

yil

OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE ANNUAL REPORT

2023|2024



THE SYILX PEOPLES CONTINUED TO PERSEVERE BY THEIR WILLINGNESS AND RESILIENCY TO NEVER DEFY OR TURN AWAY FROM THEIR TIME HONoured ORIGINAL TEACHINGS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE LANDS, WATER AND TO THEIR CREATOR.

yil

The title of this years Annual Report yil represents the work of the Nation and how the work that is undertaken takes the collective to all come together to make one strand.

Here is an excerpt from Dr. Jeanette Armstrong's dissertation that describes the root word yil: "we refer to ourselves as Syilx or people who are 'nsyilxcən' - who have Syilx in their mouth". The word Syilx makes its meaning from several different images. The root word "yil" refers to the action of taking any kind of many stranded fibre, like hemp, and rolling it and twisting it together to make one unit, or one rope. It is a process of making many into one.

The Okanagan Nation Alliance

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) is was formed in 1981 as the inaugural First Nations government in the Okanagan to work collectively on areas of common concern and to advance and assert Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights over Syilx Okanagan Territory. The ONA Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) is dedicated to upholding our inherent rights and responsibilities.

We are pleased to present to you the Okanagan Nation Alliance Annual Report for the 2023/24 fiscal year, which reports on initiatives, activities and progress as we work to uphold the Okanagan Nation Declaration. Each year's annual report serves to celebrate the past year's shared successes!

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Message from the xaʔtus

yilmixm ki law na | Chief Clarence Louie



A Long Journey of Righting Historical Injustices

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is on a long journey of righting the historical injustices that have resulted in grave impacts on our lands, waters, and communities.

Working together, the yilmixʷm from each member community make up the Chiefs Executive Council, or CEC, which bears responsibility for the strategic direction and assertion of title and rights, governance, finance, and the legal authority for the ONA.

The CEC works with ONA Operations to provide high-level guidance for Natural Resources, Fisheries, and Wellness in stewarding our lands and waters and bringing services and supports to our people. Even through the current governance, uncertainty and pending reorganization of our constitution and the electoral process for the xaʔtus, the CEC carries on with the work and this year saw progress made on important fronts that will support Syilx wellbeing today, tomorrow, and in the years to come. With all that I wish to highlight here as success, we remain cognizant of going forward into the future with a Syilx organization - that ONA represents, with the responsibility for our laws, protocols, and customs with the protection of our waters, lands, peoples, and language intact.

Sustainable Energy

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is proud to be at the forefront of renewable energy initiatives in the province, as exemplified by the joint initiative with Upper Nicola Band, to develop a significant solar project. In June 2023, the project signed a landmark agreement with BC Hydro for the purchase of electricity. As well as contributing to a sustainable future for all, the agreement spotlights the commitment of Syilx leadership to economic development and the empowerment of Syilx Okanagan communities.

Columbia River Treaty

Since the 1960s, our Nation has lived with the Columbia River dams and their devastation. For far too long, we were excluded

from decisions that directly impacted our Nation—and we were likewise denied any benefits from the treaty dams. In June 2023, after years of continued effort by the Syilx Okanagan Nation working alongside the Secwépemc and Ktunaxa Nations, the provincial government finally announced interim revenue-sharing agreements that have brought each Nation 5% of the revenue generated by Canada through the sale of power. Discussions are ongoing at the CEC table about the distribution of these funds—and negotiations continue for a long-term agreement to help address environmental, cultural, and economic impacts.

Arrow Lakes and Our sinixt/sʔaltíkʷtx Family

For over 150 years, the Canada-US border has divided us from our ancestral blood relatives in the Colville Confederated Tribes—yet we remain united through our common language, culture, history, and traditions. Here in British Columbia, under Syilx Okanagan Nation laws, customs, and practices, people of Sinixt ancestry—known as sʔaltíkʷtx in our nsyilxcən language—are part of our Nation and our Territory includes the Arrow Lakes area. In Canada, our Nation is the political representative for the sinixt/sʔaltíkʷtx in Canada. Yet, as we know too well after the grievous impacts of colonization, family relationships can be complex and not always harmonious, especially with colonial processes continuing to interfere in our affairs. Increasingly, issues associated with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. v. Desautel* are creating tensions in our relations with our U.S. family and with the provincial and federal governments.

To be clear, the Desautel case was an Aboriginal hunting case and was not about Aboriginal title. The case did not determine all of the successor groups and legal representatives of people of Sinixt ancestry. The finding was that the Lakes Tribe in the United States is one successor group of people of Sinixt ancestry. Of course, the finding that people of Sinixt ancestry are not extinct was a victory for all of us, as many of our members are Sinixt. All the ONA bands have close blood relations with the CCT and many have “Arrow Lakes” blood ancestry. Prior to the Desautel case—and going back many years—the ONA member bands have asserted our hunting rights in the Arrow Lakes, this includes the case of Regina v. OIB members John and Roger Hall filed in 2003. The map of Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory, also formally filed in 2003 and reflecting ONA staff engagement over the preceding decade with members and elders, was another important reference point where our language and cultural people asserted our ancestral rights to the Arrow Lakes region long before the Desautel court case. Rest assured that this matter is forefront with Syilx leadership, with efforts being made to address these tangled issues at every level to honor our ancestors and defend the unconquered, unceded lands of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.



Photo: ýilmixʷm ki law na at the OIB Historic Reserve Celebration, April 14 2023

Protecting styíłca? | Caribou in the South Columbia

Since colonization, we have witnessed the continued depletion of styíłca? in the South Columbia while knowing that it is our responsibility to cooperatively recover our four-legged relative. The Syilx Okanagan Nation is part of a collaborative working group—inclusive of neighboring First Nations alongside the provincial and federal governments—that brings together the best traditional knowledge and ecological expertise. After much consideration, the hard decision was made to relocate the last remaining member of the herd in order to increase likelihood of survival and eventual re-establishment. The work continues and is guided by the shared commitment to supporting the recovery and persistence of our styíłca? relatives on the landscape.

Returning ki?lawna? | Grizzly Bear to the North Cascades

Since time immemorial, ki?lawna? has been part of Syilx culture and an indicator of collective well-being. But within the last 150 years, ki?lawna? have been absent from the North Cascades due to persecution and overhunting by settlers. In 2014, the Syilx Nation declared ki?lawna? protected and ONA began stewardship planning in partnership with neighbouring Nations, the provincial government, and ENGOs. In 2022, we called on the U.S. government to relaunch recovery planning—and this past year, the U.S. officially joined restoration efforts. Just as our Nation has worked tirelessly to restore salmon, now we continue the journey together with our U.S. partners, to bring ki?lawna? home to a transboundary ecosystem that depends on their presence.

Looking back on this year, the direction is clear. Even as we continue to find our way forward, there is so much more to do.



AS SYILX NATION LEADERSHIP, WE WORK TO BUILD UNITY AMONGST THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY SYSTEM AND TO TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION AS WE CAN. WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS—THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING. WE HAVE MUCH FURTHER TO GO.

From the Executive Director

suiki?st | Pauline Terbasket



Our Nation as a Force for Changemaking at Home and Beyond

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way' k'u cyṣap means we have all arrived here together. It speaks to all the ancestors behind us who have brought us here. How are we embracing this principle now? What will the generations ahead say about their ancestors? They are waiting for us to step up. Unity remains our ongoing core principle. We must stay diligent in creating our collective future in a good way. A world where we are stronger together: for ourselves, for our children, and for our seven generations to come.

Way' - As I write, it is one year since the convocation at UBC Okanagan where we celebrated the first class of nsyilxcən graduates. The significance of these graduates cannot be overstated. Our nsyilxcən language holds the wisdom of our ancestors: our interconnectedness, the importance of family, and the wisdom of how to live well without destroying our home. At that same graduation, I was honored with a doctorate degree, noting that in years previous Grand Chief Stewart Phillip and our current xaʔtus, Clarence Louie, were given honorary degrees from UBC—all of these and other honors to our Chiefs and leadership past and present underlining the critical role of our Nation as a force for changemaking at home and beyond.

A Legacy of Leading

We cannot underestimate the impact of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) in moving the work forward for our Syilx people and raising a strong voice for Indigenous title and rights. The ONA is built on an ancestral legacy of unity and shared resistance. This activism of our Chiefs and community members began long before the 1910 Sir Wilfred Laurier Memorial and long before the ONA was formed as a tribal council in 1984—these roots deeply planted and honored by our Chiefs signing the Okanagan Nation Declaration in 1987.

The mandate of the ONA is to work collectively to protect and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation's title and rights, uphold our

responsibilities of suxʷtxtem (taking care of the land), and support the well-being of our citizens together with the economic interests and self-determination of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. This is true to spirit and environment, mindful of culture and social needs and the aspirations of individual bands—and this remains the core of our operations.

The Chiefs Executive Council provides vision and guidance for ONA operations. Today, we continue to build on 40 years of working together: collective title to our lands, Syilx rights, and everything Syilx are the practices we are carrying out. All of these responsibilities being upheld by CEC business goals: lands, peoples, resources.

The Work is Dynamic & Diverse

Since those beginnings 40 years ago, the ONA staff has grown to 120 full-time and 20 seasonal staff during harvest time. I wish to acknowledge all those who have served with us over the years and those who have moved on—a hard-working team of talented and dedicated staff—while our core Administration team anchors the work with best practices in HR, finance, communications, and management.

ONA is a dynamic, Nation-based organization with initiatives that range from sockeye re-introduction and hatchery operations to energy economic enterprise and the fostering of

business development opportunities while also encompassing the overall safety and well-being of our women, children, and families. Communication is key within this as the Annual Report faithfully attests each year, and that same Communications team also supports the many events that bring our people together. These ranging from the Health and Wellness programs keeping our children at home, the Syilx Residential School Committee with justice still to be served, and the myriad of opportunities like signage projects throughout the Territory advocated for in conjunction with our Natural Resources team and the monumental work of restoring our four-legged relatives together with Fisheries and the vision, shared with our neighboring Nations, of the Columbia River Salmon Restoration Initiative. Each of our initiatives have grown their respective internal department processes of annual strategic planning—all of this important for the ongoing flow of projects and how staff manage organizational growth and change. This past year, we received Professional and Institutional Development funding and two projects are underway. The first is a case study on ONA's growth and development. The second is an Operational Evaluation Framework to capture how we can learn and do better in efficiencies and the effects of our projects and programs. We just finished a proposal writing course offered by Okanagan College in which 20 staff participated. Further, we are still actively engaged in updating ONA procedures regarding Bill C-65 implementation required by law in respect to harassment and violence in the workplace.

These are only the briefest highlights of how the work shores up the sustainability of our lives and our Mother Earth, tmix^w and tmx^wulax^w, our oral traditions, our captik^w and our ceremonies, our ways of harvesting,

our ways of knowing—all of this contributing to positive change for the People-to-Be.

Uncertainty and Opportunity

ONA and our member bands can attest that—from the beginning—our band offices have operated with slim and uncertain budgets based on government funding and proposal writing. This is no different from ONA where our resources at the Nation level hinder us from moving forward at the rate we may sometimes prefer as all of these endeavors require policy and capacity expertise outside of project funding in order to build a stable, responsive work environment. Over the years, direction from the Chiefs has been visionary and tenacious in adhering to the principle of self-determination and the pursuit of “the possible.” This is reflected in the wide-reaching impacts of the work which, this year, included the first redress of the devastation of the Columbia River Treaty with substantial revenues achieved by the Chiefs’ agreement together with the dedicated legwork of the ONA. This is a historic place of having revenue to consider and the opportunity to stay the course of supporting the long-term collective vision, knowing that coming generations will require the support of Nation-based collaborative work with our unity principle intact. The Chiefs, in consultation with their Councils, are considering a distribution formula to the Syilx Okanagan Nation member bands, retaining funds for Syilx title and rights strategies, and providing some administration funding for ONA Operations. Money has not been the sole goal, rather the focus is building up our Nation and each other in our own sustainability, protecting and advancing our Syilx title and rights while supporting the well-being of our people. This revenue, achieved through unity and vision, represents a monumental opportunity.



THE FOCUS IS BUILDING UP OUR NATION AND EACH OTHER IN OUR OWN SUSTAINABILITY, PROTECTING AND ADVANCING OUR SYILX TITLE AND RIGHTS WHILE SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OF OUR PEOPLE



Photo: Drummers singing to honour the North American Indigenous Games Syilx participants at the ONA AGA in Penticton.

So Much More to Do—Together

All of this is unfolding within a complex and uncertain space. With governance, the Chiefs are still working through the bylaws and constitution including the question of elections for a full-time *xa?tus*. Currently, five Syilx Okanagan bands are formal members of ONA—with USIB and UNB actively participating and included in all Nation business.

Everything we deal with has been distorted through the colonial legacy of dispossession and assimilation and we are left with recovery. Decolonizing is messy work. There is division. There are issues. Unity can be elusive. There is also the provincial and national agenda within which we sit. The outstanding land question. All these distractions from the main work of what we are really trying to do: Find our Syilx way through climate change, murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls+, toxic drugs, so many of our children still in government care, and too many of our youth struggling every day. The challenges are great and they are growing—as is the list of CEC-directed priorities: Spotted Lake, data governance, an office presence in the Columbia, our own hunting camp, a Syilx *nsyilxcən* language strategy, and ultimately our *i?_siwłkʷ* strategy – water is life.

At the same time, this report speaks volumes about leadership against all odds. We have restored *ntityix!*—A vision of the Chiefs from the early 1990s that was considered nearly impossible. And now we are trying to do the same for *styłtʷ?* and *ki?lawna?*. This is legacy work in a world that needs to listen to the resurgence of our traditional knowledge and relationships with Mother Earth.

way kʷu cyʕap means we have all arrived here together. It speaks to all the ancestors behind us who have brought us here. How are we embracing this principle now? What will the generations ahead say about their ancestors? They are waiting for us to step up. Unity remains our ongoing core principle. We must stay diligent in creating our collective future in a good way. A world where we are stronger together: for ourselves, for our children, and for our seven generations to come.

Year in Review Highlights

2023-2024

The ONA remained dedicated to asserting our presence and voice, supporting communities in their journey towards greater self-determination, and safeguarding the *tmixw*, *tmxwulaxw* and *siwtkw* for future generations to thrive. Here are some of the key accomplishments our Nation achieved together in the past year:

Expanded Range of Salmon Reintroduction Efforts in *k4úsXnítkw* Tributaries and the Upper Columbia

A huge milestone in sockeye reintroduction was having the Province acknowledge that sockeye need free access to Okanagan Lake. In addition we were able to finally release *sc'win* at the Head-of-the-Lake into Lower Vernon Creek. It has taken numerous ceremonies, projects, habitat development, fish passage and partnerships and a dedicated 20 year+ effort to get this far. In addition, we successfully tracked the return of two adult sockeye salmon to the *nXwntkwitkw* Columbia River from releases we conducted at *sn+uxwqnm* Castlegar in 2020, once again proving that we have the expertise and ability to successfully reintroduce salmon.

Negotiated an Interim Revenue Sharing Agreement from the Columbia River Treaty

Through an interim agreement, the Syilx Okanagan Nation will each receive 5% of the revenue generated through the sale of Canada's share of downstream power benefits under the treaty. This revenue will be shared over four years.

Relocated one of the last remaining *styíłca?* caribou from the Columbia South herd

With the decline of *styíłca?* the translocation aimed to enhance the caribou's chances of survival, breeding success, calf retention, and to bolster genetic diversity within the Central Selkirks herd to the Central Selkirks maternity pen. This underscored ONA's dedication to preserving this culturally significant species amidst ongoing habitat loss and population declines.

Historic Electricity Purchase Agreement Signed with BC Hydro

The UNB and ONA have jointly developed a groundbreaking 15MWac solar project located on UNB's Nicola Lake IR No.1 This landmark agreement is a significant step towards the development of future sustainable energy projects on Syilx Okanagan territory.

Hosting First Speakers Gatherings

First Speakers provided crucial insight into various collective *sqilxw* issues. These gatherings were instrumental in informing and grounding nation-based strategies across multiple domains including Wellness, Natural Resources, Fisheries, and Governance.

Restoration of *ki?lawna?*, Grizzly Bear, to the US North Cascades Ecosystem

The US published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This progress confirmed grizzly bear recovery and will enable us to work hand in hand to revive grizzly bear populations in this transboundary ecosystem.

Planning, Development, and Implementation of the *n?aysnú la?xw* (Ashnola) Family Wellness Centre

With support and collaboration from Central City Foundation, Interior Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and Provincial Health Services Authority, the endeavor is a significant step towards enhancing Syilx family wellness on a Nation scale.

\$2,385,074 in supports and services for families from Jordan's Principle has been approved since ONA took over service coordination in February 2021

Our Service Coordination team has grown this year and has been asked by other organizations and the federal funder to share guidance with others on setting up a strong Jordan's Principle program.

The ONA Hosted Five Community-Focused Open Houses for Information Sharing as well as Feedback and Collaboration from Syilx Nation Members.

skc'əḥ^wəḥwipla?
uḥ steḥtaḥ

UNITY AND SOLIDARITY



In 2023/24, the Chiefs Executive Council directed and oversaw a number of initiatives to continue to protect, defend and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation's skc'əḥ^wəḥwipla? uḥ steḥtaḥ - Aboriginal Title and Rights. The Syilx Okanagan Nation's rights are collective rights held by the whole Nation and are tied to sux^wtxtəm (taking care of the land) responsibilities.

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We will survive and continue to govern our mother and her resources for the good of all for all time.

- Okanagan Nation Declaration



Collective Decision Making

COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is governed by the Chiefs Executive Council (CEC), a leadership body of the Syilx Okanagan Nation established under Syilx law, and comprised of the *ýílmixʷm* of the affiliated communities, and the *xaʔtus*, the elected leader of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The mandate of the CEC is to advance, assert, support and preserve Syilx Okanagan Nation sovereignty.

The CEC conducts regular meetings, including an Annual General Assembly, to discuss and address key issues. Special meetings are convened as needed to address specific concerns throughout the year. Additionally, the CEC and council members serve as political representatives on behalf of the Nation.

cqʷaʔqwʔál 2023-2024 CHIEFS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETINGS

Jun 26, 2023	Special CEC Meeting: Columbia River Treaty (CRT)
Jul 11, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Jul 27, 2023	Special CEC Meeting: CRT
Aug 10, 2023	Special CEC Meeting: BDO Audit
Aug 18, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Sept 1, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Sept 22, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Oct 3-4, 2023	ONA Annual General Assembly, Penticton BC
Oct 27, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Nov 24, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Dec 8, 2023	CEC Regular Meeting
Jan 17, 2024	CEC Regular Meeting
Feb 1-2, 2024	Syilx Nation Gathering, Penticton BC
Feb 15, 2024	CEC Regular Meeting
Mar 14, 2024	Special CEC Meeting: Title and Rights

səxʷqʷíqʷílt NATION REPRESENTATION

xaʔtus, ONA Tribal Chair	ki law na <i>ýílmixʷm</i> Clarence Louie
Syilx Child and Family Governance Rep	sil-teekin <i>ýílmixʷm</i> Greg Gabriel
Columbia River Treaty and CRSRI	kalʔlùpaqʷn <i>ýílmixʷm</i> Keith Crow/ Chief Byron Louis
Energy Executive Committee, Chair	simo <i>ýílmixʷm</i> Robert Louie
Syilx Health Governance Rep	səxʷkʷínmaʔm Alan Louis
Natural Resource Committee, Chair	čris səxʷkʷínmaʔm Jordan Coble
Syilx Data Governance Rep	səxʷkʷínmaʔm Suzanne Johnson



Photo: Chiefs honour caylx and skālita? at the February 2024 Syilx Nation Gathering for all their contributions, guidance, and knowledge sharing for the Nation. caylx and skālita? were each gifted a staff, handmade by Spirit Peoples. caylx's staff was inspired by the How Coyote Broke The Salmon Dam captikʷt, while skālita?'s staff featured a carving of sʷaʔakxən (frog), to honour her ancestors in the Arrow Lakes area.

