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# ANNUAL REPORT



məʔ kl ts ǰ<sup>w</sup>uys, la kin ts sǰəlǰált

## With Deep Gratitude to our Language Speakers

- Pauline Archachan
- Richard Armstrong
- Delphine Armstrong
- Wilfred Barnes
- Rose Caldwell
- Aimee Lezard
- Levi Bent
- Rob Edward
- Carol Holmes
- Joe McGinnis
- Lou Paul
- Abe Sheena
- Shayla Allison
- Hazel Squakin
- Marlene Squakin
- Jane Stelkia
- Sheri Stelkia
- Maynard McRae



The development of the axá i? scuntət i? tl ǰa?xitət ǰl i? nqsiltət Family Declaration took six years to reach completion, with it being signed by the Elders, Language Speakers, and the Chief's Executive Council on July 26, 2022, in Revelstoke, BC. The work took place in all the Nation's communities, involved multiple groups, especially Elders and Language Speakers, and passed through many hands along this journey.

Overall, declarations are recognized internationally as a standard of Nationhood. This declaration is a written expression of aspects of sqilx<sup>w</sup>ca<sup>w</sup>t (Syilx cultural ways of being) and captik<sup>w</sup>t knowledge that are critical to the health and wellbeing of the Nation's families and our children.



## way̓ ǰast s̓xləǰalt i? p\_ isnəqsílx<sup>w</sup>

Since inauguration in 1981, the ONA has worked towards creating both governance structures and operations that uphold the Okanagan Nation Declaration. At the center of this work is our mandate to work collectively to advance and assert Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights across the entirety of the 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 2022-2023 fiscal year, which reports on initiatives, activities and progress as we work to uphold the Okanagan Nation Declaration.

**"For the good of all for all time."**

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# TRIBAL CHAIR MESSAGE

YILMIXM KI LAW NA | CHIEF CLARENCE LOUIE

## WE ARE IN THE SAME CANOE PADDLING IN THE SAME DIRECTION.

This year, the ONA remains focused on building unity amidst all the divisive politics that abound and act to separate us as we strive to strengthen our Syilx governance systems at home and as a Nation where we must defend our inherent birthright—the unconquered, unceded lands of the Syilx Okanagan Nation—just as our ancestors did before us. Constitutionally protected Syilx title and rights are the underpinning of our tribal sovereignty with our culture and language intact.

The Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) comprises the yilmixʷm from each member community and is responsible for Title and Rights Strategic Direction and Assertion, governance, finance and the legal authority for the ONA. The CEC engages with ONA Operations to ensure the continuance of the good works of Natural Resources, Fisheries, and Wellness in stewarding our lands and waters and bringing services and supports to our people. This work remains in the spirit of the Okanagan Nation Declaration of 1987: “For the good of all, for all time.”

**Making History:** I am proud to share that this past year saw critical work completed on historic milestones for the Nation and our communities. Engagement with BC Hydro and with the Columbia River Treaty negotiations have brought us to an interim 4-year agreements many years in the making. At the same time, we remain steadfast in demanding justice for the crimes of colonialism, whether it is unmarked graves, murdered and missing women, or the international border cutting us off from our families in the like on the Colville Confederated Tribes Indian Reservation.

**Columbia River Treaty:** Since 2018, Syilx Okanagan leaders have sat at the table with the Ktunaxa and Secwépemc Nations as well as the governments of Canada and BC, working to negotiate a new Columbia River modernized Treaty with the US. This past year saw the realization of interim agreements for each Nation to receive 5% of the revenue generated by Canada through the sale of power. This is the first time we will receive benefits from the treaty



dams. For too long, decisions were made without any form of consent and we were left with devastating impacts. The dams continue to impact our title and rights. This historic first step attests to the continued efforts by the CEC over many years. Alongside our First Nations neighbors, we are on a long journey of righting past injustices with the Crown. Negotiations are continuing for a long-term agreement to address environmental, cultural, and economic impacts.

**UNB-ONA Solar Project:** Recognizing the importance of the Syilx Okanagan Nation's traditional territories as an energy corridor in BC, leadership has prioritized opportunities to develop energy projects for the benefit of our communities. Over the past decade, the UNB and Okanagan Nation Association have jointly developed a ground-breaking solar project, set to be the largest in BC. An important focus of this past year has been negotiating an agreement with BC Hydro for the purchase of electricity from the project for a 40-year period. This puts the Syilx Okanagan Nation at the forefront of renewable energy initiatives, exemplifying our dedication to self-sufficiency and the well-being of our communities.

**UNDRIP Action Plan:** The ONA entered into the Enduring Relationship Agreement in 2011 with BC Hydro, the largest corporation impacting syilx Okanagan Territory. A working collaboration has evolved and, while there are still issues, the Enduring Relationship has created an avenue for dealing with them. One issue that the CEC addressed this past year was the failure of BC Hydro's draft Action Plan for UNDRIP implementation to set out real and meaningful changes for doing business. The ONA provided detailed feedback and discussion, which led to changes in the Plan to more clearly acknowledge and help action First Nations rights and title.





**Photo:** Chief Clarence Louie, Chairman Andrew Joseph Jr., and City of Nelson Council members at the s̓n̓ʕay̓ckstx Gathering.

**Always Our Children:** The ONA marked the anniversary of the announcement by Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc about the 215 unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School by calling on Canada to move past hollow apologies and criminally investigate these findings as murder. We are demanding justice, equality, and actualization of human rights, no apologies without real action. We continue to send prayers to all peoples who are being impacted by these findings. This intentional cultural genocide was—and is—carried out to remove Indigenous people from each other, our spirit, and the lands that the settlers covet. As these truths continue to be unearthed, we encourage all Nation members to unite and continue supporting the survivors and each other through the emotional and mental health impacts.

