our voice heard, but that our presence is felt. We, as Syilx People, have an inherent responsibility to call salmon back to the Upper Columbia. Ceremonies such as this affirm our connection to our territory" stated Grand Chief Dr. Stewart Phillip, ONA Chair.

The sockeye fry release saw over 500 students from 10 schools throughout the Columbia releasing approximately 1200 sockeye fry that they have raised as part of ONA's Fish in Schools (FinS) program. By creating greater awareness of aquatic species students will become more educated of both salmon, their habitat and surrounding ecosystem. In the Columbia, this program also creates awareness of the historic salmon run from the ocean, upstream to the Kettle River, Columbia, Pend d'Oreille and Kootenay Rivers, including major tributaries the Salmo River and Slocan River.

calyx (Richard Armstrong), Syilx elder furthered that "Our Salmon Ceremonies are important because they tell the salmon 'Come up! The Eagles need to eat. The Bears have to eat. The land can be fed, because not only the people depend on the salmon, but the land depends on it. The Eagles take the fish to the shore and the Bears carry it further up the mountain and they fertilize the huckleberries and everything else up the mountain. And as long as we perform these ceremonies the salmon knows that we Syilx are still here and we are still carrying out our responsibilities to call them home".

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) continue to be dedicated and vigilant to ensuring the successful reintroduction of sockeye salmon to the Upper Columbia watershed.

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The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) was formed in 1981 as the inaugural First Nations government in the Okanagan, which represents the 8 member communities of the Okanagan Nation. In the 1960's the Columbia River Treaty led to the creation of industrial reservoirs and the building hydro-electric developments on the Columbia River, making it impossible for fish passage, which deeply impacts Syilx cultural and food systems. Years of hard work, direct action and political advocacy, particularly in the last decade, have seen the ONA working with provincial, federal, other First Nations, and US Tribes and agencies to rebuild this sockeye run within all parts of Syilx territory.

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