Protecting the Arrow Lakes Portion of Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory

The Arrow Lakes area of the Syilx Okanagan Territory is an important area that has received increased focus in recent years, following the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. v. Desautel*. The Desautel case involved a member of the Lakes Tribe of the Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) in the US who claimed an Aboriginal right to hunt elk in the Castlegar area. In that case, the Court confirmed that people of Sinixt/sʔaltikʷtx ancestry are not extinct. The Okanagan Nation Alliance intervened in that case, to protect and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation's title and rights in the Arrow Lakes, as the representative of people of Sinixt ancestry in Canada. As a result of that intervention, the Court was very careful to note that it was not making a finding that the Lakes Tribe is the only successor and that there may be other successor groups, including in Canada. In addition, it is important to note that the Desautel case was about hunting rights, not Aboriginal Title and there was no finding that there is a "Sinixt Nation" that holds Title and Rights.

Since the Court's decision in Desautel there has been some confusion about the case and the Court's finding. This confusion in relation to who represents the people of Sinixt/sʔaltikʷtx ancestry in Canada. The CEC have, prior to Desautel, continue in their collective efforts to protect and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights in the Territory which includes the Arrow Lakes and includes our membership who have Sinixt ancestry. This past year they updated the Nation at the February 1- 2 Syilx Okanagan Nation Gathering in Penticton, BC. They provided along with their Legal, Policy and Negotiation Team an update of their activities and work going forward. This included the importance of the Unity Principle and working together with all our Syilx Okanagan Nation member Bands and the CCT. They affirmed their priorities and urgency of this work to seek resolve regarding all the political indifferences and would rather focus on the importance of these Gathering's and dialogue with their Elders and members. This dedicated effort will impact our Syilx Nation today and for generations to come.

nk'wəłtwistm̓ntəm AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP

The ONA and Upper Nicola Band (UNB) together signed a Final Agreement with BC Hydro (BCH) in respect of the construction of the Interior to Lower Mainland Transmission Line in the summer of 2011. The agreement commits both parties to develop an Enduring Relationship (ER), based on principles of respect, early involvement, and transparent communications. Out of the Enduring Relationship, the parties have defined a mutual, collaboratively developed engagement process for the management of issues relating to BCH operations and assets across the Syilx Okanagan Territory.

Furthermore, the Nation negotiated with BCH who then made a commitment to create and support direct procurement opportunities to Syilx Okanagan businesses and members. This allows Bands, member owned businesses and individuals access to many substantial direct award opportunities to participate in the BCH projects and initiatives occurring on the territory. This past year, \$6.2M in contracts was received by Syilx designated businesses. In total, since the ER was established, BCH has awarded over \$32 million in contracts to Nation designated businesses with more ongoing opportunities worth millions of dollars still to come. To support community- or member-owned businesses or other designated businesses to capture directed procurement awards BCH has funded part-time Band Community Liaison positions to work with the ONA Community and Business Liaison, Raf De Guevara who was hired in January 2023, to support this process.

This past year the two ER Sub-Agreements, which define support measures and funding for Governance, Communications and Procurement, have now been renegotiated,



with increased funding support and procurement targets. These new agreements will deliver additional support and funding over the next five years.

Finally, BCH is a strong supporter of Nation initiatives and events that preserve or enhance culture, including language, and promote Nation-building. BCH provided funds to the ONA for cultural events, youth programs and initiatives, and community outreach which is a part of the BCH United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples action plan; which included feedback and input from the ONA.

Energy Executive Committee

Out of the ER, the parties have defined a mutual, collaboratively developed engagement process for the management of issues relating to BCH operations and assets across the Syilx Okanagan Territory. As part of this commitment, the CEC established an Energy Executive Committee (EEC) which is chaired by Chief Robert Louie and made up of Chiefs, council members, and community technical representatives and ONA staff/advisors who address, assess and guide all BCH activity on the Territory through to recommendations to the CEC. This committee provides a common forum to discuss all energy-related issues in detail, including BC Hydro project and ER updates.

BCH will launch the largest clean energy call

"WE ARE EXCITED TO BRING THIS HISTORIC SOLAR PROJECT INTO REALITY AFTER MANY YEARS OF PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH BC HYDRO. IT IS A TESTAMENT TO OUR SHARED COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. TOGETHER, WE ARE PAVING THE WAY FOR A GREENER FUTURE WHILE CREATING ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR OUR PEOPLE."

- Chief Dan Manuel, Upper Nicola

for new alternative energy project in BC History. BCH will be requesting projects that will total up to 3,000 GW/hour per year from new private sector clean energy project proposals for consideration. The ONA and EEC wrote a comprehensive alternative process proposal for BCH that redesigned the criteria of the BC Clean Energy Call. As a result of numerous discussions with BCH the EEC teams were instrumental in influencing and

advising how BC First Nations would be included more prominently in all new accepted energy projects. Dramatically increasing the role for First Nations as alternative energy vanguards. All new accepted Clean Energy projects from the call will now require a meaningful ownership share of BC First Nations in order to obtain the required Energy Purchase Agreement. The Call is expected to be open from April to September 2024.

Project Review Committee

The Project Review Committee (PRC) which was established to review major BCH projects continues to deliver exceptional value as we strive for shared decision-making. Major projects in Syilx Okanagan territory are:

Wilsey Dam: For the last 81 years, Wilsey Dam has prevented salmon from using at least 20 km of former spawning and rearing habitats above Shuswap Falls. The ONA has been releasing fry into the Shuswap River above the dam, participating in a fish passage steering committee, and conducting studies on juvenile salmon survival through Wilsey Dam. Assessments concluded no serious impediments to re-establishing fish passage above the dam, and planning for fish passage was recommended. The Okanagan PRC is collaborating with BC Hydro to shape and advance this project and has expressed support for decommissioning the dam as the leading alternative.

West Kelowna Transmission Line (WKTL): The WKTL Project Review Committee, led by WFN, continues to engage with BCH on the transmission line study. The PRC provides input through studies and document reviews on the proposed

routing of the transmission line to minimize impacts and protect Nation and community-based interests.

Revelstoke Unit 6 (Rev6): The Rev6 power generation project has been reinstated, with BCH committed to working with the Syilx Okanagan Nation to identify and address impacts beyond the incremental impacts of the Rev 6 Project. The original PRC, led by the OKIB, will coordinate both band interests and Nation studies. The PRC will work on broader impacts and interests, advancing proposed restoration measures and addressing archaeological and cultural concerns related to reservoir operations. BCH has provided continued funding to support the further development of three specific programs: *suxw̓tx̓təm* Guardian Program, Syilx *nxw̓lxw̓łtantət* Food and Medicine Sovereignty Program, and the Syilx Culture and Heritage Restoration Program.

Electricity Purchase Agreement (EPA): On June 26, the ONA and UNB signed a historic electricity purchase agreement with BCH to fulfil the 2011 commitment in the Interior to Lower Mainland final agreement. Under the terms of the EPA, the UNB and ONA have jointly developed a groundbreaking 15MWac solar project located on UNB's Nicola Lake IR No.1, situated 30km northeast of Merritt and in close proximity to the BCH Nicola substation. Planning, financing, and development continue to progress on an electricity purchase agreement for the proposed 15MWac solar project. The ONA and UNB have agreed on an ownership arrangement that allows for further work to continue. Furthermore, discussions are continuing with a potential energy partner to help in the development, construction and operation of the project.

Employment, Training and Education

As part of the Enduring Relationship, BC Hydro also committed to supporting the Syilx Okanagan Nation by offering training, education, scholarships and bursaries to Nation members. These opportunities support future employment with BC Hydro and elsewhere in the energy sector.

Some key highlights this past year:

- 4 Syilx members are currently employed by BC Hydro in roles such as: Construction Officer, Interchange Plant Operator and Field Service Rep.
- Syilx Nation member secured a full-time temporary role at BCH as a tour guide from May to September 2023.
- Randi Baptiste completed a Pre-Apprentice Powerline Technician Program, supported by BC Hydro, the Electrical Industry Training Institute, and the University of the Fraser Valley. The \$17,690 program, covering tuition and tools, prepared the candidate to compete for upcoming BC Hydro jobs.
- Twelve youth from the UNB, WFN and OIB, participated in the IndigenousTech.ai Summer Intern program. This program is funded by a \$90,000 BC Hydro grant and provides education in technology, finance, and customer service, opportunities to hear from industry leaders, and hands-on experience. The initiative aims to increase awareness and encourage Indigenous youth to pursue careers in STEM fields.
- Jakob Alexis, a member of the Syilx Nation, is currently attending Okanagan College for Mechanical Engineering Technology and received a \$5,000 BC Hydro scholarship.

Columbia River Treaty

ADVANCING THE NATIONS COLLECTIVE RIGHTS

The Policy, Legal and Negotiation Team undertook work on various initiatives in 2023 to advance the Nation's Title and Rights strategy, under the direction of the CEC, including ongoing participation in the Canada-United States (US) Columbia River Treaty (CRT) renegotiation process; continuing work to facilitate the re-introduction of salmon in the Canadian portion of the Columbia River.

Columbia River Treaty Negotiations

Canada entered into the CRT with the US in 1964 to coordinate flood control and optimize hydroelectric energy production on both sides of the Canada- US border. The CRT was entered into without any consultation with, or consent from the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The CRT resulted in the construction of three major dams in the Upper Columbia Basin that flooded the Arrow Lakes and converted the Upper Columbia watershed into a massive reservoir system, resulting in the devastation of large swaths of Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory, the loss of Nation members' ability to exercise rights in areas of the Territory, and desecration of ancestral burial and cultural sites.

Canada and the US started renegotiating the CRT in the spring of 2018, as the flood control provisions otherwise terminate in 2024. As one of the most significant and on-going infringements of Syilx Title and Rights, the CRT negotiations between Canada and the US continues to be a key file in the context of advancing and protecting the Syilx Okanagan Nation's Aboriginal Title and Rights. Through the hard work and dedication of Syilx leadership and negotiating team, Global Affairs Canada granted observer status to the Syilx Okanagan Nation (along with the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc Nations) in 2019,

which allows the CEC's representatives to participate in these international negotiations - an international precedent and a testament to the strength of a unified approach. Accordingly, representatives of the Syilx Okanagan Nation have been attending all Canada-US negotiation sessions and are participating in the development of positions for the negotiations.

A key objective of the Nation's participation in CRT and related negotiations is to advocate for the sharing of revenues that the Province of BC receives under the CRT. As reported in last year's report, the Nation signed an interim benefits-sharing agreement with BC last year in relation to the annual Canadian Entitlement payment paid by the US to BC for power coordination. This was a hugely important step forward in the negotiations and was long overdue. Negotiations began last year to negotiate a longer-term revenue-sharing agreement. In addition, the CEC, together with the Policy Legal Team have also been participating in other negotiating tables to integrate ecosystem values and cultural values in CRT dam operational decisions (and not just power generation and flood control, which is currently the case); develop new governance processes to ensure the Syilx Okanagan Nation has a meaningful role in governance under the CRT moving forward; and negotiate redress for past impacts from the CRT and the CRT dams.

A key focus in the negotiations has been on salmon. Both in relation to improving conditions for existing Okanagan salmon stocks and to support salmon reintroduction and recovery in the Upper Columbia Basin by addressing salmon flow and passage needs. The US Tribes share these goals and have



Photo: Canada and US CRT Negotiators visit the k' cpalk stin Hatchery May 2023

been collaborating with the Nation to support salmon needs, including through the proposal to participate in these international negotiations - an international precedent and a testament to the strength of a unified approach.

The Nations aim is to create a CRT ecosystem and an Indigenous cultural values body that will make recommendations to the US and Canada on CRT-related operational issues. Given the Syilx Okanagan Nation's success in protecting and strengthening Okanagan salmon stocks, it continues to take a lead role in these negotiations.

Chief Crow, the CEC Lead on CRT negotiations, and the Nation's negotiation team meet quarterly with the CRT Band Liaison Committee, which includes representatives from Syilx Okanagan Nation communities. During these meetings, updates are provided and input is sought on negotiation issues. This Committee serves as an effective forum for communication and collaboration.

Reclaiming our Ancestral Connection

SYILX STEWARDSHIP IN OUR EASTERN TERRITORY

Our Columbia Office team has been instrumental in stewarding various species and aquatic habitats within the eastern territory of the Syilx Nation. Our work continues to grow as we continue to conduct extensive monitoring and management initiatives aimed at conserving and restoring critical ecosystems in the Columbia River basin and its tributaries. Key efforts include invasive species management, notably addressing Northern Pike and Zebra Quagga Mussels to mitigate their impact on native species and habitats.

Additionally, we have focused on endangered species recovery, such as White Sturgeon in the Arrow Lakes Reservoir. The population of ʕəmtus White Sturgeon in the Canadian section of n̓x̓wəntkʷitkʷ Columbia River was listed as Endangered under the federal Species at Risk Act in 2006. The ONA has been monitoring Mid-Columbia River White Sturgeon spawning. This project supports a conservation aquaculture program through the on-site incubation of eggs and transfer of larvae to the Freshwater Fisheries Society Kootenay Trout Hatchery Facility in Fort Steel BC for rearing and subsequent release back into the saltkʷt.

Other endangered species of focus have been the Speckled Dace in the Kettle River watershed, and collaborating on Bull Trout and Kokanee populations with provincial authorities. Our team has also monitored Rainbow Trout and Mountain Whitefish populations downstream of the Hugh Keenleyside Dam in Castlegar, BC, assessing their response to dam operations.

Our efforts have yielded significant achievements. We recently achieved the highest escapement for Rainbow Trout from the Murphy Creek Spawning Channel since the 1990s, demonstrating effective habitat management and restoration.

Furthermore, we successfully tracked the return of two adult sockeye salmon to the Columbia River from releases conducted at Castlegar in 2020, marking a pivotal milestone in our salmon reintroduction endeavors. These accomplishments underscore our commitment to biodiversity conservation and sustainable management practices, in collaboration with the Syilx Nation and other stakeholders across the Columbia River basin.

One of our key educational achievements is our Fish in Schools program. This initiative is key in bringing the salmon back to the Upper Columbia as it educates regional students and teachers about the salmon lifecycle and the importance of their ecosystem so that they may become future advocates for both salmon and their habitat. We currently have 29 schools that participate in the program and participate in our ceremonial releases that take place in Castlegar, Revelstoke and Slocan.

Finally, we are actively involved in the collaborative Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative, aiming to restore salmon populations throughout the Columbia River system. These efforts have involved engaging community technicians, fostering local participation, and building capacity within Syilx Nation communities.





IT TAKES A RIVER OF PEOPLE TO BRING THE SALMON HOME

The Bringing the Salmon Home: The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (CRSRI) is the Indigenous-led collaboration of the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Ktunaxa Nations, with British Columbia and Canada. The ONA is the Host Secretariat for the Initiative. Along with continued governance development, CRSRI has been hard at work increasing capacity in Indigenous knowledge, technical inquiry, communications, and cultural engagement. They have created a strategic Road Map with clear actions, timelines, and responsibilities to support their transformation into an enduring Indigenous-led organization, beyond the current agreement which expires March 2025.

CRSRI continues to advocate for sustaining long-term funding which included direct meetings by Syilx Okanagan Executive Working Group representative Chief Keith Crow with the Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for Columbia Basin Trust, Columbia Power Corporation, and the Columbia River Treaty.

The ONA hosted the first CRSRI Tri-Nation Indigenous Knowledge Keepers (IKC) Gathering on March 1-2, 2023, led by IKC Representatives Chad Eneas and Dixon Terbasket. Held at the Enowkin Centre, the event featured knowledge sharing, food, ceremonies, and a hatchery tour. The gathering aimed to unite Tri-Nations IKC, Elders, and Cultural Knowledge Keepers to build relationships through inter-tribal, cultural, and ceremonial expressions of their values and traditions. Participants shared their hopes for restoring salmon populations, strengthening relationships, and collaborating on necessary research and protocols, addressing both historic and contemporary issues.

The ONA continues to play an important role in bringing the salmon home using our experience, technical expertise and the successes we have had in salmon restoration to support this collaborative process. Fisheries staff spearheaded several salmon reintroduction initiatives, including the tagging and release of 30,000 sockeye fry. Tagging will assist to assess survival and behaviour of juvenile Sockeye salmon in the Arrow Lakes and Roosevelt Reservoir and inform future reintroduction activities in the Upper Columbia River. Additionally, our team collaborates with other nations and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to support capacity-building efforts, including training in sockeye fry tagging. These fry were subsequently released into the Columbia River. We also worked with a team that included members of the other nations and contractors, to develop a model of the entire upper Columbia water management system including developing performance measures that could be used to assess impacts of different flow regimes. For example, performance measures included floodplain, riparian, wetland criteria for herbaceous plants and cottonwoods as well as ecosystem flows for sturgeon and salmon. It has taken a lot of technical support and analysis to ensure the development of the components to allow ecosystem functions to be included in the water management planning and decision making for the treaty.

Our Community Engagement Organizer Billie Jean Gabriel has been very active in community and at various events with our Salmon

Warriors promoting the work of CRSRI as well as sharing the The Bringing the Salmon Home documentary in community.



To learn more
scan here



Amplifying Our Presence

STRENGTHENING VOICES AT THE TABLE

Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST)

The PST is a Canada-US agreement that codifies and regulates the joint management, research, catch sharing, allocation mechanisms, and enhancement of Pacific salmon stocks. This international treaty is designed to prevent one nation from harvesting an excessive number of the other country's salmon as they migrate through marine and freshwater environments. The treaty includes chapters that address specific species and regions. Initially ratified in 1985, the PST is a 10-year agreement and has been renegotiated and re-ratified in 1999, 2008, and 2018. The current agreement remains in effect until 2028, with renegotiations for the 2029 agreement expected to begin in 2026.

Some of the key issues are that Okanagan salmon are currently not included in the PST, which is also relevant to future Upper Columbia River salmon populations. Consequently, harvest decisions in the US are made solely by American authorities, with no formal mechanism for Canada to object. The Okanagan Working Group, established under the last treaty, includes members from the ONA, DFO, Washington State, CCT, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission, and Oregon State. The group's objective is to address issues related to the low abundance of Okanagan Chinook in Canada. Recently, the PSC endorsed the group's plan to initiate a bilateral hatchery supplementation program between Canada and the US to rebuild the salmon population in Canada. With all the restoration efforts that the Nation has undertaken, it is vital that we ensure that Okanagan Sockeye are included in the PST so we can that we can

have input into harvest decisions that support cultural preservation, food security, economic opportunities, environmental stewardship, sovereignty, and collaborative management of salmon.

Recognition and Reconciliation

Several years ago, the CEC developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BC, paving the way for enhanced decision-making processes and providing an elevated venue for resolving conflicts and exchanging information on sensitive and important issues with the BC Government. Potential opportunities under the MOU included recognizing the Nation's governance roles in resource management, wildlife, water management, forestry, hunting, infrastructure, and policy development.

Currently, the BC government is working with the Nation's team to identify the highest-level opportunities and decision-making processes rooted in recognition and reconciliation priorities. Once an outline is established, the CEC will review and determine the potential for a new high-level enabling framework agreement that meets the interests of the Nation and the Bands on the territory, and whether to proceed further in the negotiations. This approach is intended to be "enabling," establishing key principles, commitments, and criteria standards that allow for different sub-agreements on specific interests and sectors to be explored and negotiated separately in a manner consistent with the principles of free, prior, and informed consent set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Fortis BC

Fortis BC is one of the largest major industrial energy operators within Syilx Okanagan Territory. They have two primary divisions: (1) commercial and residential natural gas supply; and (2) hydro electricity supply and generation with hydroelectric dams on the Kootenay river system within the Territory. The Syilx Okanagan Nation, under the direction of the CEC, is in the process of negotiating a Relationship Agreement with Fortis BC that recognizes the Nation's roles, interests and responsibilities within the Territory. It is aimed at identifying and strengthening the opportunities, relationships and partnerships between the two parties, while determining the mechanisms and circumstances of engagement.