**Salmon:** Over the last 80 years, dams on the Columbia River system destroyed land, disrupted ecosystems, and destroyed historical villages, sacred sites, burial grounds, and food harvesting area, breaking many of our cultural and family connections. Today, the ONA is working with the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc Nations to reintroduce sockeye salmon to the Upper Columbia watershed. As part of these efforts, sockeye fry releases and ceremonies took place, providing an opportunity to affirm our deep connections to ntyitix and our responsibilities to be stewards of our lands and waters.

**Colville Confederated Tribes Business Council (CCTBC):** When it comes to our family across the line, we may be divided by colonization and the Canada-US border, but we remain united through our common language, culture, history, and traditions.

As Tribal Chairman and longstanding member of ONA, we continue to persist with managing organizational change as the environmental, social, and political pressures befall us all as First Nations Indian peoples. We have updated the ONA Constitution, we host many meetings to keep our collective dialogue going, and I have always upheld that our meetings are never behind closed doors, thus meetings are always open. Even though USIB and UNB are not formal members of ONA, they still as Syilx Okanagan Nation communities are apprised of meetings as we work through our own internal conflicts. In addition, we have CCTBC relationships to uphold, yet are excluded from their Sinixt legal and political strategies here in Canada. Even amongst our own communities there is much to do so that we all mutually benefit, collectively—the Unity Principle remains our guiding force. **We are all in same canoe and only by paddling in the same direction can we honour and uphold our ancestral responsibilities.**



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE

SUIKI?ST | PAULINE TERBASKET

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The ONA embodies collective work that predates all of us—cumulative over these many years. The work of operations continues to evolve as a First Nations tribal organization mandated with the business goals of supporting Syilx Okanagan lands, resources, and beautiful people. This work is within the mandate as set by the CEC over the years and the ongoing diligence of the Chiefs in bringing forward the voices of the people.

The focus this past year has been on keeping the canoe going forward, guided by the priorities of members. Our families continue to get services. Our fish continue to return. Our lands continue to be stewarded amidst the realities of the colonial system that continues to impact and restrict us.

We gratefully lift the ONA staff and celebrate all they do each day to be transparent and accountable in the delivery of excellence. Annually, ONA staff organize so many gatherings and ceremonies in support of our families, our salmon, our Food Chiefs. Our staff roll out ground-breaking programs for children like Jordan's Principle and raise their voices to bring Syilx principles to the protection of our forests, waters, and four-legged ones including ki?lawnwa? grizzly bear and yilíkʷlxkn bighorn sheep. The words of our Elders provide guidance in many ways including through the Syilx Indian Residential Schools Committee and their direction on numerous projects from the Spirit of Syilx Unity Run to Orange Shirt Day and the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. All this good work of Wellness, Fisheries, and Natural Resources is achieved under the direction of our leadership and everyone with paddles in the water to move the Nation forward. We continue to find our rhythm as we maneuver our canoe.

**Perspective:** There is so much work— Syilx Nation building is no easy task or responsibility, however we are reminded of the direction of Elders and leaders—past and present—who stand by the Okanagan Nation Declaration. Thus, being so busy and always more to do that it can be easy to lose sight of the big picture. This year, staffing has been complicated with a tight job market and the challenge of finding a new fisheries manager after 25 years.



Alongside this is the focus of building the capacity of our youth. We are all busy and there is so much to respond to: climate change and its impacts on our lands and people, MMIWG+ and the failure of government to take action, species at risk, Indigenous child welfare, social determinants of health, and the continued trauma of 215+. There is also the fact that our work as a tribal organization is dependent on government funding to support wellness, stewardship, and economies so that the Syilx Okanagan peoples may thrive on a territory that sustained our ancestors in abundance until contact. We know that these colonial systems still impede the rebuilding of our communities and that justice in federal policy remains elusive with funding inequities at every level of our community operations.

Yet, amidst all the challenges, exciting and important work continues. ONA is a leader in restoration and protection of Syilx food systems that are deeply rooted in our way of life. We are host secretariat to the Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (CRSRI) where ceremonies and a powerful youth camp are building up Salmon Warriors. Our Annual General Assembly for 2022 was held in Revelstoke, demonstrating ongoing presence in our north-eastern Syilx territory. At the southern edge of our territory, we saw the highest return of Okanagan sockeye salmon since records began in 1938 and the ONA was able to share 200,000 meals with Nation members.

Many innovative minds contribute to the work of finding our Syilx way forward. ONA administration holds space so that Indigenous best practices can be illuminated as we work to deconstruct systems and liberate our people. In partnership with IndigenEYEZ, ONA supported the new generation of nsyilxcən learners and teachers to gather and chart a path for keeping our language awake. Dialogue can be a source of new opportunities that Indigenous tribes have been pursuing since contact.



**Photo:** Pauline Terbasket and Syilx Nation members at the sən'lip i skʷants (Enloe Dam) Salmon Calling Ceremony

Our data sovereignty work, like all our programs, is grounded in engagement with community and, this past year, brought language speakers together to identify sqlxʷ principles to further ground the Data Plan in sqlxʷ+cawtət our ways.

**In This Together:** These achievements do not just happen. There is a backdrop of collective effort behind each milestone. In education, we are seeing the flourishing of seeds that have grown into partnerships with UBC Okanagan, Okanagan College, Selkirk College and the En'owkin Centre including success with SSHRC funding finally for the co-curricular project with UBCO that has been underway for years to support public school teachers to better take responsibility to indigenize the classroom.

