



## Okanagan Nation Insist that the Province Halt Cutting Permits of Old Growth Forests on Syilx Territory

Media Release | August 23, 2022

**snkx̓ kntn (Revelstoke), Syilx Territory:** The Syilx Okanagan Nation demand that the Province of BC protect old growth forest throughout our territory, including the area around snkx̓ kntn. Despite the commitments made by BC to defer the development of Old Growth forests, they continue to approve cutting permits in critical caribou habitat and some of the last intact inland temperate rainforest in the Province. Despite having clear recommendations from an expert advisory panel, held up by BC as key to the success of their own Old Growth Strategic Review process, BC is continuing to approve development of Old Growth in the snkx̓ kntn (Revelstoke) area on the basis that First Nations have not come to consensus on the old growth deferral areas.

The Province's continued failure to protect these forests, particularly through the ongoing authorization of the harvesting of old growth forests, is disturbing and has already led to the extirpation (regional extinction) of key species, like southern mountain caribou. The Province's justification for old growth deforestation is based on false assumptions regarding a lack of consensus by First Nations on the need to protect these forests and endangered ecosystems.

To clarify, the Syilx Okanagan Nation does not, in any way, oppose the protection and conservation of these ecosystems for the generations to come. What we opposed is the lack of meaningful engagement with the Syilx Okanagan Nation to determine how the protection of these forests should take place in our territory. Furthermore, in July 2022 the Selkirk Natural Resource District provided the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) with a set of options, developed by licensees in the Revelstoke area, that allow for the continued harvest of Old Growth forests. These options do not include adequate protections for old forests, caribou, and the many other values on our territory.

"The Province's failure to protect Old Growth forests and critical caribou habitat has direct adverse impacts on our ability to maintain our culture and exercise our Title and Rights. It has resulted in the extinction and near-extinction of species that we have always relied on for food, social and ceremonial purposes, including southern mountain caribou. We have no reason to believe that BC intends to change their approach significantly enough to secure a thriving Southern Mountain Caribou population. Further, we are confident that BC is not able to rationalize their continued infringement on Syilx rights. This approach is contrary to the honour of the Crown, your government's constitutional obligations, and its commitments pursuant to the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. The Province cannot infringe our constitutionally protected rights without justification, or make decisions which will effectively extinguish those rights." ỳilmix̓m Byron Louis, Okanagan Indian Band, states.

According to population estimates from late 2021:

- Six out of 17 subpopulations (herds) of southern mountain Caribou have been extirpated, or functionally extirpated, since 2003;

- The most southerly herds of southern mountain Caribou are at continued risk of extirpation;
- Seven subpopulations (herds) are located on Syilx territory of which 3 are extirpated, 2 are threatened and declining, and 2 are stable but not self-sustaining; and
- The ultimate cause of caribou loss is the continued loss and alteration of caribou habitat.

As such, the ONA require that the Province halt the cutting of old growth forests on Syilx territory, and meet with our leadership to determine an fulsome criteria for the issuance of cutting permits and protection of forests.

~

The ONA was formed in 1981 as the inaugural First Nations government in the Okanagan, which represents our member communities. Our mandate is to work collectively to advance and assert Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights over the Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory.

***For information please contact:***

ki law na, Chief Clarence Louie, ONA Tribal Chair  
T: 250-498-9132

Cailyn Glasser, ONA Natural Resources Manager  
T: 250-469-1595