Raising Syilx Voices

ADVOCATING FOR SYILX WELL-BEING

Wellness is the foundation of Syilx Okanagan lives. Guidance and direction about the operations of the ONA Wellness Team comes directly from our elected representatives and community staff. Wellness works under the mandate of the Chiefs' Executive Council (CEC) and with direction from the ONA Wellness Committee, which includes Health and Social Development Directors from member bands. Since 2008, the Wellness Team has engaged in annual strategic planning with the CEC to ensure leaders are fully informed and that leadership guidance is embedded in staff workplans.

For the past 10 years, Wellness has benefited from a growing number of Syilx Governance Representatives who are appointed by the CEC to provide direction in key areas. There are currently 3 Governance Representatives in the areas of Health, Children and Families, and Data who have all been appointed for 2-year terms to represent the Nation at political tables and working groups at the regional, provincial, and federal levels. These Representatives report back to the CEC and Wellness Committee to inform and focus discussions on pressing issues impacting the Nation, positioning Syilx voices to contribute to the larger political and legislative conversations. The ONA Wellness Team supports the Governance Representatives and helps with the work of connecting with partners to escalate Syilx priorities and issues. These roles have been crucial in ensuring Syilx political advocacy and respect for title and rights as our Nation navigates increasingly complex governance roles. Syilx Governance Representatives are always available to meet with individual Chiefs and Council as required.

Linking with communities is central to ONA operations. The Nation has a mandate to ensure that the cultural integrity, safety, and well-being of all our members are upheld. This year, Wellness held Special Chiefs Assemblies as an important opportunity where Chiefs and Councils and band staff can deeply engage in specific issues of concern to their communities. These will be continuing in 2024-25.

Starting in April 2023, in keeping with CEC directives to support the revitalization of our nsyilxcən language, Wellness has hosted two First Speakers Gatherings to bring language speakers together with the intent to provide space for speakers to speak to one another, share their concerns regarding language, the people, and land and in the future in order to develop a Nation strategy for nsyilxcən. In recent years, First Speakers have been actively engaged in developing the Nation declarations that share some of our sacred laws. Going forward, these gatherings provide the opportunity for the wisdom held within our language to provide direction and sqilx^wca^wt grounding to Nation-based strategies in all areas of endeavor.

A growing contribution to governance about Syilx children and families is being provided by the annual Grandmothers Gathering of tupas from across the Nation who are being supported to step into their role of providing guidance. These voices, together with all other governance roles, are contributing to formulating direction that is driving the work of the Child and Family Planning and Wellness Team overall.

Together, these leaders provide the direction that ensures the ONA Wellness plans and



services respond to the needs of the people and build capacity while respecting the self-determination of each community. This is in alignment with the dedication of past generations to stand up Syilx Okanagan inherent jurisdiction for the wellbeing of our people.

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WHEN WE ARE DOING WELL IN OUR LIVING



The conversation in Indigenous healthcare is shifting from treating the symptoms to investing in a holistic approach to health and wellness that begins to address root causes—and the ONA Health Team is working on multiple fronts to support this important shift. Engagement with community leaders, Health Directors, and band staff is a key piece of this work—as is access and responsiveness to health data. Newly released statistics show that the life expectancy of First Nations people in BC has been greatly impacted by Covid-19 and the toxic drug emergency, falling by 7.1 years between 2015 and 2021—adding impetus to the work.

The Health Team together with our Syilx Health Governance Representative, Councilor Allan Louis, have been working to ensure that Syilx perspectives are heard and considered in discussions at every level to help address social determinants of health and the need for a holistic approach to Indigenous health in Canada. Priority areas that have emerged include mental health, toxic drugs, traditional wellness and healing on the land, and the importance of linking health issues with root causes. Engaging with communities on how to centre a Syilx wellness framework in these conversations is crucial.

Councilor Louis operates with a mandate from the CEC and provides direction to the ONA Health Team, which provides support on a variety of pressing files that are impacting our Nation in the complex landscape of healthcare transformation.

FNHC Evaluation

The independent evaluation of the roles and responsibilities of the First Nations Health Council (FNHC) that

was requested by BC First Nations at Gathering Wisdom X was completed and the final report filed in November 2023. In response to findings, the FNHC has designed a two-year engagement plan to continue the conversation on the evolution of the First Nations health governance, including the structure, roles, and responsibilities of the FNHC with a consensus paper for decision to be shared at Gathering Wisdom XIII in 2025.

Health Legislation

Current federal Indigenous health legislation has been going ahead with insufficient consultation and a lack of funding commitments, so our Representative, with support from ONA, worked with Syilx leadership, other Nations, and the First FNHC to raise concerns that led to Indigenous Services Canada revisiting the roll out of the initiative. A BC approach is evolving—led by FNHC with support from FNHA—to engage with the distinct Nations in BC and create a principles-based document that will inform the federal government about what needs to be part of legislation according to BC First Nations. Upcoming in 2024-25, these discussions are on the ONA agenda to present to Chiefs and Councils.

Governance Tables

It has become clear that there is a need to focus on governance in relationships with partners, especially Interior Health (IH). Discussions are taking place for the distinct Nations to be acknowledged as governments in the government-to-government relationship expressed in the DRIPA legislation. These conversations are happening among the 7 Nations of the Interior Region at the FNHA Interior Region Nation Executive (IRNE) table and also with Interior Health at the Partnership Accord Leadership Table (PALT) where the nations of the Interior



Photo: Attendees of the Syilx Men's Wellness Gathering at Glimpse Lake, Upper Nicola on July 14-16, 2023

Region are advocating for a shift from top-down sharing of information to discussions focused on building mutual understanding and respect for distinct Nations and communities. In this regard, the Syilx Nation is advocating to the Ministry of Health (MOH) to ensure that mandate letters to the regional health authority reflect the needs and desires of the Syilx Nation, as well as advocating for the development of structures to support the flow of capital funding to the Nations from FNHA in order to support regionalization and bringing resources closer to home.

Primary Care Networks (PCNs)

There is a lack of dedicated resources for the Syilx Nation and communities to participate on an equitable footing with other healthcare partners in the team-based and patient-centred health services called PCNs, which continue to require substantial inputs from the ONA and Syilx communities. While IH and the Doctors of BC have core funding for PCN work, there is no basic funding for First Nations to tackle the work required. Instead, there are insufficient resources to participate in meetings; few resources for nursing that address community needs; and a lack of collaboration and alignment between the different groups resulting in competition for health professionals. Advocacy continues for increased resources. One collaborative space is the Interdivisional Strategic Council which, together with FNHA, is exploring how to better support the goal of improving the wellbeing of the Indigenous peoples in the interior region. But regardless, the issue persists of First Nations being woefully under-resourced for the demanding work of PCNs.

Letter Of Understanding (LOU) With Interior Health(IH):

Ongoing meetings have been addressing issues in the relationships between IH and Syilx Communities. Currently, the revised LOU is being vetted with all communities in to ensure the wording is appropriate and it is getting close to being presented to the CEC. The LOU Joint Committee is also exploring ways of escalating issues in a manner that increases the likelihood of change. This includes moving to create a sub-working group for mental health because this is such a pressing priority for all Syilx communities.

Anti-Racism: The LOU with IH includes initiatives to address racism in healthcare. The need for systemic cultural change continues and the ONA has been supporting Syilx citizens who have experienced racism in hospitals by including IH leads in the complaints process, holding them accountable, and pushing for discussions about how their structure needs to change in order to increase cultural competency and ensure safer healthcare experiences for Syilx people. Additionally, a Nation Planner for Health (IH-LOU) will be hired by ONA—with funding from IH and MOH—to continue the work of addressing systemic racism through the LOU process.

Health Planning

Engagement with communities through the Wellness Committee helps develop strategies to support communities with complex health issues. The ONA collects information from band staff and Health Directors to identify current health priorities and ensure investments in health correspond to the needs on the ground in community—as well as coordinating regional activities and supporting local initiatives of bands to enhance health services. For example, asking communities about pressing issues has led to discussions about root causes of opioid addictions and violence in our communities—including the overwhelming need for mental health supports and the role of traditional wellness and land-based healing. Another key issue that has been identified, is the need for Elder support through a long-term home care plan. This is the focus of discussions being facilitated by FNHA on behalf of the BC Ministry of Health in order to plan for long-term care that responds to Indigenous priorities including being closer to home, family-centred care, and cultural healing. This is an important priority but, to date, the FNHA engagement process has failed to take into account the time and capacity limitations of Syilx communities, so the ONA has pushed back and asked for more time to properly engage with the Wellness Committee and then with communities on this priority.

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FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, OUR CHILDREN NOW, THOSE YET TO BE BORN, ARE SACRED



To best support our Nations' families, the ONA builds upon the work of past generations under the direction of our Syilx leadership and the Nation's Wellness Committee. The ONA's goal is to support our communities to achieve their desired outcomes related to child and family wellbeing. In the governance realm, this work includes advocating to federal and provincial government ministries to ensure the rights of our people are respected, and government obligations are fulfilled. The ONA also builds alliances with other First Nations to share insights and collaborate on the political changes needed to address the lack of equitable resources, policy barriers, and gaps in service.

To support this work at the political level, *Yilmixw*m (Chief) Greg Gabriel has been appointed as the Nation's Child and Family Governance Representative. *Yilmixw*m Gabriel takes a leadership role, participating at political tables and working groups, reporting to the CEC and Wellness Committee, and speaking for the Syilx Nation in designated government consultation and engagement environments. The Child and Family Policy and Planning Team provides technical support.

Justice

At the 2023 AGA, *Yilmixw*m Gabriel discussed issues with the justice system including providing safety for Syilx people, particularly women and children. The Syilx Nation Human Trafficking Forum was held in Penticton in April 2023 and strategies to protect our most vulnerable populations were

discussed—with youth trafficking as a focal point. In September 2023, the ONA supported *Yilmixw*m Gabriel's meeting with the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General/ Deputy Premier, Minister Farnworth. Numerous concerns were raised including delays within the court system; the safety of our children when it comes to human trafficking; and the lack of supports for our women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ relatives who are at the highest risk of being the victims of violent behaviours and crimes. Upcoming in 2024-25, the ONA is prioritizing a justice mandate and a working relationship with the RCMP, BC First Nations Justice Council, Mediate BC, and all government ministries with a justice mandate.

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

Throughout the past year, meetings between *Yilmixw*m Gabriel and ISC Ministers took place, even as our Nation continues to struggle with resources. Despite numerous funding opportunities, new criteria have obstructed communities and the Nation from obtaining funds for infrastructure, information technology, staff, and services.

A key issue this year is the mandated Agreement-in-Principle from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. The compensation package, which amounts to over \$20 billion, will see individual settlements upwards of \$40,000 for those discriminated against in Jordan's Principle applications or Child and Family Services. This settlement was agreed upon by all the legal parties - but

“We hold our families up. We hold people accountable within our communities for justice and for healing and for taking care of one another.”

- Brenda Baptiste, Women's Wellness Gathering



lacked communication and involvement with First Nations communities. The ONA has requested transparency, as has the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. This settlement will greatly affect those involved, as it progresses we continue to keep informed of any changes, disruptions, and opportunities regarding this issue.

Despite a precedent-setting Supreme Court of Canada ruling on An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis Children, Youth and Families, ISC still has several barriers in establishing a sufficiently funded jurisdiction model. *Yílmiḡw̓m* Gabriel attended several meeting where this was being discussed, most recently at the UBCIC presentation by Dr. Cindy Blackstock.

Ministry Of Child And Family Development (MCFD)

Although new federal and provincial legislation was intended to enhance relationships and provide communities with increased decision-making for their own people, Syilx Nation communities continue to receive inadequate support from MCFD. Issues include inadequate communication, reduced financial supports, and decisions made without consent. In response, *Yílmiḡw̓m* Gabriel and the ONA have demanded a meeting with the new minister, Grace Lore, as meetings with the previous minister resulted in no improvements.

Yílmiḡw̓m Gabriel also continues to advocate for an inquiry into the Robert Riley Saunders case that saw Indigenous children within Syilx territory financially abused by an MCFD worker. The Union of BC Indian Chiefs signed a resolution to further address this issue. Relationships with the Representative for Children and Youth and the Attorney General are the next steps in demanding accountability.

Our Children Our Way Conference 2023

This conference was hosted by Our Children Our Way Society, which represents the 24 First Nations, Inuit and Metis delegated Aboriginal agencies in BC. The event brought together Indigenous and partner agencies with professionals and community members from across Canada to discuss child and family wellbeing, safety, practices and legal/systemic changes. At the conference, the ONA gained political updates on federal and provincial changes and learned about the work of other Nations to stand up their inherent jurisdiction and serve their families.

Early Years

With the transition of Early Years from the Ministry of Child and Family Development to the Ministry of Education and Childcare in 2022, our Nation received minimal communication from either Ministry. Among the many issues in the area of Early Years services, the current priority is ensuring community daycares have access to funding and \$10-a-day rates. A major goal of the upcoming year will be to meet with the Minister of State for Child Care to address issues of capacity, curriculum, and supportive learning.

Data Sovereignty

SYILX PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS GATHERED AND STORED KNOWLEDGE

Syilx have always been data stewards—protecting, gathering, and sharing data. Data sovereignty is the right Syilx people have to tell their story, with Syilx data, in a way that is responsible to all our relations. The Nation communities continue to face challenges in knowing what data outside agencies are gathering and how to access that data to enhance community and Nation planning. Data is about rights and self-determination. Syilx data governance planning work started in 2019 under a multi-year funding commitment that ONA received from ISC. Two areas of focus have been:

- **Respecting Principles:** Protecting our data by identifying traditional laws and contemporary principles that need to be followed when gathering, storing, and sharing knowledge.
- **Informing Decision Making:** Syilx leadership has expressed the need to ensure decisions, planning, and monitoring of programs are informed by good quality data that is informed by *sqilx˘ca˘wtat* (our Syilx ways of being) and shows how our nation members are doing.

Syilx Data Governance Representative Councillor Suzanne Johnson provides direction for the ONA Data Team and serves at political tables and working groups, speaking for the Nation in designated provincial and federal data-related engagements and consultations. In the past year, the following issues have been the focus of the work of the Data Representative with support from the ONA in the continued advocacy for data rights and governance, including access to Syilx data.

Tripartite Data Quality Sharing Agreement (TSQSA)

Outside agencies continue to overstep their roles when it comes to Indigenous data rights. One example is FNHA and the Ministry of Health renegotiating a data sharing agreement that uses First Nations health data without the meaningful participation of Nations. The Data Governance Representative, with support from the Health Governance Representative and ONA technical staff, have worked hard to advance Indigenous Nations rights to make decisions regarding their data. The ONA team worked in conjunction with FNHA to change the TDQSA and make it relevant and appropriate for the Syilx Nation, as well as serving as an example for other distinct nations. The result is now in the process of being shared with other nations, ISC and other relevant groups.

Integrated Activity Agreement

This project in Kootenay Boundary (KB) provides the legal framework for public providers—like health authorities, and private providers—like doctors' offices, to share information with each other. The agreement enables data-driven improvements to the Primary Care Network with the goal of improved patient outcomes. The purpose of the project is to document the collection, use, disclosure and retention of personal information by all parties in compliance with the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act, and other legislation that supports the delivery of care through the Primary Care Network. The work is in collaboration with Doctors of BC local chapters and other nations in the KB area.



Photo courtesy of LSIB

Nation Wellness Data Governance Plan

Community presentations and language speaker and knowledge keeper engagements continued with Data Plan engagements taking place with LSIB, OIB, and WFN, PIB, and UNB. The Data Plan was also presented to Chiefs and Councils at LSIB, WFN, PIB, UNB, and OKIB. Engagement is continuing through 2024 with the Data Team returning to Chiefs and Councils in the autumn for approval of the Data Plan and Business Case. If approved, the Data Plan aims to move data governance work forward by increasing community and Nation data staff and strategic initiatives.

k^wu əc'ulluʔs

SYILX CONNECTION



In the heart of our Nation lies a profound commitment to cultural revitalization and community strength. Through k^wu əc'ulluʔs, we embark on a journey of unity and empowerment. This collective endeavor nurtures cultural teachings, fosters educational growth, and enhances awareness among our people. By coming together, we reaffirm our stewardship of tmx^wulax^w.

"Through our syilx connection, we strengthen our cultural roots, honor our ancestors, and ensure the vitality of our traditions for future generations."

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Canada. It is a testament to the University's commitment to reconciliation and decolonization, fostering a supportive environment where Indigenous knowledge and languages can thrive.

As we celebrate the milestone of the first graduating cohort of the nsyilxcən language fluency program at UBCO, we acknowledge the dedication of the students, faculty, and community members who have contributed to the success of this groundbreaking program. This program reflects a two-decade effort initiated by the Chiefs of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. These collective efforts have not only empowered individuals to become fluent speakers of nsyilxcən but have also revitalized a language that is integral to our squilxʷ identity, and the laws embedded in the wisdom of our language.

This achievement is the result of partnership between Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, delivering courses entirely in the nsyilxcən language. Spearheaded by the framework of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, FNEC, and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, IAHLA.

"The graduation of the first cohort from UBCO Bachelor of nsyilxcən Language Fluency program marks a historic achievement in Indigenous education and language revitalization." Dr. Jeannette Armstrong highlights the significance of this milestone in preserving Indigenous languages and culture, fostering reconciliation and educational pathways for future generations. The ONA celebrates this program in setting a precedent for future initiatives aimed at reclaiming and celebrating Indigenous languages, ensuring vitality and relevance of Syilx for all present and future generations to come.

Integration of siwłkʷ Water Wisdom

Another resource that we lifted off the ground was the development of a Syilx siwłkʷ Knowledge. This curriculum is a comprehensive K-12 resource guide designed to integrate Syilx traditional water wisdom into educational frameworks aligned with the core competencies of BC's newly redesigned curriculum. This initiative represents a significant commitment to education and cultural preservation, aiming to bridge current knowledge disparities. Educators, School Districts, and Band Schools will

Photo top left: Photo Courtesy of UBCO : Graduates preparing to cross the stage in June 2023 with nsyilxcən language fluency degree

sqilxʷcaʷtət

RECLAIMING AND REVITALIZING OUR ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

First Language Cohort

In June 2023, the University of British Columbia's Okanagan (UBCO) campus celebrated a significant milestone with the graduation of its inaugural cohort from the Bachelor of nsyilxcən Language Fluency program. This program, which commenced in 2021, represents a groundbreaking achievement as the first degree program in Canada to be delivered entirely in an Indigenous language.

The Bachelor of nsyilxcən Language Fluency program stands as a testament to the resilience and dedication of our peoples in reclaiming and revitalizing our ancestral language. It marks a critical step forward in preserving our culture and strengthening our community. Approved under the University Act of BC, this program's framework provides a model for Indigenous language revitalization efforts across the province. Moving forward, the Bachelor of nsyilxcən Language Fluency program at UBCO serves as a beacon of inspiration for similar initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting Indigenous languages throughout

benefit from access to robust teaching materials and hands-on activities that highlight Syilx cultural perspectives and incorporate the nsyilxcən language. By centering on water as a thematic focus, this guide not only enriches classroom learning but also fosters a deeper understanding of Syilx heritage and environmental stewardship among students across diverse educational settings.



First Speakers Share Their Wisdom

In 2023, the First Speakers Gathering played a pivotal role in shaping the direction of wellness and governance within the Syilx Nation. Positioned as an integral cultural and community engagements, First Speakers provided crucial insight into various collective sqilx̓w issues. These gatherings were instrumental in informing and grounding nation-based strategies across multiple domains including Wellness, Natural Resources, Fisheries, and Governance.