Another historic milestone in 2022 was the historic signing of the axá i? scuntət i? tl xa?xítət xl i? nəqsiltət Family Declaration at the AGA. Since 2017, the ONA has worked in collaboration with member communities, Language Speakers and Elders to develop this Declaration upholding Syilx laws and affirming our rights and responsibilities to protect our children and families. This builds on the advocacy of our mothers and grandmothers for over 30 years and our time-honoured ways of supporting one another as families, communities, and a Nation.

We live today with the long-term benefits of our collective defense of Syilx title and rights. Initiatives like the Columbia River Treaty and the UNB-ONA solar project remind us that we are stronger together. Our people must be diligent to keep relationships intact. These are aggregate, cooperative processes that Indigenous peoples have known from the beginning of time.

**Decolonizing:** At the same time, politics are often divisive and we must acknowledge the ongoing tensions between ONA operations and political governance and the impact this has. One impact this past year was the loss of substantial funds back to the federal government subsequent to the Chiefs choosing to continue to pause the self-determination table agreement. There is no avoiding conflict as we take on decolonizing practices—it is our greatest challenge to look within, desire the change, and take responsibility for it. This is the struggle of the oppressed throughout all sectors as we try to change systems and breathe action into nxʷelxʷeltantət, that which gives us life.

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“We are the unconquered aboriginal people of this land, our mother; The creator has given us our mother, to enjoy, to manage and to protect; we, the first inhabitants, have lived with our mother from time immemorial; our Okanagan governments have allowed us to share equally in the resources of our mother; we have never given up our rights to our mother, our mother’s resources, our governments and our religion; we will survive and continue to govern our mother and her resources for the good of all for all time.”

- Okanagan Nation Declaration, 1987

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Bringing the people together remains central to the work of ONA. Gathering has always been a defining feature of our collective culture as one people. Ceremony binds us to one another, to our lands and waters, to our ancestors and our People-to-Be. We continue this today with the Salmon Feast, the Unity Run, the Four Food Chiefs Gathering, and so many other events. The Syilx Elder Youth Summit held at the AGA each year is a powerful moment of Elders and Youth on the land sharing what it means to be Syilx and passing this to the next generation. This is how we move forward as one people with stewardship for our territory: these covenants that were made with our ancestors.

Indigenous peoples have been always in this state of flux and change and crisis. The message continues to be: Stay the course. Paddle the canoe. Think about the People-to-Be. What will their future look like?

We have inherited the imperative of continuing this work so that the People-to-Be will know what it means to be Syilx. So that they will have language tools. Clean water. Foods from the land. Strong families. We are beautiful people and this is the future that we are building together.

*"I want to stand by the river in my finest dress. I want to sing, strong and hard, and stomp my feet with a hundred others so that the waters hum with our happiness. I want to dance for the renewal of the world."*

— Robin Wall Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*.



axa? i? kʷu syilx i? kʷu sukʷnaqinx kʷu salaʔx i? ʔ ʔ tmxʷulaxʷ uʔ way? təsxʷuy—kʷu kʔqixʷntm i? tmxʷulaxʷtət, uʔ i? nxʷəlxʷəltantət, uʔ i? aʔnkʷulmntət, i? stəkʷukʷxixtət uʔ i? syilx i? kʷu sukʷnaqinx i? sqəlxʷtəwtət.

We, the Syilx Okanagan Peoples have inhabited our territory since time immemorial—we have been defended by our lands and resources, language, customs, traditions and the Syilx Okanagan way of life,

axa? i? kʷu syilx i? kʷu sukʷnaqinx kʷu cnqilxʷcən ta nsyilxcən uʔ way təsxʷuy uʔ ta mnimʔtət kə ckʔqixʷstm uʔ kə ctiʔstm, uʔ niʔip kə ckʷulmstm i? nsyilxcən aʔ nqilxʷcntət.

We, the Syilx Okanagan Peoples have spoken our nsyilxcən language since time immemorial, and we are responsible for the protection, revitalization and advancement of our nsyilxcən language.

— excerpt from the Syilx Okanagan Language Declaration



skc'əḥ<sup>w</sup>əḥwipla? uḥ steḥtaḥt

# GOVERNANCE

To advance, assert, support and preserve Syilx Okanagan Nation sovereignty.



The Chiefs Executive Council's ("CEC") work together in unity to protect, defend and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation's Aboriginal Title and Rights continued in 2022. Through their work, they upheld their *sux<sup>w</sup>txtəm* (taking care of the land) responsibilities while advancing the economic interests of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The CEC's work is essential to protect and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation's Aboriginal title and rights, given that they are rights held by the whole Nation collectively off Indian Reserve lands.



Photo: 21st Annual Border Crossing Canoe Paddle, July 4 2022

## Advancements Through Unity

### TITLE, RIGHTS AND DECISION MAKING

The Policy and Legal Team focused on a number of projects over the past year to advance the Nation's Title and Rights strategy, under the direction of the CEC. Some of the important files they've been working on included ongoing participation in the Canada-United States Columbia River Treaty renegotiation process; undertaking work on the re-introduction of salmon in the Canadian portion of the Columbia River; continuing work to secure long-term, safe access to the Syilx Okanagan fishing site at Okanagan Falls; engaging with BC Hydro under Syilx Okanagan Nation processes, together with the Bands on projects and opportunities; and providing policy and legal support on a number of files at the direction of the Chiefs Executive Council.