First Speakers actively contributed to the development of nation declarations and

continued their involvement in the Syilx data declaration. Their directive input and grounding in sqilx̓w cawt (traditional knowledge) provided essential guidance for policy formulation and strategic planning within the nation. By addressing critical topics such as territory stewardship, forestry standards, water management, health and wellness initiatives, and justice frameworks, First Speakers ensured that Syilx values and perspectives were deeply integrated into governance decisions and justice frameworks. Under the leadership of the Wellness Manager, the First Speakers Gathering achieved several key goals. It provided a dedicated space for First Speakers to convene and share their wisdom, facilitating open dialogue to discuss concerns and provide strategic direction on nationwide issues. They clarified and refined Syilx words and concepts to maintain cultural integrity and established standards for addressing collective nation topics, ensuring consistency and alignment with Syilx values. The First Speakers engaged in a diverse array of topics reflecting the depth and breadth of Syilx cultural knowledge and contemporary challenges faced by the community. This included identity and terminology, issues

such as drug use, violence, and the impact of cannabis shops within the community, Indigenous ecological knowledge such as the life cycles of insects and fish, and the significance of the 4 food chiefs, cultural curriculum development such as the 13 moon curriculum for educational purposes, language preservation and the respectful use of Syilx words, including discussions on derogatory terms, protocol surrounding gender identity and the inclusion of diverse perspectives in community protocols, Identifying gaps in teachings and strategies for enriching education practices, parenting and spirituality.



axa? i? k̓w̓u syilx i?
k̓w̓u suk̓w̓naqinx k̓w̓u
cnqilx̓w̓cən ta nsyilxcən
uʔ way t̓əsx̓w̓uy uʔ ta
mnim̓t̓ət k̓ə ck̓q̓ix̓w̓stm
uʔ k̓ə ct̓it̓stm, uʔ n̓is̓ip̓ k̓ə
ck̓w̓ulm̓stm i? nsyilxcən
a? nqilx̓w̓cnt̓ət.

– excerpt from the Syilx Okanagan
Language Declaration



We are a distinct and sovereign Nation, sharing the same land, culture, customs and nsyilxcən language.

A Lasting Collaboration

COLLABORATIVE PATHWAY AND PARTNERSHIP

The ongoing partnership between the ONA and UBCO marked a milestone in formalizing the importance, opportunities and benefits of building a lasting collaboration with the UBCO for our peoples. Back in October of 2023, the ONA and UBCO met to formally renew our commitment to an enduring relationship through the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU). The renewal of the MOU, signed during ONA's Annual General Assembly on October 4, reaffirms our commitment to expanding educational opportunities and preserving our culture for the benefit of the Syilx Okanagan Nation and our ancestral lands. Chief Clarence Louie stated that "this close partnership forged and cultivated with UBCO since its inception is deeply valued by the ONA and the communities it represents."

The work of the ONA is to ensure communities are supported in efforts towards self-determination and accessibility to advanced education. This relationship that we have built with UBCO, along with the MOU, represents a significant milestone in establishing a model framework for many communities to emulate. Additionally, this framework sets the groundwork to provide many newly emerging opportunities and contribute to the flourishing of both our communities.

Since its inception in 2005, UBCO has worked closely with the Nation, forming a steadfast bond essential to advancing our collective educational goals.

Dr. Cormack affirmed that while the MOU formalizes our partnership, its true depth

transcends written agreements, driving recent accomplishments. This includes developing bilingual wayfinding signage in nsyilxcən and English on campus, supporting collaborative research in watershed management and ecosystem sustainability.

At the signing Dr. Cormack also noted the initiatives by the En'owkin Centre, notably the nsyilxcən language fluency degree program, which serves as a beacon of inspiration for similar initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting Indigenous languages throughout Canada.

Honoring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture & Relational Self:

ONA is one of several community partners of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) 5 Year Research project with UBCO. The Research project, Co-Curricular Making: Honoring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture & Relational Self. We are now in Year 4. This project is led by Dr. Margaret Macintyre Latta (Principal Investigator) with her UBCO Okanagan School of Education Team including Dr. Bill Cohen. The project aims to foster curricular pathways that will mobilize local, place based Indigenous ways of knowing and being for educators and their students. This project is a timely initiative and aligns with our commitment to ensure respectful, participation and appropriate sharing and aligns with the ONA & UBC MOU.

UBCO Education Community Field Experience

In recent years, through their partnership with UBCO, the ONA has had a notable increase in students opting to undertake their Community Field Experience with us. This experiential program is tailored for teacher candidates seeking to explore teaching and

learning in a new setting, offering a comprehensive perspective that enriches their formal teaching practice.

By engaging with ONA, candidates gain a unique platform to demonstrate their educational expertise and skills while cultivating connections with community-based learning opportunities beyond conventional classroom settings. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are drawn to ONA to immerse themselves in our initiatives, participating in communication and event projects aimed at integrating Syilx knowledge to enhance educational outcomes for future generations.



Photo: Yilmixw'm ki law na and Dr. Cormack signing the MOU between ONA and UBCO



Scan Here to Read the Co-Curricular-Making: Honoring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture, and the Relational Self Document

Building a Better Future

RECOGNIZING SYILX STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENTS

The Building a Better Future Initiative is a testament to our commitment to supporting the educational endeavors of Syilx Okanagan Nation members. The ONA has built partnerships to assist with providing this scholarship, bursary, and awards initiative. With the help of our partners we aim to provide financial assistance to eligible individuals, recognizing their perseverance and achievements as they pursue higher education.



\$1000 Syilx Siya Award
Sponsored by EMB Management Ltd.
Chantae Kruger

At the age of 16 years old Chantae graduated in January 2023. She will be attending Okanagan College in September in the Associate of Arts program then transfer to UBCO to complete a Bachelor of Education degree. Her goal is to become an elementary school teacher.



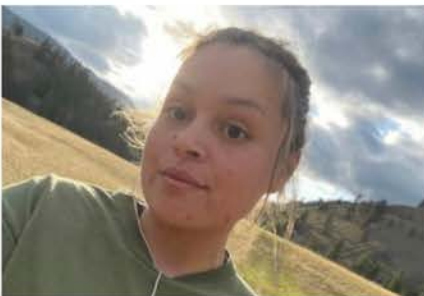
\$1000 Syilx Siya Award
Sponsored by EMB Management Ltd.
Peter Waardenburg Jr. Sk'ik'aycin

Peter, from Lower Similkameen, graduated in June 2023 and will be attending Okanagan College this September in the Business Program. "Peter is a strong Indigenous Athlete who showcases the important connection between sports and resilience." - Ms. Nerbus



\$1000 Syilx Siya Award
Sponsored by Hi Traxx & Lance McLean
Tiyanetkw Manuel

Tiyanetkw, from Upper Nicola, graduated in June 2023 and will be attending the University of British Columbia Okanagan pursuing a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Indigenous studies. In the future, she plans to become a teacher, specializing in Indigenous-focused studies, and nsyilxcen.



\$1500 Education for Life
Sponsored by FortisBC
Randi Baptiste

Randi, from Upper Similkameen and Osoyoos, is on a journey to becoming a Power Line Technician (PLT). Randi was accepted into a PLT Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program in Fall 2023 at the University of the Fraser Valley, which will support her next steps in becoming an Apprentice PLT.



\$1500 Education for Life
Sponsored by FortisBC
Alicia Marchand

Currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Education Program at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. Alicia's life goals consist of cultural preservation, revitalization, advocacy, and social change within the education system. Alicia hopes to bring these values back to Syilx schools.



\$3500 Engineering Bursary
Sponsored by EMB Management Ltd.
Jakob Alexis

A proud Syilx person and first-generation student entering the field of Mechanical Engineering Technology. Jakob plans to bridge to the Mechanical Engineering Degree from the diploma at either UBCO or Lakehead University by next fall after completing the diploma in Dec 2023.



\$1500 Business Bursary
Sponsored by EMB Management Ltd.

Ali Butler

Ali, from Lower Similkameen, is deeply committed to building healthier communities and moving forward Indigenous social justice initiatives. As a social worker currently working towards an MBA in Advancing Reconciliation, Ali hopes to move the needle toward social change, substantive equity, & reconciliation.



\$1500 Bursary
Sponsored by EMB Management Ltd.

Nashua Kruger

Nashua, from Penticton, graduated from high school in 2023 and began a 4-year program education journey, starting as an Automotive Service Technician. Nashua plans to further his education after his apprenticeship to become an Automotive Mechanic and potentially a Heavy Duty Mechanic in the future.



\$1500 Walking My Learning Forward
Sponsored by EMB Management Ltd.

Kim Kosik

Kim, from Westbank, entered her 4th year of the Bachelor of nsyilxcən Language Fluency Program in 2023. Kim hopes to grow more fluent each day and be able to start a business creating nsyilxcən resources that would be readily available for Okanagan families, daycares, and schools.



\$1500 Progressive Fence Bursary
Sponsored by Progressive Fence

Nicola Terbasket

Nicola, from Lower Similkameen, began working towards her Masters of Health Administration in September 2023, which has been a long-standing educational goal for Nicola. She is pursuing this 2-year program to support her work with the FNHA Interior Region, where she is currently working.



"IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER AND BE REMINDED THAT EDUCATION IS, AND HAS ALWAYS BEEN, AN IMPORTANT PART OF SYILX CULTURE AND VALUES. THIS INCLUDES FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS THAT SUPPORT OUR ABILITY TO SUPPORT OUR SYILX LEARNERS AND HIGHLIGHT THE FACT THAT WE TRULY BELIEVE IN THEIR LIVES, THEIR FUTURE, AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL PURSUITS,"

- suiki?st, Pauline Terbasket

limlāmt | Thank You

These awards would not be possible without the support of our partners - EMB Management Ltd, Fortis BC, and community donors Progressive Fence Installations Ltd, Hi-Traxx and Lance McLean. They have assisted Syilx students in continuing their educational pursuits by offering \$15,500 in awards for both high school graduates and post-secondary students.

kłskłlæx^wnwx^wsælx

THEY HAVE A MESSAGE

The ONA CEC is committed to the preservation and practice of Syilx language and culture. Through numerous nation-wide initiatives and gatherings the ONA has supported, assisted and promoted the development of language and culture resources and educational materials and messages, as well as created the space for the Nation to come together.

We have worked to develop partnerships with various organizations to find platforms where we can create a Syilx presence. Educating the broader public about our culture, histories, and contributions, in hopes of fostering a deeper understanding and respect for Syilx ways of knowing and being. This is crucial for cultural preservation, education, advocacy, environmental stewardship, and reconciliation.

This work has been guided by the Elders, speakers and traditional knowledge keepers throughout the Syilx communities.

A wide range of promotional items were developed to promote Syilx unity, pride, Nationhood, culture, and language. These items were distributed via our social media channels, in community, and at various events and gatherings.



Creating a Presence

The ONA developed a variety of interpretive signage with multiple partners including the Regional District North Okanagan, City of Lake Country, City of Kelowna, Friends of the Okanagan Rail Trail, North Okanagan Conservation fund, and UBCO. These signage initiatives contributed to the assertion of Syilx presence throughout a portion of the territory, while providing education and awareness on different parts of Syilx culture and language and environmental stewardship.

The signs are installed along the Okanagan Rail Trail between a 50 km stretch starting at the north end of Kalamalka Lake and ending at the center of Okanagan Lake, downtown Kelowna. The interpretive signs along the trail aim to provide educational and cultural insights into the region's history, ecology, and significance to the Syilx people. A total of 7 signs have been created thus far with topics including:

- k'w'u syilx | We are the Indigenous People of this land
- q'w'nəłq'n t'ik'wət | Kalamalka Lake kəkni
- t'əctx'ap tl tqalqaltikn | Watershed
- The Beauty of k'nmałka | Kalamalka Lake
- k'emcnitk^w | The Edge of Water
- mulx | Black Cottonwood
- Chief siya?

Further development and installation of signs will continue in other parts of the territory as funding and locations become available.



kł cpəłk stiń Film Project

In recognition of the ONA's continuous efforts to restore and rejuvenate salmon populations, the ONA worked with Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) on an upcoming TV series titled "Animal Nation". The Syilx Nation will be featured in an episode focused on salmon and its cultural significance to Indigenous peoples. Filming first commenced in October 2023. The ONA facilitated several on-site locations and interviews with elders, knowledge keepers, leadership, youth, and ONA Fisheries.

This project aims to bring a holistic view of salmon restoration and preservation in the Syilx Okanagan territory to a public audience, from broodstock collections through to the releasing of salmon fry from the hatchery, as well as our Fish in Schools programs.



“There are historic names that have stood for thousands of years, First Nation language and placenames deserve the same respect as their English names – not just in a historical context, but in a contemporary context as well.”

-yilmixm ki law na, Chief Clarence Louie

Everything Has a Name

Through colonization, our lands have been remapped and renamed. As a crucial part of reclaiming our Indigenous knowledge and territories it is important to utilize our Indigenous place names as they are tied to our oral histories, laws and language. Our language is embedded in the land itself. The use of Syilx placenames is important as they preserve and strengthen our cultural heritage and identity and ensure our history, languages, and practices are passed down to future generations.

The ONA partnered with the Municipality of Summerland in developing a sign for ackt't'pus, Giant's Head Mountain. The sign would not have been possible without the support of one of our knowledge keepers, caylx who provided the placename and stories about this mountain. This place means so much more than a trail that you can hike up, this place provided food and medicine, and was a gathering place. There is a captikw' about this mountain when there were no humans; only the Animal People on the earth. The captikw' describes how the Animal People used ackt't'pus as a training ground. The lesson passed down in this story is that size and strength are not the only things that will get you to the top of the mountain but that courage, a positive mindset, and believing in yourself when no one else does will also get you to the top.

On June 9th at the sign unveiling, Chief Greg Gabriel of the Penticton Indian Band, alongside caylx Richard Armstrong and the ONA, joined the Mayor of Summerland and council members in honouring all collaborative efforts in completing the ackt't'pus interpretive signage. “This collaborative effort signifies a profound acknowledgment of the cultural and contemporary significance of ackt't'pus to our people. The signage stands as a testament to and enhances awareness of the tmx'úla?xw and the rich history of ackt't'pus. The commitment to incorporating and showcasing Syilx perspective and collaboration on this project.

At the unveiling Mayor Doug Holmes, of Summerland, highlighted Giant's Head Mountain's strong cultural significance to the Syilx Okanagan people, cherished by residents for its ecological value and recreational opportunities.

The unveiling of interpretive signage, developed through partnership between the ONA, PIB, and the District of Summerland, marks a significant milestone in asserting our jurisdiction and responsibility as Syilx people, of the land and while asserting our leadership as being the caretakers and stewards of the land. Theses public signs also have the ability to ignite dialogue, open people's minds and reconfigure the way they relate to and understand specific places as well as Syilx people.





- Grandmothers Gathering
- Honouring stylíca? Ceremony
- Open House: UNB & LSIB
- River Restoration Workshop
- Drug & Human Trafficking Forum
- First Speakers Language Gathering
- Sockeye Fry Release Ceremonies, Shingle Creek, Lower Vernon Creek, Six Mile Creek, Mission Creek
- Open House: OKIB & OIB
- x'wax'mina? Trout Fishery
- Sylix Elders Spring Luncheon
- Sockeye Fry Release Ceremonies, Castlegar, Slocan, Revelstoke
- Chinook Fry Release Ceremonies, Spallumcheen River, OK Falls
- Spirit of Sylix Unity Run, snpinktn to nea?m (Christina Lake)
- Salmon Calling Ceremonies, Kettle Falls, Castlegar, Revelstoke, McIntyre Dam, Enloe Dam
- sqlix'w Birthing Gathering
- Sylix Elders Summer Luncheon
- Men's Wellness Gathering
- Sylix Youth Gathering
- Okanagan Lake Community Engagement
- Open House: PIB
- Salmon Feast
- Walk for the Children
- Sylix Fall Hunting Camp

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEPT



- Annual General Assembly
- Elder's Fall Luncheon
- River Restoration Workshop
- Sylix Nation Data Governance Plan
- Presentations: LSIB
- First Speakers Language Gathering
- Sylix Nation Data Governance Plan
- Presentation: WFN
- Connecting About Suicide
- Intervention Workshop
- Asserting Family Authority: Child and Family Info & Engagement
- Session: PIB
- Residential School Healing Circles: LSIB
- captikw4: kwackwæstím i7
- stætætæt Session 1
- Honouring kɪ7lawná? Ceremony

OCT

NOV

DEC

- captikw4: kwackwæstím i7
- stætætæt Session 2
- YES Specialized Training
- Sylix Okanagan Nation Gathering
- CRSRI IKC: Gathering to Witness for Salmon
- "You Empowered Strong"
- Gathering: A Success Story
- Sylix Youth Winter Gathering
- Honouring stýlka? Ceremony
- k'yu æc'ullu7s: Frontline Wellness

JAN FEB

MARCH

t'əctx'ap tl
tqalqaltikn

WATER CONNECTS ALL LIVING THINGS



Photo Top to bottom: Releasing fry at Shingle Creek, Okanagan River, Opening Circle at the 2023 World Water Day Water Forum at Sun Oka Beach.

Our Syilx worldview is grounded in an understanding of the profound impacts of interconnection. We are connected to one another and to our ancestors through the ancient siwłk^w that flows around, under, and through us. As Syilx people, we flow with the siwłk^w, which we have lived in harmony with since the beginning of time. Today we carry this responsibility to siwłk^w forward through dynamic leadership, strategic partnerships, and efforts grounded in our knowledge and culture.

”

Our relation siwłk^w, our most sacred medicine, must be kept healthy to restore and hold its relationship to tmix^w to ensure the resiliency of our Mother for the good of all, for all time.

- Syilx Okanagan Natural Resources Committee, 2018

Flowing Futures

RESILIENT AND HEALTHY WATERSHEDS.

siwłkʷ has a range of important impacts, as it strengthens community resilience, promotes ecological health, and upholds our inherent rights. Resilient creeks provide homes for diverse species and are crucial for fish such as salmon and trout, that rely on these waterways for spawning and rearing.

Restoration efforts also improve water quality, reduce pollution, control erosion, and manage runoff, all which lead to cleaner water for ecosystems and human use. Additionally, restored creeks are better able to cope with climate change impacts, such as increased temperatures and altered precipitation patterns.

By restoring wetlands, rivers, creeks, and lakeshores, while implementing sustainable land and water management practices rooted in both TEK and Western science, the ONA aims to enhance ecosystem resilience and ensure the long-term health of siwłkʷ. Collaborative efforts with non-Syilx partners, external governments, and stakeholders are essential to achieve these goals, fostering mutual understanding, respect, and shared responsibility for the watershed.

nłxʷaqʷaʔstn: Mission Creek Restoration Initiative

nłxʷaqʷaʔstn is extremely important for all Indigenous fish, including salmon. The ONA continues to be a leader in restoring the creek and its floodplain through numerous activities including annual Sockeye fry releases and population monitoring, aquatic habitat monitoring, and being a lead on the Mission Creek Restoration Initiative Steering Committee. The ONA has also created conceptual restoration designs for the entire lower 12 km, which are being implemented in phases in with the Committee. The first of these restoration

projects is expected to commence in the fall of 2024 and includes putting back spawning and rearing habitat for salmon. ONA project staff are thankful and empowered by the strong support and advocacy that the Syilx Okanagan Nation continues to provide for this important work.