#### Columbia River Treaty

Negotiations in relation to the Columbia River Treaty (CRT) resulted in a key milestone being achieved this past year, with the completion of an interim revenue-sharing agreement with British Columbia and the Syilx Okanagan Nation. As a result of pressure that the Syilx Okanagan Nation put on British Columbia to share revenues from the CRT, British Columbia and the Syilx Okanagan Nation were able to conclude a historic revenue-sharing agreement in March 2023. Under this agreement, the Nation will receive 5% of the revenue from the sale of downstream power benefits that the United States pays to British Columbia for community benefits. This is a historic agreement as British Columbia has never before shared these types of benefits with First Nations. Similar agreements were entered into by the Secwepemc Nation and the Ktunaxa Nation.

Canada entered into the CRT with the United States 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 the Syilx Okanagan Nation or the other First Nations impacted by the CRT and without the First Nations' consent. The CRT resulted in the construction of three major dams in the Upper Columbia Basin that flooded the Slocan Valley (Arrow Lakes) and converted the Upper Columbia watershed into a massive reservoir system.

Canada and the United States 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 United States 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 staff, 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.

Throughout the process, the CEC has always made it clear to British Columbia that the revenues it receives under the Columbia River Treaty need to be shared with the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The interim benefits-sharing agreement is a hugely important step forward in the Columbia River negotiations and is long overdue, but other negotiations are continuing to ensure the Nation is properly compensated. More specifically, the CEC, together with the Policy Legal Team continue to negotiate other measures to help mitigate the impacts of the Columbia River Treaty on the Syilx Okanagan Nation and the Nation's title and rights. These include: integrating ecosystem values and cultural values in CRT dam operational decisions (and not just power generation and flood control, which is currently the case); developing new governance processes to ensure the Syilx Okanagan Nation has a meaningful role in governance under the CRT moving forward; and negotiation of redress for past impacts and long-term revenue sharing.


A strong focus in the negotiations has been on finding strategies for salmon reintroduction and recovery in the Upper Columbia Basin by addressing salmon flow and passage needs. The US Tribes share this goal and are making some headway on salmon passage in the US. The Syilx Okanagan Nation, Secwepemc Nation and Ktunaxa Nation have been collaborating with the US Tribes to design an ecosystem and 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 reintroducing Okanagan salmon, it continues to take a lead role in these negotiations.

For the last several years, the CEC Lead on the CRT negotiations, Chief Keith Crow, and the Syilx Okanagan Nation's CRT negotiation team have been meeting quarterly with the CRT Liaison Committee, which is made up of representatives from Syilx Okanagan Nation communities. Updates are provided to Committee members and input sought on issues being negotiated at the various tables. The Committee has proven to be a helpful forum for communication and collaboration.



Photo: Columbia Salmon Ceremony, May 17 2022

### Columbia River Salmon Restoration Initiative – Bringing the Salmon Home!

The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (CRSRI) is a collaborative and indigenous-led process  **Kłpalkstim i? ntytyix** to explore salmon reintroduction into the upper Columbia River that was established in July 2019 and recently renewed until March 2025. The CRSRI signatories include: Syilx Okanagan Nation, Secwepemc Nation, Ktunaxa Nation, Province of BC, and Government of Canada.

Over the past year, CRSRI has remained quite active amongst its various committees including the Executive Working Group (EWG), Implementation Team (IT), Technical Working Group (TWG), Communications Advisory Group (CAG) and the Indigenous Knowledge Counsel (IKC). Collectively, some of the key milestones of this year's CRSRI activities has included the EWG and IT working to secure a further three-year addendum to the Salmon Letter of Agreement that supports the CRSRI process. This process included the development of a Case for Continued Support that was completed in January 2022 that outlined the rationale to support the work and funding needs of CRSRI for another three years.

The Implementation Team holds monthly CRSRI meetings to work with the CRSRI's Management Team to provide direction to the TWG and make recommendations to the TWG, often serving as the conduit between these groups. The IT also established the Funding Action Committee and through the work of this group, CRSRI submitted an application to the BC Salmon Restoration Innovation Fund for a three-year contribution to support the scientific, cultural knowledge and cultural engagement work of CRSRI.

**Bringing the Salmon Home!**



**SCAN ME**

Watch the  
Bringing the  
Salmon Home  
Documentary!



Read the  
2022-2023  
CRSRI Annual  
Report!



**SCAN ME**

The Indigenous Knowledge Counsel works with all CRSRI committees to provide cultural perspectives and guidance to all CRSRI work. In particular, the IKC works with the TWG to ensure that the work conducted by TWG is interwoven with indigenous knowledge. IKC also works with the CAG to enhance cultural connections throughout CRSRI activities.

Over this year, the TWG has carried out three key technical studies, each one being led by one of the three First Nations. The studies focussed on: risk assessment, habitat assessment and synthesis and experimental reintroduction design. The TWG also works with US Tribes to identify opportunities for technical collaboration.

Finally, the CAG has worked alongside the three Nation-based Outreach & Engagement Teams to host the “Bringing the Salmon Home” online festival, the Salmon Warriors Gathering and on-going capacity for young Nation members, public presentations, sharing information through its online portal at [columbiariversalmon.ca](http://columbiariversalmon.ca), social media and multi-media sources as well as producing the Bringing the Salmon Home documentary.

The CRSRI remains one of the key initiatives that the Syilx Okanagan Nation participates in as part of our overall stewardship responsibilities for salmon and food security within Syilx Okanagan territory.