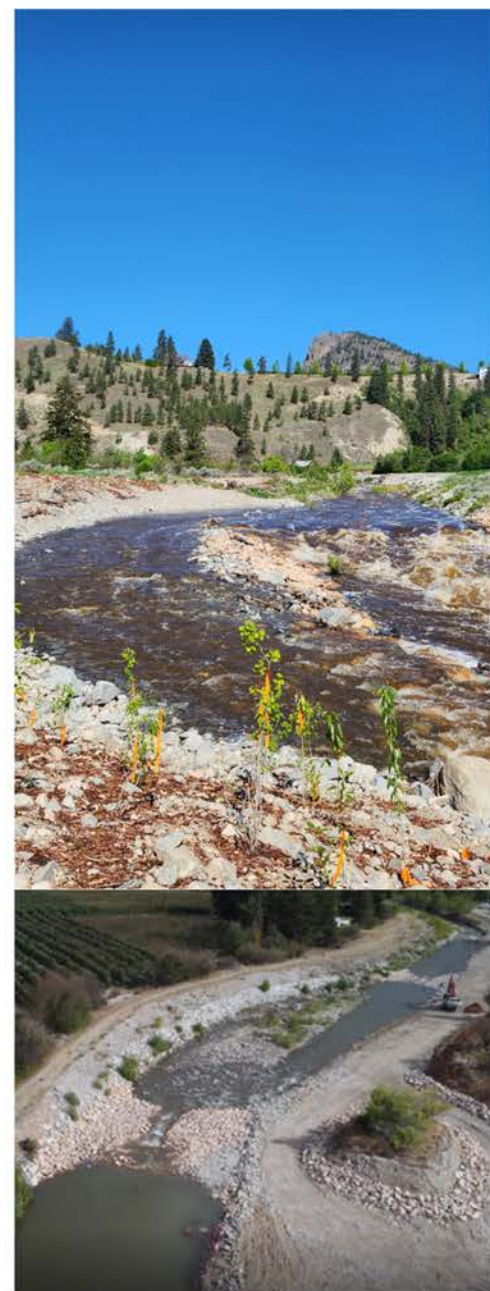
Mill Creek

Mill Creek is one of the many small but mighty creeks which flow through modern-day City of Kelowna. This creek has been damaged throughout its entire 15 km journey through the City of Kelowna. The ONA has provided restoration guidance which is being implemented in phases by the City of Kelowna. The first construction phase occurred in summer 2023. This work resulted in many benefits including an upgraded flow management system which incorporates important ecological flow needs, installation of 2 riffle-pools designed especially for salmon, and reconnection of 2 sections of floodplain. ONA continues to assist the City of Kelowna in monitoring and maintaining these restored areas. This is another creek which is increasingly benefitting over time thanks to the strong advocacy of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

nluxʷluxʷłcwix Restoration

The nluxʷluxʷłcwix (Trout Lake) Restoration project is being completed in collaboration with the PIB and the En'owkin Center. This project is focused on restoring the fish and wildlife ecosystem that was degraded by channelizing the waterways. So far, the completed restoration has included putting four riffles and pools back into the creek so fish have areas to rest, eat, and spawn. Also, creekbank has been widened to appropriate widths along with floodplain to bring back

connection between the land and water. Ultimately, this project will help establish a long term healthy riparian forest which will benefit all species. We have already seen salmon spawning at all new riffles, regular visits by indigenous wildlife and cottonwoods sprouting in the floodplain. This year we are continuing re-vegetation efforts, monitoring and planning for future restoration projects on nluxʷluxʷłcwix.





Nurturing Water in a Changing Climate

A functioning watershed slows, cleans, filters and stores water by allowing water to absorb into the ground. This process improves water quality, reduces risk of flooding, reduces risk for invasive species to establish and increases resilience within a changing climate. When you think of a watershed, there is no separation from connected creeks, streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, aquifers, headwaters and snowpack. If one is impacted, they all feel a ripple of effect. Ensuring the quality and availability of water resources is crucial for environmental stability, and social/cultural well-being. Climate change, along with human and other environmental impacts has greatly impacted the watersheds within the territory.

Understanding the Flows of Groundwater: In collaboration with the PIB, OIB, WFN, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, BC's

Ministry of Forests, UBCO, and Okanagan College the ONA was able to collect and analyze over 200 surface water and groundwater samples from Shingle Creek, Vasseux Creek, and McDougall Creek.

Combining this information with other monitoring techniques, including stream gauging and water level monitoring throughout the year, we were able to increase our understanding of the relationship between flow in each of these creeks, water diversions, and groundwater flow, helping to explain areas of low and no flow and why. This information will better help us understand the availability of water resources, the health of aquifers, and the impacts of groundwater extraction on surface water systems and ecosystems.

Supporting Ecosystem Health in the Okanagan Watershed: The ONA is working to determine the quantity, timing, and quality of water flows required to sustain healthy ecosystems. This includes maintaining habitats for fish and other wildlife, as well as supporting plant communities and natural processes. The ONA's work includes EFN validation and monitoring in the Okanagan Lake watershed. Specifically, ONA staff conducted a study in Trepanier Creek to validate recommended EFN values, while also updating EFNs for Okanagan Lake tributaries to account for anadromous salmon now accessing the lake.

Additionally, ONA's involvement in monitoring streamflows and participating in provincial drought response meetings is highlighted to underscore efforts in maintaining adequate flows in rivers and creeks crucial for ecosystem health. In recent months, ONA staff conducted a comprehensive study in Trepanier Creek in recommending EFN values for the creek.

This study involved rigorous assessments of flow dynamics, habitat requirements, and ecological conditions within Trepanier Creek. By validating EFN values, ONA aims to ensure that Trepanier Creek stream flows adequately support the watershed's ecological health and biodiversity, including fish populations and riparian habitats.

ONA is actively updating EFN values for Okanagan Lake tributaries, incorporating considerations for anadromous salmon populations that now have access to the lake. Anadromous salmon, such as Chinook and Sockeye, play a critical role in the ecological balance of freshwater and marine environments. Their migration patterns and spawning requirements necessitate adequate flows and water quality standards in tributaries leading to Okanagan Lake. By updating EFN values to include anadromous salmon, ONA aims to enhance habitat suitability and support the natural reproductive cycles of these iconic species. This initiative aligns with ONA's commitment to ecosystem-based management and the protection of biodiversity in the Okanagan watershed.

Furthermore, ONA actively participates in provincial drought response meetings and collaborative initiatives with governmental agencies and stakeholders. These engagements develop proactive strategies and adaptive management plans to mitigate the impacts of drought and ensure the resilience of rivers and creeks in the Okanagan region.



Safeguarding Okanagan Lake

A key to successful *siwᑦkʷ* protection on the territory is through nurturing partnerships with a wide range of other governments and organizations. The *kłúshnikw* Okanagan Lake Responsibility Planning Initiative (OKLRPI) represents a concerted effort by the ONA to transform decision-making processes, policies, and land use practices across the Okanagan and Similkameen *t'əctᑦap tł tqalqaltikn* (Watershed). Initiated in 2019, this collaborative endeavor aims to enhance the protection and restoration of *siwᑦkʷ* through a Syilx-led planning process. By fostering partnerships with over 30 non-Syilx entities, the initiative seeks to address systemic challenges and cumulative impacts on water resources within Syilx territory.

Since its inception, the OKLRPI has employed a comprehensive approach involving workshops, interviews, and a policy gap analysis to deepen understanding of Syilx water laws, protocols, and practices. This process underscores the potential of integrating TEK with contemporary environmental strategies to overcome entrenched planning paradigms. Central to these efforts is the development of a strategic *siwᑦkʷ* Responsibility Action Plan slated for implementation during 2024-26.

In 2023, the Okanagan Collaborative Leadership Table was established. This table brings Chiefs, Councilors, Mayors, and Regional District Chairs together to guide the initiative. This governance structure, inspired by the Collaborative Leadership Initiative (CLI) developed by the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER), facilitates intergovernmental

dialogue and regional cooperation crucial for advancing the OKLRPI's objectives.

The OKLRPI focuses on implementing localized land-based strategies to achieve comprehensive water stewardship goals. Key actions include identifying critical baseline data, integrating water and land use planning, establishing environmental flow regimes, reevaluating water licensing priorities, devising sub-watershed drought response strategies, safeguarding headwaters, and restoring wetlands, rivers, creeks, and lakeshores. Additionally, efforts are directed toward managing aquatic invasive species to preserve aquatic ecosystems.

Moving forward into 2024-2025, the initiative will continue to foster trust and collaboration through the Okanagan Leadership Table, identifying shared water challenges and articulating governance structures to support the *siwᑦkʷ* Responsibility Action Plan. Capacity-building initiatives will support the *siwᑦkʷ* Working Group, comprising Syilx community members, in providing essential guidance and recommendations for the Action Plan's development.

The OKLRPI integrates the Syilx Water Strategy endorsed in 2021 by the Collaborative Leadership Table, emphasizing co-governance and reconciliation frameworks. By drafting the *siwᑦkʷ* Responsibility Action Plan collaboratively with Syilx and non-Syilx participants, the initiative aims to create a robust management tool for watershed planning. This document will not only guide regional water governance but also serve as a replicable model for communities across British Columbia and Canada.



kł c'pəlk stíḥ

CAUSE TO COME BACK

The ONA Fisheries Department continues to deliver a wide range of projects that span the entire territory of the Syilx nation. Throughout the year, our team has worked on 135 projects with 52 staff members. The Sockeye restoration work continues to be our highest priority with many projects focused on the Okanagan Lake population including sockeye releases from the hatchery, as well as, progress on the Okanagan Lake dam fish passage. The work in the eastern part of the territory continues to expand with the Bringing the Salmon Home initiative receiving funding for a 3-year project to carry out several technical studies with the addition of cultural support.

A Commitment to Conservation

The kł c'pəlk stíḥ Hatchery achieved significant milestones in 2023/24, underscoring its commitment to the conservation and restoration of Sockeye salmon populations in the Okanagan Basin. With a release of over 4.7 million Sockeye fry and an impressive survival rate of 89.3% from egg to release, the hatchery's efforts have been instrumental in bolstering fish stocks across various waterways. This success not only reflects robust hatchery practices but also highlights ongoing advancements in monitoring, evaluation, and collaborative efforts aimed at ensuring the sustainability of salmon populations.

Over the years our efforts to reintroduce salmon to kłúšxnítkw Okanagan Lake have extended to multiple tributaries that feed into the Lake. Continuing to extend the range on kłúšxnítkw, in 2023 we released 4.7 million fry, including 3,815,000 Sockeye fry released into 6 different Okanagan Lake tributaries: Trout Creek, Mission Creek, Equesis, Whiteman's Creek, Nashwito, and for the first time ever we brought 300,000 fry back to the Head-of-the-Lake, including Lower Vernon Creek. This work is a continuation of the Syilx Nation commitment to our responsibilities of restoring and reintroducing sc'win back to all parts of the territory, and illustrates how our sustained efforts have been successful in covering more and more key areas.

Safeguarding Genetic Diversity and Sustainability

Even with the anticipated low Sockeye run, high temperatures and low flows in the Columbia River, broodstock collection achieved our pre-season target (650+ females), to collect 1.7 mil. eggs and in addition 100,000 eggs were collected with CRSRI.

In addition, our crews were able to collect two female Chinook for egg collection. This is important, because local Chinook spawners are better adapted to survive in the Okanagan. The spiritual and symbolic importance of increased Chinook stocks is extremely important to the Syilx Nation. Through meticulous egg collection and management practices, the hatchery continues to play a vital role in safeguarding the genetic diversity and sustainability of Sockeye salmon, ensuring their resilience in the face of environmental challenges and contributing to the broader goals of aquatic ecosystem conservation.

Pit-tagging

A cornerstone of the *kl̓ c̓p̓áḷk stírn* Hatchery's strategy in 2023 was the implementation of pit-tagging to track and monitor Sockeye salmon throughout their lifecycle. Over 30,000 Sockeye fry were meticulously pit-tagged prior to release into key locations of the Upper Columbia at Burton, Castlegar, Revelstoke, and Slocan. Alongside the CRSRI team we pit tagged and released approximately 24,000 Sockeye fry and released a total just over 135,000 Sockeye fry. Hatchery staff also pit tagged over 5,000 Sockeye fry for release into Equestis. This innovative approach allows hatchery staff to gather precise data on migration patterns, survival rates, and habitat preferences without unduly impacting the fish population. The pit-tagging initiative represents a significant enhancement employed for more than 15 years, ensuring that conservation efforts are grounded in reliable scientific data. These insights are crucial for planning effective strategies for salmon recovery in the upper Columbia watershed and beyond.

Evidence Based Management Practices

During the 2023-24 sampling year, our efforts in the lab at the ONA focused on a comprehensive range of techniques and methods to expand our database, processing a total of 8,854 fish samples. These included Sockeye, Chinook, Kokanee, and Mysid shrimp, alongside water samples, collected through various methodologies and meticulously analyzed throughout the year. Fish sampling encompassed essential tasks such as length and weight measurements, species identification, determination of sex and maturity, aging processes, thermal mark checks for distinguishing between hatchery and wild stocks, stomach content

analysis, disease screening (or confirming disease-free status upon release), DNA analysis, and tagging verification. Similarly, mysid shrimp sampling involved quantifying population numbers, assessing lengths, sex determination, life stage classification, and stomach content analysis. These findings continue to inform evidence-based fisheries management practices and contribute to the sustainable stewardship of aquatic resources in the Okanagan-Similkameen watershed.

Alongside our fish-focused activities, the lab also conducted rigorous water quality testing, ensuring that both the water entering the hatchery and flowing into Shingle Creek adhered to approved quality standards throughout their journey. Looking ahead, we are initiating a new training module aimed at facilitating knowledge sharing. This program will offer members of other Indigenous nations and communities the opportunity to visit our fisheries lab, fostering the establishment or enhancement of their own facilities based on our practices and methodologies.

Harvest

In 2023, the community harvest and distribution activities were not conducted due to the limited migration of sockeye into Osoyoos Lake. Community members were restricted to accessing approximately 200 sockeye, a stark contrast to previous years. The hindrance to migration stemmed from unusually high temperatures experienced in June and July, which created a thermal barrier along the lower Okanagan River, impeding the fish's passage into Osoyoos Lake. However, a brief period of cooler, rainy weather at the end of August provided some respite from the prevailing conditions, aiding in mitigating fires.



Consequently, a modest count of just over 19,000 sockeye managed to return for spawning purposes.



Photo: A fish ladder at the Okanagan Lake Dam as part of a ntytyix Passage Project was installed

Return of ntytyix

RESTORING SALMON AND ENHANCING ECOSYSTEMS IN THE OKANAGAN WATERSHED

Okanagan Lake Dam Fish East Salmon Passage Project

Due to the persistence and direction of the CEC, the Province of BC is no longer impeding salmon passage into Okanagan Lake, setting the foundation for long-term passage. In 2022, we saw approximately 5000 adult Sockeye return to spawn in Okanagan Lake tributaries, which was the largest Sockeye return into Okanagan Lake since the early 1900s when the Okanagan dam was built. The top spawning tributaries in Okanagan Lake are currently Equis, Powers, Trout, and Mission Creeks. Although salmon now have free access into Okanagan Lake, the existing 1950s fish ladder does not provide adequate access to Okanagan Lake and is only operational for a few months each year.

In 2023, the ONA fisheries team began working with the Penticton Indian Band to plan a bypass channel on the east side of Okanagan Dam and final designs are currently in

progress. The fishway is designed to provide volitional passage for all native adult and juvenile salmonids at all migration times. The Syilx community and general public will be able to view the salmon migrating while protecting the salmon and accounting for public safety. The fishway is designed to accommodate extreme climatic conditions such as low flows during drought conditions and high flood events, while providing preferred swimming velocities for salmonids. A monitoring station is also part of the design to provide long-term monitoring capabilities for decades to come. Outreach efforts will educate communities including local schools and seasonal visitors on the importance of river and habitat connectivity. It is a priority of this project to utilize outreach activities to raise awareness of the impacts of barriers to fish migration and to tell the Syilx story of the salmon returning home. This project remains a collaborative effort among multiple organizations and agencies to bring indigenous salmonids back to their historic spawning grounds.

This project is part of the larger vision of the Syilx Nation Elders to heal the river by “bringing it back”
kł cp’alk’ stim’.

Salmon Reintroduction in the Okanagan Watershed

In the ongoing efforts to restore salmon populations within the Okanagan watershed, the ONA Fisheries Stock Team has continued to play a pivotal role in the reintroduction and monitoring of Sockeye Salmon. A significant aspect of ONA's work involves PIT tagging fry and smolts, which provides crucial data on their oceanward migration, distribution, and survival. This technology enables ONA to track the journey of Sockeye Salmon as they navigate through the Okanagan Basin and beyond, encountering numerous hydroelectric dams before reaching the Pacific Ocean. Understanding these migration patterns is essential for assessing the effectiveness of restoration efforts and informing future conservation strategies.

Despite environmental challenges, ONA achieved significant milestones in its salmon conservation efforts. Broodstock collection exceeded targets, with over 1.6 million eggs collected, including Chinook females crucial for local adaptation and cultural significance. Moreover, advancements in hatchery fry outplants and the successful passage of salmon at Okanagan Lake Dam have contributed to the re-establishment of salmon populations in Okanagan Lake.

Chinook Recovery

In May 2023, the ONA conducted significant efforts to enhance Chinook salmon populations in the Okanagan region through hatchery releases and monitoring initiatives.

In May 2023, ONA released a total of 11,908 hatchery Chinook fry at two key locations: Okanagan Falls and McIntyre Dam. These releases were part of ONA's ongoing efforts to bolster Chinook salmon populations in the Okanagan watershed.

During the spawning season, the number of Chinook salmon returning to the Okanagan region was estimated at 20 adults. This figure represents the number of hatchery-released Chinook salmon that successfully returned to their spawning grounds.

As part of the hatchery program continuity, ONA captured two female Chinook salmon as broodstock for the 2024 hatchery program. This strategic effort ensures the sustainability and continuation of the hatchery initiative aimed at rebuilding Chinook salmon populations.

Despite the challenges observed in 2023 with a low return of spawning Chinook, ONA anticipates a slight improvement in 2024. Factors such as previous hatchery releases and ongoing conservation efforts are expected to contribute to an increase in the number of returning Chinook salmon next year.

Sockeye Escapement: Enhancing Sockeye Survival

In 2023, ONA staff undertook a comprehensive assessment using hydroacoustic equipment to monitor Sockeye passage into Okanagan Lake. This monitoring initiative was conducted from early September to late October, aligning with the

peak spawning season of the species.

Additionally, ONA crews conducted surveys in various tributaries including Mission Creek, Trout Creek, Trepanier Creek, Peachland Creek, Powers Creek, and Equis Creek. These surveys aimed to recover Sockeye carcasses and collect biological samples from spawned fish, providing valuable data on population dynamics and health.

The results of the 2023 monitoring efforts indicated a notably low abundance of Sockeye salmon passing into Okanagan Lake. Few fish were observed during the monitoring period, highlighting potential challenges in the species' population recovery within the watershed. Despite the low escapement observed, the operation of hydroacoustic equipment proved successful in providing critical insights into Sockeye salmon behavior and migration patterns.

Looking forward, ONA plans to continue utilizing hydroacoustic equipment to monitor Sockeye escapement into Okanagan Lake. Based on ongoing conservation and habitat restoration, we anticipate escapement numbers to improve in 2024/25.

Wilsey Dam

The ONA in partnership with the Okanagan Indian Band continue to conduct baseline studies and implementing interim fish passage activities in preparation for a potential decommissioning of Wilsey Dam. This year a sediment release trial was planned that would provide data on how to best release the built-up sediment in the head pond while ensuring aquatic life safety. We look into doing this next year. As well, this year, there has been an out planting of over 9000 Chinook eggs to begin seeding upstream habitats so future returning Chinook spawners will migrate upstream of the dam site in previously blocked reaches.



IN THE HEART OF THE OKANAGAN, WHERE THE RIVER FLOWS WITH HISTORY, OUR CHIEF NTYTYIX SALMON'S JOURNEY TELLS A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND RENEWAL. THROUGH KŁ C'ƏL'K STI'M, THE ONA IS CHARTING A PATH TOWARD A THRIVING FUTURE FOR NTYTYIX.

For Generations to Come

WE ARE TIED TO THE WATER

In 2023, the ONA continued its dedication to honouring ancestral practices and supporting the next generation with the salmon ceremonies. These ceremonies instill our responsibilities toward ntytyix, siwłkʷ, tmxʷulaxʷ, and tmixʷ. They underscore our commitment to upholding our Syilx ways of being and knowing, and bringing forth the knowledge of our elders, while instilling in our children the importance of being stewards of the land and ensuring the continuation of our ways for future generations.

Salmon Fry and cemtus Released in Syilx Okanagan Ceremonies

After raising the fish in their classrooms as part of an Okanagan Nation Alliance Fish in Schools program, children released sockeye and Chinook into local waterways. As part of our Fish in Schools program the students join the Syilx community in the ceremonial releases of fry they have raised. Starting with 100 sockeye eggs in the fall, students nurture them into fry before releasing them in the spring. This program educates youth on the salmon life cycle and the cultural and ecological significance of fish. Youth learn to become caretakers and respect cycles of life and tmixʷ. A total of 56 elementary and secondary schools participated in the ceremonial releases this past year. Youth learn to become caretakers and respect cycles of life and tmixʷ. This year marked the 19th year that the ONA has been doing the ceremonial fry releases.