#### **Collaborative Habitat Mapping Project**

ONA is collaborating with Skeena Fisheries Commission, First Nation Fisheries Legacy Fund Society, and the University of Victoria Map Shop, in a pilot project entitled, UAV Habitat Mapping to Inform Wild Salmon Stewardship. The pilot has a goal to enhance capacity for monitoring and management of wild salmon habitat in First Nations through the integration of community mapping and geospatial technologies, to enhance capacity for monitoring and managing wild salmon habitat in First Nations territory through the integration of community mapping and geospatial technologies. The project is funded by British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF), a partnership between the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

#### **Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, Columbia Region**

The Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP) is a BC Hydro program with a goal of conserving and enhancing fish and wildlife populations in watersheds impacted by BC Hydro’s operations. BC Hydro describes the FWCP as a partnership between BC Hydro, the Province, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, First Nations and public stakeholders. The Fish and Wildlife Program operates in three regions: Coastal Region, Peace Region and the Columbia Region. Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory falls in the Columbia Region.

The Columbia Region expanded First Nations representation on its board (from one appointee from three First Nations, to three appointees from three First Nations) and created a First Nations Working Group for the Columbia Region this year. The CEC appointed three First Nations representatives to the Board: Mark Steynen, Michael Zimmer, and Fabian Alexis. The Columbia Region also created a First Nations Working Group for the Columbia Region. The CEC appointed three representatives to the Working Group: Chad Eneas, Evan Smith, and Nancy Bonneau. Through these appointments, the Syilx Okanagan Nation can advance its priorities in coordination with its other work in fisheries and habitat restoration within Syilx Okanagan territory.





Photo: sawsitkw (Okanagan River) at swnitkw (Okanagan Falls) Park

### Okanagan Falls Access

The CEC continues to address challenges at Okanagan Falls, the site of the swnitkw salmon fishery and a former Osoyoos Indian Band Reserve. For many years, Nation members have used a 10-meter buffer of “Crown land” between the fishery and private property adjacent to the dam to access the fishery and exercise their Aboriginal fishing rights.

Over the last several years, the private land owners have made attempts to have the lands resurveyed to make the buffer part of their lands, including through applications to the Surveyor General to change the boundary of their lands. The landowner’s first application for a survey adjustment was unsuccessful after both the Syilx Okanagan Nation and the Province of BC strongly opposed the application in order to ensure the buffer area is retained for use by Syilx Okanagan Nation members. Unfortunately, the landowner has brought another application to change the boundary. The Province and the Nation have opposed that application as well and are awaiting a decision from the Surveyor General.

In addition, the CEC has been actively engaging with the Province of BC to ensure that safe, long-term access to the fishery is maintained for Syilx Okanagan Nation members. Through these efforts, the Province has removed a fence and other barriers, facilitated access across the dam for Nation members, undertaken survey work and geotechnical investigations and attended site visits together with Nation representatives. These efforts allowed the Syilx Okanagan Nation fishery to proceed last year.

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swnitkw (Okanagan Falls) is an important traditional fishing camp, gathering place and trading site of the Syilx Okanagan peoples. One of the Nation’s goals is to further the responsibilities and teachings to be keepers of our waters, territory, lands, foods, and resources.

“By enacting our inherent responsibilities to the water and the tmix, we are ensuring that salmon will continue to return to feed our peoples and lands for generations to come.”

- Chief Clarence Louie,  
September 16 2022 Salmon  
Feast Press Release

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Photo: Spirit of Syilx Unity Run from Kamloops Indian Residential School to the Syilx Indian Residential School Monument

## nk<sup>w</sup>əłtwistmntəm

### AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and Upper Nicola Band (UNB) together signed a Final Agreement with BC Hydro 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, 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 BC Hydro operations and assets across the Syilx Okanagan Territory. As part of this commitment, the CEC established an Energy Executive Committee (EEC) which is made up of Chiefs, council members, and technical community representatives and ONA staff who address, assess, and guide all BC Hydro activity on the Territory through to recommendations to CEC. This committee provides a common forum to discuss all energy-related issues in detail, including BC Hydro project and Enduring Relationship updates.

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. Furthermore, the Nation negotiated with BC Hydro 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 BC Hydro projects and initiatives occurring on the territory. In total, since the

Enduring Relationship was established, BC Hydro has awarded over \$27 million in contracts to Syilx Okanagan Nation designated businesses with more ongoing opportunities worth millions of dollars still to come.

Finally, BC Hydro is a strong supporter of Nation initiatives and events that preserve or enhance culture, including language, and promote Nation-building. In Fiscal 2023, BC Hydro provided \$119,000 to the ONA for cultural events, youth programs and initiatives, and community outreach related to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

#### Fiscal 2023 Highlights - BC Hydro Projects

- The Project Review Committees (PRC) established for major BC Hydro projects continue to deliver exceptional value to BC Hydro as we strive for shared decision-making.
- In Fiscal 2023, the major projects in Syilx Okanagan territory are the Wilsey Dam Fish Passage project and the West Kelowna Transmission project:
  - 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 in the past, was a part of a fish passage steering committee, and has been conducting studies on increasing knowledge on survival of juvenile salmon through Wilsey Dam. Assessments concluded that there are no serious impediments to re-establishing fish passage above Wilsey Dam and it was recommended that planning for fish passage proceed.