ONA upheld our commitment to honouring our ancestors and praying for the salmon by supporting a number of salmon ceremonies throughout the territory. This included a series of Salmon Ceremonies in the eastern territory, which brought leaders, traditional knowledge keepers, elders and community members out on the land. These ceremonies provide the opportunity to reaffirm our connection to the land and water, setting a precedence for the youth to engage in ceremony and learn the responsibilities we have to ntytyix, siwłkʷ, tmxʷulaxʷ and tmixʷ. Our ways of knowing—all contributing to positive changes for the People-to-Be.

Restoring one of our food Chiefs, Salmon is central to the well-being of our Syilx community, not only does it bring back a food source but also restores the ceremonies, social constructs and food harvest practices that accompany the return of ntytyix - our Indigenous food sovereignty.

In addition to the salmon ceremonies held the nation also gathered in snkx̣ kntn Revelstoke to honour Ćamtus, sturgeon.



Mission Creek Fry Release 2023



Revelstoke Sturgeon Fry Release 2023

“Those kids, they raise the salmon from the tiny eggs. They know. They’ve seen them — they feel their spirits.”
- cewelna Leon Louis



Photo: Salmon Calling Ceremony on the Similkameen River, just below Enloe Dam.

Calling the Salmon Home

In 2023, ONA was honoured to uphold Syilx Elders and support Knowledge keepers in the five annual salmon calling throughout Syilx Territory to honour our ancestors as well as our relatives in the water, ntytyix. Spanning five days and taking place at traditional locations that our people used to gather at to fish along the sn̓wntkʷít̓kʷ watershed such as s̓x̓wánít̓kʷ Kettle Falls,

n̓tux̓qnm Castlegar, sn̓k̓y̓kntn Revelstoke, n̓s̓aylntn McIntyre Dam, and s̓ank'lip i sk̓wants Enloe Dam. These ceremonies continue to honour our ancestors, sn̓xa?l'iwlem, honour the sacredness of the river, and ntytyix, chief salmon.

The annual Salmon Calling Ceremonies stand as a powerful testament to the resilience of the ntytyix, and the Nation. The ONA supports these ceremonies led by calyx, Richard Armstrong, who has conducted these ceremonies since his youth and has been carefully instructed by his relatives from a young age, to uphold his responsibility to ntytyix.

Furthermore, this ceremony highlights the extensive traditional territory and interconnectedness of the communities and familial ties. The ONA's involvement underscores our commitment to preserving and revitalizing these traditions, ensuring they endure for future generations. By supporting the work of our relations, and their responsibility to carry out the Salmon Calling Ceremonies, we reaffirm our cultural heritage and demonstrate our unwavering commitment to our ancestors.

Salmon Calling Ceremonies 2023:

- Snq'əq'ula?xn tn, Kettle Falls
- S̓lux̓qaynm, Millennium Park, Castlegar
- Sk̓y̓kntn, Big Eddy, Revelstoke
- n̓s̓aylntn, McIntyre Dam, Oliver
- s̓ank'lip i sk̓wants, Enloe Dam, WA

Sockeye Fry Releases:

- akt̓ x̓wumina?, Shingle Creek
- Lower Vernon Creek
- Six Mile Creek
- nx̓w̓aq̓a?stn, Mission Creek
- sn̓tux̓qnm, Castlegar
- takli̓saickst, Slocan Lake
- sn̓k̓y̓kntn, Revelstoke
-

Chinook Fry Releases:

- Spallumcheen River, Cherryville
- s̓x̓w̓ə̓x̓w̓nit̓kʷ Okanagan Falls
- Salmon River, Falkland

“

“This ceremony is a Senk'lip law for us to do. It's not something we're making up – it's not new. This is one of the oldest ceremonies we have.”

– nk'lx̓w̓cin Chad Eneas

kʔulluʔsməntm

Rebuilding Our Ways



The ONA is committed to improving the wellness of our People not only for our present community members but for the stelsqilx^w—the People to Be. For Syilx people, health is multifaceted, holistic and interconnected. ONA Wellness takes a Syilx shared services approach that is grounded in the collectivity of our ancestors, informed by contemporary efficiencies, and recognizes the self-determining nature of each Syilx Okanagan band.

We will survive and continue to govern our mother and her resources for the good of all for all time.

”

-Okanagan Nation Declaration

Services Closer to Home

LISTENING TO COMMUNITY VOICES



Photo: Children singing for the OIB Historic Reserve Celebration on April 14, 2023

Shared Services In Practice: Allocations to Communities

It is important to recognize that the Syilx Nation has, and continues to, respond to the funding policies dictated by the government. The Nation Allocation Funding is an opportunity, provided currently by FNHA and Interior Health, that only exists because of the Nation-based approach. Funding allocations are reviewed and approved by the Wellness Committee and CEC annually, supporting the approach that has led to continuous funding for key activities in Syilx communities. Some shifts in funding policies are also occurring, resulting in various efforts to advocate for what is needed for the Syilx Okanagan Nation. Coming out of engagement with leaders and band staff, the message is clear that current priorities are mental health, traditional wellness including on-the-land healing, and the toxic drug crisis. Each member Syilx community applies the funds to fit their local setting and priorities. Following the unity principle, this is distributed to every Syilx community.

Highlights Of Community Coordinated Efforts

UNB saw health and social programs and services continue to respond to individual health concerns as well as provide membership with good health promotion. The band worked on 6 strategies: (1) Empowering Members, (2) Cultural Identity, (3) Health Community, (4) Sustainable Environment, (5) Economic Opportunity, (6) Supportive Workplace. All aspects of these strategies were infused with a principled and practical approach to wellness and many program functions were delivered in each strategy to strengthen members.

LSIB offered ceremonies that brought community together to connect, share and heal. They brought in practitioners for the Elders including reflexology, acupuncture, massage and footcare to help heal mind, body and soul, as well as stay mobile and keep stress under control. They also encouraged women to come together, for example through sewing initiatives.

USIB had regular visits from doctors and a dietician who hosted healthy meal prep for moms and tots. They hosted workshops including on-the-land learning with Elders about plants, medicines and storytelling; mental health for men and women, substance use and services, harm reduction, chronic diseases, and safe sex and sexual health. They built an outdoor Naloxone cabinet for harm reduction supplies, smudge kits, safe sex supplies, and other info. They held a regular Elders Social. Some home improvements were made to make homes more accessible and safer. Their Healthy Harvest Program gives harvest boxes every month to on-reserve members and a Community Garden is being planned.

OKIB has tackled program development for culture and on-the-land healing programs. They also hired a part-time LPN to support harm reduction and expanded this to include sexual health providing contraceptives and pregnancy tests. In the last year, harm reduction has managed needle disposal boxes and community sweeps to clean up drug paraphernalia.

OIB has supported the organizing of well-briety groups and on-the-land healing sessions. They hosted knowledge keepers and Elders to teach about the significance of water and plants as medicine, as well as inviting speakers to share about Chinese medicine and about the importance of body movement for healing. OIB continued to hold many cultural activities such as drum making, ribbon skirt and shirt- making.

PIB focused on youth and Elder programming with a weekly Elders day program. Other meetings, for Elders and the general community, featured info sharing about self-help, awareness of personal health, and where to go for assistance. All of their programs integrate Elders as knowledge keepers including parenting, youth programs, and the addictions recovery house. PIB also held cultural safety sessions with Interior Health staff, including emergency department staff, which improved hospital service delivery.

WFN made a traditional healer available for nation members including adults and with a specific focus on youth. Time was available outside office hours which was greatly appreciated. Furthermore, a BodyTalk practitioner came to the health building twice a month, seeing up to 6 members a day. Meals and other supports helped expanding Wellbriety sessions together with involvement of fathers in the new program of traditional parenting. They hired a specialized trauma counsellor and a child and youth counsellor. Safe spaces for counselling were created in our health building, resulting in more members participating.

Jordan's Principle Service Coordination

This child-first and needs-based principle is used to ensure that First Nations children and youth under 19 have equitable access to all

government-funded public services. The Canadian government has committed to facilitate access to all supports without delay. Jordan's Principle is about substantive equality—it means giving extra help when it is needed so our children have an equal chance to thrive through better access to health, social and educational supports and services. ONA-based Service Coordinators support families with their requests by gathering materials needed for the submission and, once a decision is made, helping families get direct payments and access services, supplies and equipment. The annual Bear Witness Day (May 10, 2023) was held, honouring the memory of Jordan River Anderson, the young boy from Norway House Cree Nation whose tragic death gave rise to Jordan's Principle. The ONA team supported daycares to host tea parties and shared learning resources with teachers to enhance awareness of the Jordan's Principle program.

Impacts In Community: The benefits could be seen in action at a community event this past year. One young child in particular, who was diagnosed with autism, had struggled with peer interactions and new environments. At the event, this child was able to be included all day, running and playing while wearing noise cancelling headphones and using an assistive communication device—both of which were provided through Jordan's Principle.

Youth Opportunity: This year, a group request was approved for Syilx youth to receive driving lessons to support skill development, self-esteem, being on the land, connection to Elders, and to promote safety and awareness of MMIWG. This was one of 14 group requests, all involving 10 or more children.

Jordan's PRINCIPLE for First Nation Children

**IMPROVING ACCESS
TO HEALTH, SOCIAL,
AND EDUCATION
SUPPORTS AND
SERVICES.**



uc k'w iksk'xítm?

How can
we help?

Best Practices: Our Service Coordination team has grown this year and has been asked by other organizations and the federal funder to share guidance with others on setting up a strong Jordan's Principle program.

- 241 new files were opened in 2023-24—71 more than in 2022-23
- \$2,385,074 in supports and services for families has been approved since ONA took over service coordination in February 2021

Navigating Healthcare

Nation members deserve optimal healthcare but getting it can be challenging. These two ONA-based, Nation-shared positions help community members access services and resources in a timely way—with a strong advocate and supporter by their side.

The Healthcare Advocate: This ONA position works with Nation members—at their request—to help them navigate their health journeys. This includes guiding members and their families to existing health services, providing support at medical appointments, and consulting with medical staff and families about decision-making on client care outcomes—as well as discharge preparations and follow up treatments. The Healthcare Advocate helps with the following: patient advocacy, FNHA Health Benefits, navigation with disability applications, chronic disease management, medical equipment reimbursement, travel reimbursement, and the appeals process for medical services. In 2023-24, the Healthcare Advocate regularly handled numerous in-person appointments each week, maintaining a busy schedule with an average of 25 visits each month.

One Nation member who requested the support of the Healthcare Advocate to navigate a complex health emergency expressed heart-felt gratitude and reported ongoing satisfaction with their medical experiences.

This past year, the Healthcare Advocate helped identify and remedy barriers that impact access to timely and quality healthcare for Syilx Nation members and for First Nations more broadly.

- **Services For Vision Impairment:** The Healthcare Advocate identified a barrier common to all Indigenous people in BC: namely that while the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) provides services for those with vision impairment, there have been ongoing challenges and a lack of responsiveness despite several years of effort. The Healthcare Advocate offered assistance that resulted in a provider number being obtained with the successful outcome that CNIB can now submit pre-authorizations to Pacific Blue Cross with minimal obstacles for First Nations.
- **Access To Healthcare Supplies:** A similar situation with a major healthcare supplier was causing delays for First Nations in accessing equipment and supplies. Again, with a provider number in place, the obstacles were resolved and First Nations no longer needed to pay upfront or face long delays.

The Mental Health And Addictions Specialist: This Nation-based Specialist continues to see an increase in Syilx Nation members reaching out to talk about support for them and their communities. The position has observed a growing openness about mental health challenges including personal struggles or the challenges faced by our loved ones—and peer support meetings are ongoing. The position works directly with high-risk mental health clients in community, providing counselling as well as supports with case management from planning and intake to treatment and aftercare with some notable successful outcomes. The main focus of the position is on helping build capacity with band staff, service



THE MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS SPECIALIST HELPS TO BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY, PROMOTE HARM REDUCTION, REDUCE STIGMA AND SHAME, DECREASE RATES OF OVERDOSE, AND PROMOTE HEALING.

providers, and partners including naloxone training, harm reduction education, working with community-based teams, and helping with clinical interventions when communities are impacted by trauma including working with the Okanagan Nation Crisis Response Team (ONRT).

- 2 high risk clients were fast tracked into the treatment process instead of having to wait 3-4 extra months due to advocacy by the Specialist challenging the current bureaucratic system for addiction treatment.
- 6 band open houses included a program display and Naloxone training.
- 7 youth and 21 adults on the program caseload.
- 204 resources provided

“Always remember who you represent. What you’re doing today, representing your community, is the highest of honour. We are all so very proud of you.”



There In A Crisis

THOSE WHO HELP

Connecting regularly with communities while working at a Nation level, ONA provides specialized crisis services, brings communities together for education and connection, and escalates community voices to ensure they are heard at every level.

While our work of Syilx resurgence continues to move forward, we are all too aware that our wellbeing as Syilx Okanagan people is challenged as individuals, families, and communities by ongoing crises—whether they are violence and toxic drugs or the ecological devastation of wildfires and floods exacerbated by climate change. Our communities have current needs for support and crisis management and these will carry on—even as we work to create a future that moves beyond response mode by increasing prevention, strengthening our traditional ways, and doing the work to build Indigenous-driven policies and programs that continue to strengthen our people.

Syilx Mental Wellbeing Plan: A call to develop integrated wellness plans was initiated by the need for programs and services that are relevant to the Syilx Okanagan Nation where our people continue to experience issues with mainstream services that include long waitlists, confusion about service providers' roles, ineffective transitions to and from services, and services that continue to fall short of meeting the mental health needs of Syilx individuals, families and communities. In response to this, the Syilx Mental Wellbeing Plan builds on Syilx traditions, ideas, skills and abilities to serve our people. The vision is to provide appropriate services in a manner that respects Syilx values, spirituality, and traditional knowledge. The intent is to work toward integration and expansion of local programs and implement new services, while also working with mainstream mental health and substance use services to provide supplementary resources including specialized care such as psychiatry and other disciplines.

Emergency Management: ONA Natural Resources coordinates planning for emergency management with the Syilx Nation and collaborates with Wellness staff as required including planning for local state of emergency situations. New provincial legislation passed in November 2023 brings into play a 4-year staged implementation of planning for health emergencies such as a pandemic, the opioid crisis, or health impacts of floods and fires.



The Addictions and Toxic Drug Crisis

Even as our people increasingly rise in culture and strength, the crisis of toxic drugs and the impact of addictions continues to be felt against a backdrop of intergenerational trauma and resulting economic disparity, lack of housing, and other social determinants of health caused by colonization. ONA has been responding to this crisis since the Nation Drug Forum was first held in 2004 after the tragic events at the Penticton Indian Band. In the intervening 20 years, ONA has worked with communities to develop powerful prevention initiatives like the Syilx Unity Run, land-based camps, and the Okanagan Nation Response Team (ONRT). Despite the success of these programs, addictions continue to claim too many of our people. We know that there is much more to do and this issue remains a top priority for CEC and ONA Operations.

nʔaysnú laʔxʷ Family Wellness Centre:

A highlight for this past year was beginning the planning, development, and implementation of the nʔaysnú laʔxʷ (Ashnola) Family Wellness Centre with support and collaboration from Central City Foundation, Interior Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and Provincial Health Services Authority. The endeavor is a significant step towards enhancing Syilx family wellness on a Nation scale. It is gratifying to have voices coming together from diverse backgrounds in a commitment to inclusivity and holistic wellbeing. What makes it even more fulfilling is that it is designed to be Nation-led, ensuring that it reflects the diverse needs and voices of the communities. This milestone embodies a vision of collective empowerment and unity between the communities within the Nation towards addressing the need for treatment facilities that reflect the interconnectivity of our families and the inclusive nature of Syilx wellness.

Syilx Nation Drug And Human Trafficking

Forum: ONA has been hosting annual forums since 2018. The 2023 forum was held April 19-20th in Penticton. This year the forum included a focus on human trafficking given that mental health, substance use, and human trafficking are a growing epidemic in the Okanagan region and are directly affecting Syilx Nation member communities. There is grave concern about the increase in trafficking being observed in our region and the vulnerability of our youth, and especially our girls, women, and 2SLGBTQIA+ members. Prevention and intervention are required to combat this danger. The forum opened with a ceremony and prayers for those affected by mental health, addictions, and human trafficking. Over the 2 days, panel discussions explored the root causes in colonization, looked at firsthand experiences in Syilx Nation communities, talked about current work to combat the crisis and spotlighted the importance of healthy relationships and strong partnerships in moving forward. Resources and toolkits to help prevent and respond to human trafficking were shared. Both afternoon sessions included open discussions about action planning to support family, community, Nation and partners to take the next steps.

Purple Ribbon Campaign: The ONA supports Syilx bands with this annual campaign to honour Overdose Awareness Day (Aug. 31st) and this past year saw an average of 30+ people attending in each community to learn more, share experiences, and engage in Naloxone training. Hundreds of more people engaged in online discussion boards and prize draws, contributing to broader distribution of resource, increased awareness, and less stigma for Nation members and their families living with addition issues.

SƏXʷKƏNXIT ƏLX: THOSE WHO HELP

Okanagan Nation Response Team (ONRT) is in place to support the Nation with crisis response that is culturally safe and grounded in our ways—as well as sharing trainings that help our people find life-affirming paths. The team is made up of individuals from different communities with extensive training in suicide response and education, community mobilization, and crisis response. We support families in crisis and promotes protective factors against suicide for our youth and Nation members, offering timely and culturally appropriate resources in crisis situations that include tragic deaths, mental health crises, and extreme environmental events.

15th Annual Spirit of Syilx Unity Run (June 1-4, 2023) was held to build crisis prevention within Syilx communities, support education on suicide and violence for the youth, and share cultural knowledge regarding traditional mental health. The run brought 150 Syilx youth and members together over the 3 days to run the Syilx Indigen Residencial School Monument in Penticton to Christina Lake Provincial Park.

- ONRT was mobilized 33 times
- Responded to 23 suicide ideations
- Provided 11 group supports for suicide ideation

You Empowered Strong (YES)

The YES Program continued to bring Syilx knowledge and strength-based practices to the work of creating a Nation-shared response to family violence. As the work carries on, the need only becomes more evident and urgent. Responding to family and sexual violence lacks for both funding and capacity but the YES Team is committed to carrying on, fighting through stigma, and moving towards a Syilx view of understanding violence and its root causes. This past year saw new funding to support expanded services for sexual assault and the addition of a new Coordinator position. Another focus has been strengthening partnerships to help enhance the experiences of Syilx Nation members when they access first response care.

The program works to build the skills of families dealing with the impacts of domestic violence and sexual assault to grow healthier and stronger. Strong community relations are encouraged as a means of helping to build prevention and response capacity through professional collaboration.

Services are family-driven. Each family receives support in the process of creating holistic wellbeing and safety plans. One-on-one supports vary with the preference of those involved and can include: emotional support, advocacy, connecting clients to cultural supports, debriefing, developing a safety plan, and assisting clients in accessing resources and referrals to other programs. Resources and trainings are available for communities and these are provided in a collaborative and responsive manner with the community determining what they need.

- 2 specialized trainings hosted
- 3 online #WeLoveLanguage contests

- 1,676 people reached thru 50 education campaigns, workshops, and events
- 90 people reached through 3 specialized training sessions
- 36 collaboration and partnership meetings
- 20 family and/or individual responses were provided

Collaboration: The Syilx Family Violence Network met 3 times in 2023-24, bringing together specialists throughout the Nation to discuss trends and to link service providers with communities. Meetings identified issues and opportunities including a focus on sexual exploitation and human trafficking in the Territory. YES helps partners ensure cultural safer approaches in their work with Syilx communities.