- The Okanagan Project Review Committee has expressed support for decommissioning of the dam as the leading alternative to implement the objectives of this project.
- The Okanagan PRC continues to engage with BC Hydro on the West Kelowna Transmission Line study, providing input via studies and document reviews on the proposed leading alternative for routing of the transmission line.
- The Revelstoke 6 project has been cancelled, however BC Hydro remains committed to working with the Syilx Okanagan Nation to address concerns beyond the incremental impacts of the Revelstoke 6 Project, and where possible advance the proposed restoration measures including identifying and addressing archaeological and cultural concerns related to reservoir operations. This fiscal year, BC Hydro has provided funding to support the further development of three specific programs: *suxʷtx̱təm* Guardian Program, *Syilx nxʷəḻxʷəltantət* Food and Medicine Sovereignty Program and the Syilx Culture and Heritage Restoration Program.
- Negotiations continue to progress on an electricity purchase agreement for the proposed 15 megawatt solar project led by UNB and the ONA.
- BC Hydro has prepared an UNDRIP Action Plan which includes thoughtful feedback and input from the ONA. BC Hydro was receptive to ONA's input on the draft Action Plan.

#### Relationship Agreement Update

- The two Enduring Relationship Sub-Agreements, which define support measures and funding for Governance, Communications and Procurement, expire at the end of this fiscal year, so BC Hydro and the ONA have begun negotiations two new sub-agreements that will deliver support and funding over the next five years.

#### Procurement Update

- In Fiscal 2023, Syilx Okanagan designated business received \$4.2M in contracts.
- BC Hydro is offering funding for part-time Community Liaison positions to work with the ONA Community and Business Liaisons to support community- or member-owned businesses or other designated businesses to capture directed procurement awards. In Fiscal 2023, three communities took advantage of this funding.

#### Organizational Update

- Chief Robert Louie was appointed as Chair of the Energy Executive Committee



**Photo:** cewelna (Leon Louis) and Steve Basil blessing the feather for the Spirit of the Syilx Unity Run

#### Education, Training & Employment Update

- A Syilx Okanagan community member was hired into the BC Hydro Cooperative Education program (Jakob Alexis).
- Four Syilx Okanagan community members were the recipients of education grants (Lepika Saddleman, Stacie Coutlee, Michelle Paul, Zachary Astakeesic).
- A Syilx Okanagan community member was the recipient of a \$5,000 scholarship (Ryder Quibell).
- The ONA received \$34,500 to hire two summer students to work on Enduring Relationship-related priorities (Cassie Lezard, Gage Paul).
- Twelve Syilx Okanagan youth from Upper Nicola Band, Okanagan Indian Band and Osoyoos Indian Band participated in the IndigenousTech.ai Summer Intern program, receiving education in technology, finance and customer service, hearing from industry leaders and working on real industry projects.
- A Syilx Okanagan community member, who was hired into BC Hydro's Indigenous Professionals in Development cohort in Fiscal 2022, completed his BC Hydro Plant Operator Apprenticeship (Mike Mussell).
- Twelve Syilx Okanagan community members were funding to participate in the Environmental Field Skills Certificate Program.
- Thirty Syilx Okanagan community members were hosted and toured the Revelstoke Visitor Center at the AGA in July 2022.
- BC Hydro's Indigenous Employment & Training Regional Specialist attended the Osoyoos Indian Band Career Fair March 2023.
- A Syilx Okanagan tradesperson was hired by a BC Hydro contractor to gain understanding and experience in the Powerline Technician career path to prepare to apply to BCH Pre-Apprentice Powerline Technician postings.

# STRONGER VOICES AT THE TABLE

## ENSURING OUR PRESENCE IS FELT

### 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.

### BC Government and the Syilx Okanagan Nation

Several years ago, the CEC developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BC that paved the way for the exploration of enhanced decision-making processes and provided an elevated venue for the resolution of conflict and information exchanges on sensitive and important issues to the Nation with the BC Government. Potential opportunities that could be negotiated under the MOU include recognition of 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 highest level opportunities and decision-making processes rooted in recognition and reconciliation priorities. Once there is an outline for consideration, the CEC will review and determine the potential of a new high-level framework agreement to meet the interests of the Nation and the Bands on the territory and whether to proceed further in the negotiations. It is contemplated that this approach would be an "enabling" one that would establish key principles, commitments and criteria standards that allows 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.

### Depictions of Syilx Okanagan Cultural Heritage

The City held copyright in an unpublished literary and artistic work entitled "Ogopogo". In 2001, after public pressure from the CEC, under Chief Byron Louis' lead, the City of Vernon transferred this copyright to the ONA.

The CEC has given direction to begin work on internal guidelines as to when and on what terms the ONA will consent to the use of "Ogopogo" or ḥ́ḵaʔḵʔitkʷ. Existing laws for protecting Syilx Okanagan traditional knowledge or cultural heritage are limited. Developing internal guidelines, with input and support of Syilx Okanagan communities and knowledge keepers, will support the development of intellectual property rights in existing Canadian law around ḥ́ḵaʔḵʔitkʷ.

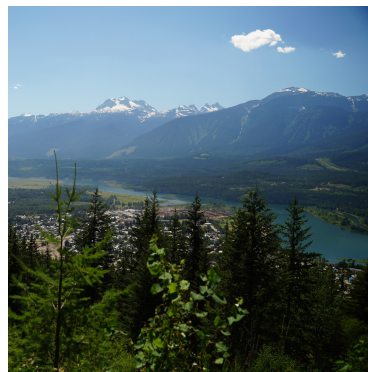






Photo: Roger Hall and others at the sʰɬaʔckstx Gathering, June 10 2022

### 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*, which 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/sʰɬaʔckstx 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 the Okanagan Nation Alliance intervening in the case, 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.

The CEC continues to work to protect the Syilx Okanagan Nation's title and rights in the Arrow Lakes, recognizing the importance of working together with the CCT so as to protect the lands and resources in the area.

### Looking Forward

Through unity and the CEC's ongoing work, the Nation will continue to enjoy a number of opportunities. These include building on the success of the CRT interim revenue sharing agreement to achieve additional milestones in CRT negotiations, such as governance, long-term revenue sharing, redress and ecosystem and cultural values. The CEC's work to bring back salmon to all areas of the Syilx Okanagan Territory will also continue. The CEC will also continue to implement the Enduring Relationship with BC Hydro. In addition, the CEC will continue its work to protect and advance Syilx Okanagan Nation's title and rights, including in the Arrow Lakes area.

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“For Sinixt/sʰɬaʔckstx people, the declaration that we are Aboriginal Peoples of Canada is the start of a healing process. For Sinixt/sʰɬaʔckstx people, no matter where they live today, the extinction declaration has been washed away and our true history and identity has been confirmed by the highest court of Canada. That history can no longer be ignored or distorted as it has been for decades. The Supreme Court recognizes that our energy comes from the land, the animals, the fish, the medicines on which we continue to rely.”

- Chief Andy Jospheh Jr.,  
sʰɬaʔckstx Gathering

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Photo: Opening Ceremonies of the 2022 Annual General Assembly and Syilx Elder Youth Summit in snkx̓kntn (Revelstoke)

# CHIEFS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

WORKING COLLECTIVELY TO ADVANCE AND ASSERT SYILX OKANAGAN NATION TITLE AND RIGHTS

## May 2022

11 Wellness Strategic Planning Session

## July 2022

15 CEC Meeting

27-28 ONA Annual General Assembly

## October 2022

10 CCT Meeting, Castlegar

10-11 Syilx Health Assembly

20 Special CEC: Title and Rights

## December 2022

2 Special CEC: Columbia River Treaty

13 CEC Meeting

## January 2023

20 Special CEC: Columbia River Treaty

## February 2023

7-8 Syilx Health Assembly

15 Special CEC: CRT Benefits Sharing Agreement

## March 2023

6 Emergency CEC: CRT Benefits Sharing

15 CEC Meeting

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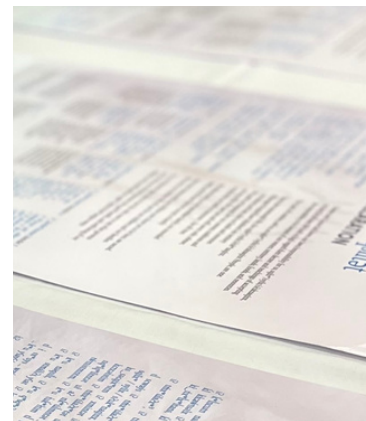
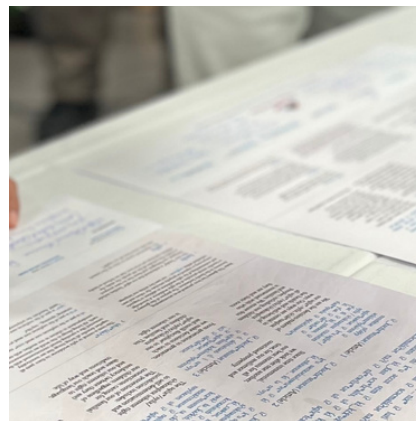
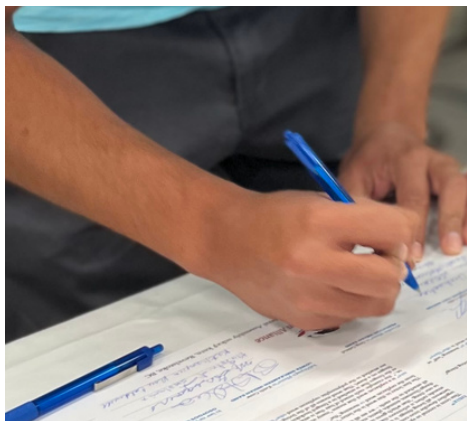
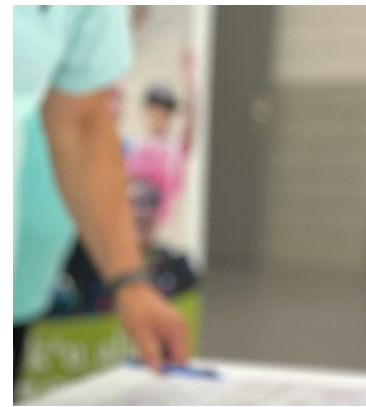
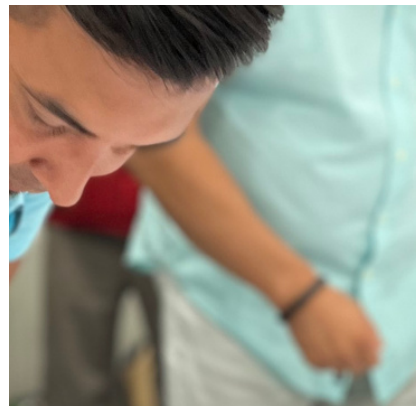
The Syilx Okanagan Nation is governed by the Chiefs Executive Council (CEC), a leadership body of the Syilx Okanagan Nation established under Syilx law, and comprised of the *ýilmix̓w̓m* of the affiliated communities, and the *xaʔtus*, the elected leader of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The mandate of the CEC is to advance, assert, support and preserve Syilx Okanagan Nation sovereignty. The *ýilmix̓w̓m* of the affiliated communities also serve as directors of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, a society that serves the Syilx Okanagan Nation and its people, carrying out work directed by the CEC.