The #WeLoveLanguage Campaign: This campaign (Feb. 2024) reminded the Syilx Nation to be mindful of the words we use when we speak to others. This year, people were encouraged to take care of our thoughts and to greet others—and ourselves—with welcome and respect. The campaign brought awareness to the language we use and issues of violence in our communities—as well as being mindful of listening to others. #WeLoveLanguage stressed the importance of recognizing unity, inclusivity, and the diversity of all people. The campaign shared: 221 T-shirts, 300 decals, 50 posters, 700 candy heart packages, and 700 Hershey Kisses.

Building Capacity: Syilx Nation members, frontline band staff, and YES partners were invited to a YES Virtual Specialized Training (Jan. 24, 2024) to learn about responding to forms of violence including intimate partner violence and human trafficking. The session brought in SOAR co-founders Karen Mason and Dr. Paul Van Donkelaar (UBCO) to talk

about the intersection between brain injury and intimate partner violence with 35 participants.



KʷU ԁC'ULLUʔS: FRONTLINE WELLNESS GATHERING

The kʷu ԁc'ulluʔs: Frontline Wellness Gathering (March 15-17, 2024) gave 28 participants from Syilx Nation member bands the opportunity for specialized training alongside cultural care, self-care, and a sense of respite. Frontline workers in the nation have a community responsibility to be prepared to respond to a crisis 24-7. This has led to consistent exposure to vicarious trauma, experiences of compassion fatigue, and even health issues. This YES gathering gave appreciation through helpful tools, meaningful peer discussions, and rest in a relaxing atmosphere. The gathering focused on building capacity for frontline workers on sensitive topics including responding to sexual violence disclosure in a culturally informed way, links between intimate partner violence and brain injury, understanding the signs and symptoms of trauma, and how to prevent personal burnout while supporting those in crisis. The gathering also included team building, cultural healing, and personal wellness activities.



Photo: Syilx Nation Gathering

Indian Residential School Program

Guided by the Syilx Indian Residential School (SIRS) Committee, which has each member represented in it, this project undertakes projects to commemorate the experiences of former Syilx Indian residential students and to promote healing within our communities and Nation. The Committee meets regularly and this includes travel across the Territory as required. This past year marked the first time that Syilx Chiefs attended some of our meetings, providing an opportunity for the Committee to be heard by leaders and continue to build those relationships.

Moving Forward in Our Truth: A Nation-based strategy for healing from the Indian residential school experience and intergenerational impacts has been developed through community engagements in each of the seven bands with Elders, Survivors, family members, and band staff.

First Healing Circle: Delivering our first Healing Circle which has been a workplan item for years and finally we have completed one! Great discussions, learned lots for delivery of future healing circles.

- 250 people of all ages attended Walk for the Children (September 30, 2023), following a visible route through Penticton to raise awareness and reach the IRS monument where elders and survivors shared stories.
- 7 SIRS Committee members travelled to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg for a national gathering that brought together over 500 people impacted by IRS.
- 1st SIRS Healing Circle was held at LSIB (November 22, 2023) with valuable discussions and relationship building.

Child and Family Planning

The ONA builds on the work of past generations as well as the guidance of Syilx leadership and the Wellness Committee to support member communities to achieve their desired outcomes related to child, youth, and family wellbeing. This is systems change work and it includes co-developing Syilx processes to address the lack of equitable resources available to our families. A recent focus has been on moving away from silos and working instead to forge robust links between programs serving our children, youth, and families, supporting collaboration at the community and Nation levels.



axá i? sccuntat i? tl ǵa?xítat ǵl i? nǵsíl̓t̓at (Family Declaration): This landmark document lays out the principles and values that our people live by—and that we expect all visitors to our territory to abide by when working with our children. Developed starting in 2016, the Family Declaration was adopted at the ONA AGA in Revelstoke in 2022 and finally signed by the leadership of all 7 Syilx communities as of February 2024. This written expression of Syilx Okanagan traditional family law forms a foundation for protocol agreements with partners and acts as a guide for community wellness policies.

Syilx Training Program: Hosting a diploma program to increase the skills of child and family workers in Syilx communities was a focus of the Child and Family Planning Team this year. Education was free for the 12 students who attended, and we raise our hands to them for their commitment of time and energy to furthering their own learning in a way that will contribute back to our communities. The Syilx Nation Indigenous Human Service Worker (IHSW) is running in collaboration with Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT). By August 2024, the students will have a first-year Certificate in Human Service Work, with Year 2 set to begin in September 2024 so that these students can obtain their Diploma in Indigenous Human Service Work—which will count as the first two years towards obtaining a Bachelor of Social Work. These students and the work they are committing to will ensure our families receive care that is informed by Syilx perspectives and understandings.

Grandmothers Gathering 2023: This popular annual event was attended by 53 Grandmothers representing all Nation communities. Together, the matriarchs in attendance were responsible for a total of 363 grandchildren, 136 great-grandchildren, and 6 great-great-grandchildren. This year, the gathering explored the values in the Fish and the Bird captíkʷł, encouraging grandmothers to use their voices to regain their authority and heal colonial impacts on their families. The Syilx Nation Virtual Grandmothers Group meets every other month—facilitated by the Child and Family Planning Team. These meetings provide a space for Nation grandmothers to connect, share teachings with one another, and take part in trainings as they become available. They have been considering their vision for the future, honouring the past, and paving the way for those to come.

Planning & Engagement: The nǵsíl̓t̓at | Family Services Nation Engagement and Information Session was held at the Penticton Indian Band Hall in November 2023 to provide key information on jurisdiction, funding, and development opportunities available to our communities. At the request of communities, the ONA worked with two bands in the Nation to support their community strategic planning sessions. With a commitment to ongoing engagement, the Child and Family Policy and Planning information booth was present at all of the open houses held in each of the 6 ONA communities this past year.

Youth Wellness

This past year saw the Youth Wellness Coordinators support the highest number of youths to date through group delivery and outreach. Youth Wellness continued the preventative work of connecting Syilx youth ages 12-19 with peers and communities in healthy ways through the R'Native Voice program, supporting them to make good choices, build positive peer networks, and cope with social pressures within today's tough environment of anxiety, drug use, violence, depression, and suicide.

Youth Wellness took a holistic, cultural approach to help youth and their families navigate the mental wellness system, get informed about services, and develop wellness plans. The participation of Elders, storytellers, land-based Knowledge Keepers, and mentors was welcomed as the program engaged with youth in all communities, as well as their parents and caregivers. Special efforts were also made to build strong collaborative partnerships with band youth workers and schools.

Traditional wellness approaches were incorporated into ongoing outreach, as well as 1-to-1 mental-emotional health support for multiple youth referrals. Youth Wellness responded to requests from communities to integrate the Syilx Traditional Games Toolkit into their child and youth programs. Youth Wellness supported annual events including the Unity Run, Elder Youth Summit, and Drug and Human Trafficking Forum—and also took the lead in organizing the following events:

- Men's Wellness Gathering (July 14-16, 2023) on the land at Upper Nicola with 40 men and 7 youth.
- Syilx Youth Gathering (Aug 1-2, 2023) summer camp at nʔaysnú laʔxʷ (Ashnola) with 53 youth.
- Winter Youth Gathering (Mar 9-10, 2024) was the first Syilx youth conference with 56 youth, 11 adults, and 8 children.

Highlights by the numbers:

- 650 youth served
- 183 children served
- 83 group sessions held
- 7 youth camps supported
- 2 Nation youth events

“I want you to be aware of that when you're on the land, that you're praying for your families and thinking about our community,”

- nkʷancinəṃ, Spirit of Syilx Unity Run 2023

Youth Wellness Coordinators aim to empower youth voices, promote nation building, and encourage healthy peer networks.





Photo: Walk for the Children

kʔulusmntm iʔ nąqsiltat | Family Decision Making (FDM)

Created by ONA Wellness almost 20 years ago and formerly known as Family Decision Making, shares tools and supports with Indigenous families so they can promote safety and connection while holding space for healing and their inherent rights to plan for their children. The program serves Indigenous families with children age 0-19 living in Syilx Okanagan territory where children may be at risk of removal by the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD)—or where a removal may have already happened. The program has helped to ensure Syilx children remain in their community. At its core is the importance of kinship and family relationships, elders, culture and the identity of children, respect, openness, honesty, and collective responsibility. The children are always at the heart of the circle.

This year, the program mounted a campaign encouraging families to recognize their strengths and talk openly about their extended family and community. The program also organized Family Group Conferencing training for community staff to build local capacity.

- 27 children supported.
- 90% of the families supported were Syilx.
- 25 Family Wellness Kits shared with each community for Family Day to support togetherness.
- 60+ Syilx participants gave feedback on the workshops they would like.
- 75+ participants reached over 11 information sessions.

Syilx Early Years

Children, families, and frontline workers all benefit from this program. Families are connected to relevant programs and services, including referrals to other ONA Wellness programs as well as child development case management. For frontline workers, the annual 2-day Early Years Gathering, which drew 58 attendees in 2023, provided a professional development opportunity and the chance to engage with fellow childcare workers. The program enhances working relationships both within the Nation and with outside partners through monthly meetings of the AECD Network for Nation Program Managers and through the quarterly ASCD/AIDP Network.

sqilx^w Birthing Gathering: Informed by a small group of Syilx women, this gathering held in Penticton (June 26-27, 2023) was the first time for coming together to share Syilx birthing stories, knowledge, and experiences. The 2-day event brought together 40 people and included time for sharing as well as dreaming to empower ourselves around birthing and an open safe space for talking about subjects like pelvic health, hormones, breastfeeding, and post-partum.

Retaining Staff: There is an ongoing need to address the importance of pay equity for Syilx Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). ONA continues to help ECEs and bands with wage policies to ensure ECEs are paid equally based on their certifications and experience.

- 20+ Syilx-focused educational resources are available to support our young ones.
- 40 people attended the first Birthing Gathering held at the En'owkin Centre in June 2023
- 58 attended the Early Years Gathering in Kelowna in May 2023
- 114 people were reached through gatherings and monthly meetings



Photo: Syilx Nation members attending the third session of captikʷᑦ: kʷəckʷəcstim iʔ stəʔtəʔtet on April 19, 2024.

captikʷᑦ: kʷəckʷəcstim iʔ stəʔtəʔtet

STRENGTHENING OUR TRUTH

The ONA once again hosted a series of captikʷᑦ Forums in partnership with the En'owkin Centre as opportunities for insight and community engagement in examining Syilx captikʷᑦ. Participants explore how the lessons and protocols from captikʷᑦ connect with our contemporary lives, and how to integrate the Syilx values and principles found within captikʷᑦ into the work of ONA Wellness planning and services. This year, the first two sessions were virtual with the first session, on Dec. 19, 2023, focusing on snk'lip cxʷuysts iʔ kʷəuwaptət naʔ iʔ kʷəuwapaʔtət k'əl iʔ tmxʷu'laʔxʷtət (Coyote Brings the Horse and the Dog to the Interior). Storytelling was by laxlaxʷ (Dr. Jeannette Armstrong) in nsyilxcən and by Anna Tonasket in English. There was a keynote by Thomas Pierre followed by a panel of storytellers addressing the oral traditions of captikʷᑦ that included kəʔkəmpica (Rose Caldwell), mahuya (Dr. Bill Cohen), Justine Manuel, Peggy Joe, and Sienna Belanger. The afternoon was devoted to breakout sessions with reflections on healthy relationships, compassion, and wellness. The second virtual session, on Jan. 25, 2024, focused on snk'lip naʔ qʷisp (Coyote and the Buffalo) with caylx (Richard Armstrong) sharing it in nsyilxcən. The panel of storytellers included kəʔkəmpica (Rose Caldwell), sumaxatkʷ (Tracey Kim Bonneau), Savannah Louis, Two Buck Pierre, and calyx Richard Armstrong. Afternoon breakout sessions again focused on healthy relationships, compassion, and wellness. The final session, originally scheduled for February-March 2023 was unfortunately postponed until April 19, 2024, was co-hosted by the Okanagan Indian Band and held in-person in Vernon. iʔ tətʷit iʔ ʔəlsəlx (The Boy Who Was Abandoned) was shared at this session, as told by Joe Abel in 1969. The panel of storytellers included Eric Mitchell, kəʔkəmpica (Rose Caldwell), Anna Tonasket, nk'lxʷcin (Chad Eneas). After lunch, the group reflected on the story told and created their own storyboards based on the captikʷᑦ.

sux^wtxtem

ASSERTING RESPONSIBILITIES



In our role as
sux^wtxtem—
caretakers of our
ancestral lands,
waters, and all living
beings—we honor a
sacred covenant that
transcends
generations. In turn,
emerges our profound
interconnection with
the tmx^wulax^w land,
siw^lk^w water and
tmix^w all living things.
Stewardship sustains
our communities and
enriches our way of
life.

”

When we take care of them,
they take care of us

Stewardship Through *sux^wtxtem*

PROTECTION AND RESTORATION IN THE FACE OF A CHANGING CLIMATE: TACKLING THE CHALLENGES



Over the last year, the ONA and various Nation-based committees have made significant strides in upholding our sacred stewardship responsibilities across our territory. At the core of our initiatives lies a profound recognition that Syilx culture and our *nsyilxcən* language are inseparable from these responsibilities. These foundational elements are intricately woven into all aspects of our work, underscoring our dedication to holistic preservation and renewal.

Despite our proactive efforts, we remain acutely aware of the escalating challenges facing our communities and ecosystems. The impact of climate change has intensified, manifesting in heightened occurrences of wildfires, flooding, droughts, and landslides across our territory. These environmental disruptions threaten both human communities and the diverse species that inhabit our lands.

In response to these pressing challenges, unity among our People remains paramount. By standing together, we can effectively address the profound impacts of climate change and uphold our responsibilities to safeguard our territory for future generations. This commitment is currently exemplified through the advancement of comprehensive programs focused on monitoring, restoration and recovery of ecosystems throughout our territory. Additionally, robust partnerships have amplified our voice and ensured the alignment of other organizations with our vision for sustainable stewardship.

This can be seen in the continued efforts to work on *cikilax^wm* (prescribed fire) projects throughout the territory. Historically, cultural fire events have played a critical role in maintaining Syilx Okanagan territory. However, the practice of active fire suppression, stemming largely from colonial land management practices, has disrupted these natural cycles. This disruption has resulted in an accumulation of fuel load — dead vegetation — which, coupled with increasingly hot and dry weather patterns due to climate change, has exacerbated the intensity and frequency of wildfires. This has led to a less resilient forest ecosystem, diminishing both cultural and ecological values and posing greater threats to communities and infrastructure.

Moving forward, ONA acknowledges that part of our inherent responsibilities as Syilx People is to restore habitats and mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change. By restoring balance and resilience to our ecosystems, we aim to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and ensure the sustainability of our lands and communities.

As we navigate the challenges posed by climate change and ongoing development pressures, the Syilx Okanagan Nation reaffirms its commitment to unity and stewardship. By upholding our cultural teachings and embracing collaborative efforts, we strive to safeguard our territory, honouring our responsibilities to all living beings, now and for generations to come.

A Home For All Our Relations To Thrive

From large mammals such as caribou to songbirds, frogs, snakes, and predators like lynx, the Syilx Okanagan territory harbors a tapestry of interconnected relations. This rich biodiversity is increasingly imperiled, necessitating concerted and coordinated efforts to protect and restore ecosystems to ensure optimal conditions for all life forms to thrive. Central to this endeavor is the dual mandate of monitoring species populations, while restoring and recovering their habitats to bolster resilience in the face of mounting environmental pressures. By safeguarding these vital ecosystems, we uphold our commitment to sustainable stewardship and the preservation of biodiversity for future generations.

Securing a Home for ki?lawna?

The Okanagan Nation Alliance has taken on multiple comprehensive initiatives to restore and protect the ki?lawna? (grizzly bear) populations throughout the territory. For generations, the ki?lawna? has been integral to Syilx laws and protocols. However, habitat fragmentation and historical pressures have led to significant population declines. Recognizing the urgent need for action, ONA has spearheaded multi-year initiatives to address these challenges and facilitate the recovery of ki?lawna? populations.

ki?lawna?, have seen their global distribution decline by over 50% since the 1800s, with ki?lawna? considered extirpated throughout the centre of the Thompson Okanagan Region, specifically in the Okanagan Highlands and throughout the North Cascades region in the western part of the Syilx Nation. ki?lawna? populations in the Okanagan Highlands and North Cascades have primarily been reduced through habitat degradation, direct persecution by humans, and historic habitat loss stemming from increased human

settlement and the establishment of agriculture. As the human presence and road densities continue to increase in ki?lawna? (grizzly bear) habitat, access to secure habitat has only become more critical.

Under the Southwest BC Grizzly Bear Steering Committee, ONA collaborates with neighboring Nations, provincial representatives, and conservation organizations including Conservation Northwest. Together, they have developed a comprehensive Stewardship Strategy for ki?lawna? in the North Cascades. This strategy outlines objectives and priority actions aimed at enhancing habitat quality and reducing threats to grizzly bear populations.

The North Cascades Grizzly Bear Population Unit (NCGBPU) is one of the most endangered grizzly bear populations in British Columbia. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified the North Cascade populations as critically endangered and are considered functionally extirpated on both sides of the Canada-US border. Due to low grizzly bear numbers in neighbouring populations, heavy habitat fragmentation and increasing road densities it is unlikely that the NCGBPU will recover on its own.

Grizzly bears in the Thompson Okanagan Region, specifically in the Okanagan Highlands of British Columbia, are experiencing high human and road densities in their habitat. To conduct targeted conservation projects that can provide secure habitat for grizzly bears, it is essential to understand the current occupancy of grizzly bears in that area. However, the current occupancy of grizzly bears in the Okanagan Highlands is unknown. This work will estimate the occupancy and density of resident grizzly bears in the Okanagan Highlands, giving

valuable information that can be used to inform, access management, resource extraction and adaptive industry practices.



Photo: ki?lawna? caught on ONA trail cam

“KI?LAWNA? HAS BEEN AN INTEGRAL AND CRITICAL PART OF SYILX CULTURE SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL – ITS PRESENCE IN SYILX TERRITORY IS AN INDICATOR OF THE HEALTH OF SYILX LAND AND PEOPLE”

- ONA TCR 2014



A camera trap network was created across the Okanagan Highlands of British Columbia to determine grizzly bear occupancy and density. This work was done in collaboration with the Westbank First Nation, Okanagan Indian Band and ONA staff who put out a large sum of 90 trail cameras, across a 60 km² area. Work has begun on creating a database of all grizzly bear sightings in the area and this summer/fall, an occupancy and density model will be run on all the data we bring in. A report will be developed and a spatial map of grizzly bear distribution across the Okanagan Highlands will be produced. Work has also begun on creating a habitat connectivity project, that will identify connectivity corridors and potential areas for restoration between the Okanagan Highlands population of grizzly bears and populations to the east in the Kettle-Granby. Since grizzly bears are umbrella species, protecting and restoring habitat for grizzly bears will also help many of the other species that share the same areas.

Not only do ki?lawna? require protected areas to roam, they also need reliable sources to sustain both themselves and their young. Recognizing the importance of stx't'atq black huckleberry and other key food species, ONA is also undertaking a multi-year project to enhance their availability across ki?lawna? habitat. This project integrates traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation practices to improve berry productivity and habitat connectivity for ki?lawna? populations. Syilx knowledge and cultural practices play a pivotal role in ONA's restoration strategies. Guided by Syilx Elders, Knowledge Holders, and community members, ONA integrates traditional understandings of ki?lawna?'s life requirements and human-bear relationships into their conservation initiatives. This approach ensures that cultural values are respected and upheld throughout the restoration process.

The ONA remains committed to the restoration and protection of ki?lawna? populations across their traditional territory. By blending traditional knowledge with contemporary conservation practices and fostering international cooperation, ONA aims to secure a sustainable future for ki?lawna? and their ecosystems.

Bringing styíłca? Home

The ONA remains deeply committed to the conservation and restoration of styíłca? caribou populations within Syilx Territory. Recent actions, including the relocation of the last remaining caribou from the Columbia South herd to the Central Selkirks maternity pen, underscore ONA's dedication to preserving this culturally significant species amidst ongoing habitat loss and population declines.

The decision to relocate the lone female caribou from the Columbia South herd was born out of necessity amidst the precipitous decline of this subpopulation since 1995. Habitat loss within their traditional range has been a primary driver of this decline, prompting a collaborative effort guided by both indigenous knowledge and western wildlife science. The translocation aimed to enhance the caribou's chances of survival, breeding success, calf retention, and to bolster genetic diversity within the Central Selkirks herd.

styíłca? has been integral to Syilx culture since time immemorial, and the depletion of their populations due to colonization has been a source of deep concern and grief for the Syilx Okanagan people. Chief Clarence Louie emphasized ONA's commitment to caribou recovery, stating, "We recognize our responsibility for caribou recovery today, and alongside other First Nations and governmental partners, we are implementing evidence-based approaches to ensure the best outcomes for our relative."

The relocation decision was the result of a collaborative process led by the Revelstoke Complex and Central Selkirk's Caribou Technical Working Group (RCCSCTWG), which includes technical advisors from several First Nations governments, the Province of BC, and the Government of Canada. This partnership exemplifies the collective effort required to address the complex challenges facing caribou recovery, including habitat restoration and population management.

The Okanagan Nation Alliance acknowledges the significant challenges ahead for caribou recovery efforts across the province. Effective collaboration, innovative solutions, and dismantling systemic barriers are essential to achieving sustainable outcomes. ONA remains steadfast in its commitment to stewardship and conservation, ensuring a hopeful future where styíłca? populations thrive once more in Syilx Territory.

yilíkʷlxkn

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) remains steadfast in its commitment to preserving and restoring yilíkʷlxkn (Bighorn sheep) populations within Syilx Territory. yilíkʷlxkn in the southern Okanagan have steadily declined in recent years. There are ongoing health issues affecting California bighorn sheep in the Okanagan Valley known as Psoroptic ("sore-op-tic") Mange and

Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae (M. ovi). This decline is theorized to be due in part to infection by pneumonia and Psoroptes mites as contributing factors to poor yilíkʷlxkn health. Since the 2011 discovery of Okanagan's first psoroptic mange case, the yilíkʷlxkn population has declined by around 60%. Other strains of this Psoroptes parasite have caused the decline and even collapse in the United States yilíkʷlxkn populations. In response to ongoing challenges, ONA's Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) has urged the British Columbia government to collaborate with the Syilx Nation in developing legislation that enforces strict separation between wild and domestic sheep and goats. This legislative framework is essential for safeguarding wild sheep populations and upholding indigenous principles of sustainability and ceremonial use, which are integral to Syilx responsibilities.

Councilor Jordan Coble, ONA Natural Resource Committee Chairman, emphasized the critical need for legislative action, stating, "It is our duty to protect yilíkʷlxkn from diseases transmitted by humans, prevent further suffering, and ensure their survival for future generations."

In collaboration with the Ministry of Water Lands and Resource Stewardship (WLRS), Washington State, the Wild Sheep Society, provincial wildlife vets, and many others, the Syilx Nation is also leading and created an Okanagan Bighorn Sheep Disease Management Strategy. This document outlines potential treatment options for treating Psoroptic Mange and M.ovi, currently affecting bighorn sheep in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia and Okanagan County, Washington State.

In February 2023, the Wild Sheep Society and ONA hosted a Wild Sheep Disease Symposium



Photo: yilíkʷlxkn in Syilx Territory

in Penticton where wild sheep disease experts came from all over the world to collaborate and share knowledge on methods to treat wild sheep disease on the landscape. Stemming from this gathering there has been great collaboration and we have decided that we will be initiating another Psoroptic mange, clinical drug trial. This drug trial will analyze the efficacy of available drugs to treat and keep a wild sheep clear of psoroptic mange. This research will allow us to know which drug we can use effectively on land to treat mange. We also continue to plan for an M.ovi test and removal. The Syilx Nation continues to monitor yilíkʷlxkn health and population status with GPS-telemetry collars and GIS modelling to determine habitat use and suitability that will inform future ecosystem restoration projects. We are also working to analyze bighorn sheep lambing sites to determine what type of habitat restoration could improve them and if there is a need for cultural burning of these sites.

preserving the Ecological Integrity

The Wildlife Management Team at the ONA has been guided by key themes over the past year that align closely with our organizational mandate. Primarily, our focus has been on wildlife conservation, particularly species at risk, which is integral to our responsibility of stewarding tmx^wulax^w and tmix^w. By emphasizing the conservation of endangered species and their habitats, we contribute significantly to preserving the ecological integrity of the Syilx Nation's territories.

This past year, we served the Syilx Nation people through proactive engagement and relationship building focused on species at risk. We facilitated numerous meetings and workshops to enhance understanding and collaboration among stakeholders. Additionally, we provided capacity building opportunities by inviting community members to join ONA staff during fieldwork and offering training workshops. Our outreach efforts extended through various platforms such as working groups, social media updates, and newsletters, ensuring transparency and dissemination of our conservation efforts.

The majority of our department's time this past fiscal was dedicated to several key areas. These included species at risk projects, broader wildlife conservation initiatives, and active participation in the Species at Risk Trilateral Working Group. These efforts aimed to address pressing conservation challenges and promote sustainable management practices across Syilx territories.

Highlights

- **Yellow-breasted Chat Monitoring:** ONA continued its monitoring efforts in the West Kootenays, focusing on understanding the persistent challenges facing this small population. Through color-banding, nest monitoring via remote cameras, and marking nestlings, we gathered crucial data on breeding success and population dynamics.
- **Mesocarnivore and Bat Monitoring:** Initiated with provincial funding, this project deployed 20 remote trail cameras equipped with scent lures to monitor wildlife, enhancing our understanding of mesocarnivores and other species in our territories.
- **Western Painted Turtle GPS Tagging:** Concluding the final year of monitoring at the Oxbow in Penticton, ONA successfully deployed GPS tags on adult female turtles. This initiative provided insights into their terrestrial movements and habitat utilization beyond the Oxbow, contributing to long-term conservation strategies.

As technology advances there is a need to for our team to adopt new technologies, such as solar-powered GPS tags for Western Painted Turtles. These tags transmit real-time data via cellular networks, significantly enhancing our ability to monitor and protect this species.

During the year, ONA also secured funding for new initiatives, including the mesocarnivore and bat monitoring project and a post-burn wildlife habitat area assessment project. These funds underscore our commitment to expanding conservation efforts and adapting to emerging environmental challenges. Significant moments included active community participation in Species at Risk working group meetings, fostering collaborative approaches to conservation

among Syilx Nation members and external stakeholders. Throughout the year, our department hosted and participated in various training workshops and events, including a remote trail camera workshop and bat acoustic training in Kamloops. These initiatives aimed to build capacity among staff and community members while fostering knowledge exchange with other wildlife professionals.

Looking ahead to the 2024/2025 fiscal year, the Syilx Nation can anticipate ongoing wildlife conservation projects, the initiation of a Western Screech Owl monitoring program, and the potential implementation of a badger translocation project, enhancing our conservation efforts and biodiversity stewardship.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO ADHERING TO THESE RESPONSIBILITIES — WITH ONA BIOLOGISTS AND TMIX^w TECHNICIANS WORKING ON THE GROUND TO DEVELOP, MANAGE, AND IMPLEMENT WILDLIFE PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES. FROM THE RESTORATION OF KEY HABITATS TO THE MONITORING OF ENDEMIC SPECIES WE ARE WORKING TO GUARANTEE THAT ALL BEINGS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO THRIVE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

naqsmi?st ʔəl tmixʷ

Syilx people have a deep understanding of their ecosystems, developed over thousands of years of living in harmony with nature. This Traditional Ecological Knowledge includes insights into tmixʷ behavior, migration patterns, and habitat requirements, which are crucial for sustainable resource management.

The tmixʷ Working Group (TWG), formerly called the Syilx Wildlife Habitat and Harvest Working Group, was struck in 2018 with a mandate by the CEC. The group consists of appointed members from each respective Syilx community with a focus on naqsmi?st ʔəl tmixʷ, meaning to come together for all tmixʷ. tmixʷ encompasses every living thing, including the land, wildlife, plants, water, fish, fire, and people. The purpose of TWG is to make recommendations to the Syilx Nation's CEC on issues that the Nation must collectively address as part of its' responsibilities in caring for the Territory. Over the last year, the TWG supported the Natural Resource Committee, provided recommendations, and took action to protect and conserve tmixʷ, uphold Syilx land-use Rights, and support Syilx harvesting practices. The group also worked with government agencies and other user groups to encourage a holistic and sustainable approach in tmixʷ management. Below are a few highlights.

The TWG rapidly developed this year, with multiple specific projects being proposed or underway. The Syilx Hunter Harvest Questionnaire was given to communities to collect data on Syilx harvest perspectives and principles. The data was collected to help inform wildlife population trends, management decisions, wildlife health, and resource needs. These findings have been compiled into a Syilx Harvest Survey Summary and will be shared with the community.

There has also been critical threats to Big Horn Sheep in the territory, so it has been integral to keep the NRC updated on their health. There are currently 3 diseases, and the working group is doing the best they can to educate and bring awareness to these different diseases and their effects on Big Horn Sheep and the landscape. The working group has recommended a disease response and management options that are being discussed to address two main diseases. Planning to treat one and not the other is not preferred but to treat the two diseases simultaneously.

Finally, the group has also been working with the Regional Wildlife Advisory Committee to promote collaboration and transparency in wildlife and habitat management within the Syilx territory and encourage the integration of Syilx knowledge, local perspectives, and citizen science with western science. A term of reference was created and presented to NRC for review. The Together for Wildlife strategy commits to creating or expanding regional wildlife advisory committees to represent a variety of perspectives and provide opportunities for collaboration to improve wildlife stewardship.





Photo: Collaborative Leadership Meeting for Okanagan Lake Watershed. On December 13, 2023, elected leaders – including Chiefs, Mayors, Chairs, Councillors, and Directors – from across the Okanagan region are gathered to discuss the health of our siwłkʷ and klúšxnitkʷ (Okanagan Lake) Watershed. In preparation for the gathering, 24 leaders committed to interviews in which they shared their personal reflections and spoke about the key issues, priorities, opportunities, and challenges in their communities and region.

Honouring Syilx Connections

COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborative Stewardship Forum

The development of the Collaborative Stewardship Forum stems from the understanding and acknowledging the need for collaboration with additional nations and/or B.C. partners during the establishment of objectives and implementation of plans to meet those objectives. The CSF includes members from the Natural Resource Committee as well as representatives from the provincial government. The goal of the CSF is to facilitate leadership and participation aligned with achieving common interests while generating trust. The CSF discussed applying sqilxʷ/syilx/sʔuknaqinx people's principles of mutual support and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. During meetings this year they discussed the four food chiefs and enowkinwixw process and what that would look like in this setting. Everyone in attendance participated in a visualization exercise where they were asked to center the discussion around things we have in common such as the land, water, and resources not in terms of use but caretaking. Notes were taken from the discussion and those were adapted into an infographic. The infographic is still in the process of being edited, finalizing certain language within it but a finalized version will be shared.

nxcip Operations



ONA is committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment that aligns with our cultural values and organizational goals. This section aims to showcase our efforts in talent anagement, training, safety, and succession planning, reflecting our dedication to the well-being and growth of our team members across the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

Guided by tradition, powered by community, the Okanagan Nation Alliance achieves excellence through the synergy of its people and the efficiency of its operations.



Core Services

ENHANCING THE COLLECTIVE WORK



Photo: Open House, PIB Session

The ONA remains responsive to the Chiefs' mandate. As opportunities arise, we continue to manage growth and change, resulting in the expansion of our programs, services, and initiatives.

Optimizing the Organization's Workforce

During the past fiscal year, ONA's Human Resources (HR) department continued to provide comprehensive services encompassing staffing, employee relations, strategic interventions, and workplace health and wellness. This included a heightened focus on creating, monitoring, and maintaining safe workplace standards. HR also played a pivotal role in day-to-day consultations across ONA departments, engaging with government bodies and other First Nation organizations as needed. They diligently monitored metrics, applied ONA governance best practices, and contributed to organizational development systems and structures. Additionally, HR implemented and monitored retention strategies and managed total rewards programs to support employee satisfaction and retention.

A significant initiative undertaken by HR was the planning and implementation of mandatory training under Bill C-65, which amended the Canada Labour Code effective January 1, 2021. This legislation enhances the framework for preventing harassment, including sexual harassment and violence, in federally regulated workplaces. Training sessions were conducted for staff, supervisors, and senior personnel to familiarize them with Bill C-65's implications, required procedures, implementation mechanisms, and potential consequences for non-compliance.

Other key highlights included Transportation of Dangerous Goods, Safety Committee training, Workplace Hazardous Material Information Systems, and Inspection and Safety Investigation Training, all customized to suit ONA's specific workplace needs. These initiatives not only enhanced safety protocols but also contributed to a notable reduction in the WorkSafe BC annual premium, resulting in annual savings of \$18,000.

The ONA staff demonstrated a strong commitment with an average length of service of 4.5 years, while 16% of staff approaching potential retirement underscored the importance of future-focused retention and succession planning strategies to sustain organizational continuity and effectiveness in the coming fiscal years.

Sharing Information and Gathering Community Feedback

To enhance our collective work, we hosted a series of Open Houses to ensure nation members had the opportunity to be informed about the Tribal Council's efforts and have opportunities to provide feedback. The Open Houses allowed for facilitation of face-to-face interactions between ONA staff and members, allowing for real-time questions, feedback, and discussions. These events featured booths from all ONA departments and programs, showcasing programs and services provided to Syilx Nation members and projects and initiatives underway throughout the territory. Due to the success and positive feedback, we will now host Open Houses in each community bi-annually.

Financial Overview

SUMMARY OF REVENUES FOR FISCAL 2023/24

The Okanagan Nation Alliance is primarily a project and proposal driven organization with a small amount of core funding to support the operations. We continue to leverage our systems, staff and assets to be able to deliver consistent results.

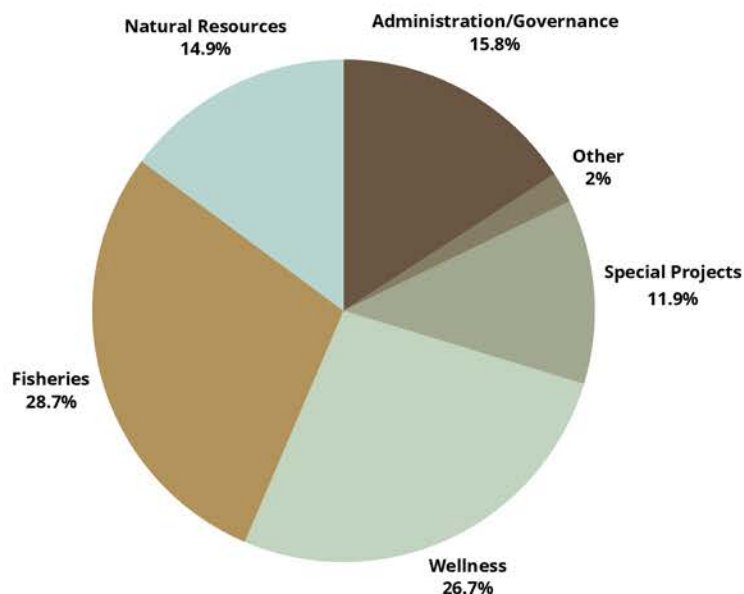
The ONA Administration continues to ensure fiscal accountability to support program, initiative and projects in achieving their contract deliverables and to support future endeavors. Our financial administrators continue to be flexible and forward thinking in order to ensure staff have the tools they need to continue to research, deliver, write proposals and innovate on behalf of the Nation. The finance team monitors the overall financial health of the ONA, ensures compliance with accounting standards, and has a proven track record of clean audits.

Growth in our operations continues with an overall increase in program revenues this fiscal of 7.7% or \$1.2M. The ONA continues to expand due to favorable progress made with partners and timing of our active proposal developments. Development is ongoing throughout our territory, and growth can be seen in many areas including in the Columbia and the Okanagan.

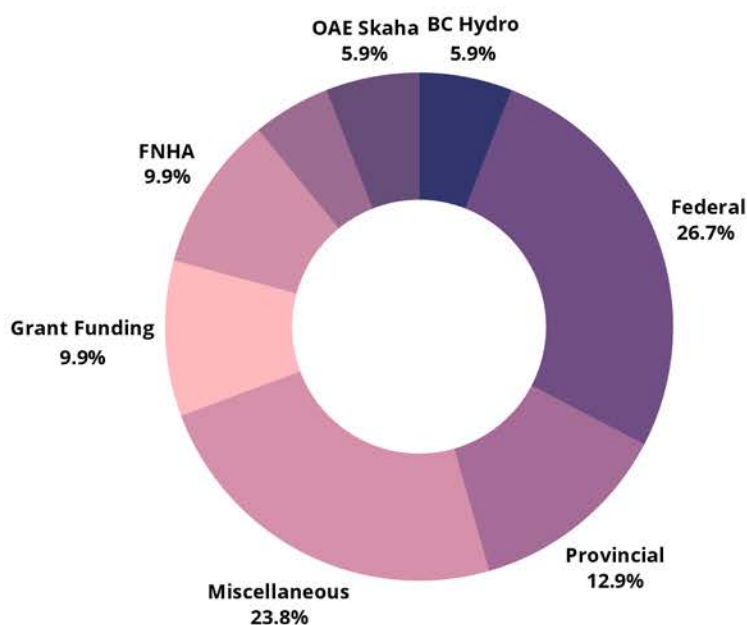
Fisheries funding has increased this year due in part to late amendments that committed capital from Federal funders (Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk) and proceeds from an in house developed program to build Hatcheries in a box. Wellness contributions are down slightly from last fiscal due mainly to program funding fluctuations but with no significant new or abandoned programs. The Natural Resource group saw some exciting growth in revenue due to the expansion of the Wildlife working group and increased funding towards water strategies. Contributions for our Nation events including the Spirit of Syilx Unity Run was very strong this year from a variety of community and corporate sponsors.

Miscellaneous revenue is revenue earned through rent, fishing revenues, book and clothing sales and donations. Other revenue is primarily project related funding from Bands, Local Government, Community and Corporate sources.

Total Revenues by Department



Total Revenues by Funder



Our Voices Are Like The Breeze

"My voice, my language goes right across this country like the breeze. We own this land. We're the Syilx of this land!"

- Joey Pierre

"There are thousands of us living both in Canada and in what they call the United States and we are all living on our land, our traditional lands, even though they are now called reservations and reserves, the people know where they're from."

- Jeanne Jerred

"I believe that this Syilx Nation rebuilding process is our chance to move away from having to defend our territory at every turn. It puts our Nation in the position to exercise our collective rights and responsibilities, drawing on our strength as a people."

- Dr. Grand Chief Stewart Phillip

"Everyone should know their family tree and know who they are."

- Margaret (Maggie) Kruger

"Respect and water – all works together. If you don't have water, if you don't have respect, you're not going to get any place, anywhere."

- Jane Stelkia

"We have to have our own child welfare, do it ourselves. We know how to keep our kids safe."

- Dorothy Ward

"[water] as the most powerful of all things giving life- as much respect as part of the acknowledgement of the creation/creator, it is the physical manifestation of creation/creator as the life force of the land."

- Dr. Marlowe Sam

"Syilx women come from a place of power, we each have a unique gift. We also hold the key to resilience."

- Inez Pierre



"Since the dawn of history, Spotted Lake or, "kʔliłxw" as we call it, has been a sacred place. Indians from all tribes came to visit the lake for the medicine the lake contains. The surrounding ceremonial cairns, too numerous to count, testify to that. Some of these are so ancient that they have sunk underground, and only their tops remain above ground. Some are buried altogether. There are many stories told by our ancestors about the cures this lake has provided, physically and spiritually through its medicine powers."

- Excerpt from the Statement of the Okanagan Tribal Chiefs (1979)

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