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kʷulluʷsməntm

# REBUILDING OUR WAYS

Supporting the well-being of self-determining Syilx communities



For Syilx Okanagan people, wellness is holistic and interconnected. Our health and well being is reflected in the health of our families, communities, and territory. Partnerships between ONA and Syilx Bands have brought the strengths of our Nation together, enabling us to advocate for the needs of each community and to leverage resources in a way that reflects collective capacity.



Photo: Syilx Elder-Youth Summit, snkx̄ kntn (Revelstoke) 2022

## ADVOCATING FOR SYILX WELLBEING

### RAISING SYILX VOICES

Through work with partners, ONA is able to escalate Syilx concerns and priorities to key tables in the region, province, and country. The work builds upon the dedication of past generations in order to move towards standing up Syilx Okanagan inherent jurisdiction for the wellbeing of our people.

A focus for ONA is supporting Chiefs to engage on legislation and position Syilx voices to play a role. The Syilx Nation has a sovereign responsibility and mandate to ensure that the cultural integrity, safety, and well-being of all our members are upheld. The longstanding message from communities is that the path of Syilx wellness lies in traditional practices of language, land, capti'kwl, and community. The ONA works under the direction of the Chiefs' Executive Council to support member communities to achieve their desired outcomes in all areas of wellness.

The ONA Wellness Team and the Nation's Wellness Committee work closely with community members, leaders, and staff in order to bring the voices of the people to the work of creating interlinking Community and Nation plans. Together, these plans build a collaborative approach to supporting communities to provide sustainable wellness services. They are the culmination of decades of previous work by so many people, coupled with the teachings and traditions that have been passed down within Syilx Okanagan culture for millennia.

#### Health Planning & Advocacy

First Nation Health Authority, Interior Health (IH), and Syilx Health Plan: The healthcare landscape is complex and evolving. At the moment, ONA is keeping a close watch on

the federal government's work with First Nations to co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation. The objective is to improve access to high-quality, culturally relevant health services. Co-development is a collaborative approach that acknowledges the distinct nature and lived experience of First Nations. This federal process of co-developing Indigenous health legislation moved into the engagement phase in 2022 with the timeline extended now into 2023. Initially, the federal government tried to do the engagement through First Nations Health Council (FNHC), but FNHC said it had to be Nation-to-Nation and that required direct engagement with the Chiefs. Canada's approach to this legislation is guided by the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Re-Ground Health: ONA engages with community members, leaders, and health office staff to support communities to identify current health priorities and help to escalate community concerns to decision-making tables. Syilx Nation members have voiced the desire to move away from the western medical model and to re-ground health in Syilx ways of knowing. Time on the land and Syilx perspectives on healing and wellness are becoming an increasingly important part of programs and services. This direction informs the strategic health planning being carried out by ONA in collaboration with Syilx communities.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH): A major development on the provincial stage was the passing of a resolution, in March 2023 at FNHA Gathering Wisdom, endorsing the 10-Year Strategy on the SDOH.

The ONA effectively advocated in revising the wording, collecting feedback from Interior Chiefs and other Nations and contributing to crafting a resolution that the Chiefs would endorse. The landmark strategy will see shift the focus for how healthcare is planned and delivered and comes with new investment funding for First Nations. Into the next fiscal year, the Syilx Team will support Communities and the Nation to explore what this opportunity means so that, instead of reacting, Syilx Okanagan people are positioned to be drivers of our own health strategies.

**Interior Health (IH) Letter of Understanding (LOU):** Our work continues with refreshing the LOU which describes the collaborative working relationship and shared objectives between IH and the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The Syilx Nation and IHA LOU is a fundamental historic agreement that is a living document that was last revised in 2019. One area of concern is addressing the change needed to deal with the systemic racism in IH as described in the In Plain Sight report. The LOU created the position of a Collaborative Health Coordinator to do the crucial work of translating the LOU objectives into activities that align with community priorities so that Syilx communities can start to drive the LOU activities.

Cultural Safety is a principle by which clients must feel safe and be treated with dignity by all service providers. The ONA carries out engagement with communities, Interior Health, and all partners to address improvements in culturally safe care including the need for territory-specific trainings for IH staff in cultural safety and humility.

### **Primary Care Networks (PCNs)**

The BC Ministry of Health (MoH) is shifting the model of health care delivery over to community spaces for team-based and patient-centred health services called PCNs. While Syilx communities are at different stages of the PCN planning process, ONA brought them together to share their recent experiences. A common theme that emerged was ongoing issues with the sheer volume of planning and the failure of BC to provide Syilx communities with resources that are equitable to other partners at the table. This led to letters to the MoH and FNHA adding to the chorus from Nations across that the province needs to commit to support First Nations with adequate resourcing to properly engage in PCN planning and implementation. PCN planning is complicated and with many parties at the table, it can suffer for lack of a firm foundation for the conversations required.

**Revelstoke PCN:** This past year in Revelstoke, issues arose with three Nations at the table together with Métis, Urban



Indigenous, and partners including IH and the local Division of Family Practitioners. ONA came in to facilitate discussion circles that created space to heal group dynamics and reset the groundwork for collaboration. A part-time coordinator was hired to support the Indigenous parties at the table. The circles resulted in increased mutual awareness of the importance of recognizing the social determinants of health and maintaining a focus on the people who face specific challenges. Collectively, funding was secured to implement a needs assessment in the Revelstoke area to aid in planning processes.

**Kootenay Boundary Region PCN:** ONA has been working with Kootenay Boundary for several years now with good relationships in place and the work continuing as participants focus on the common vision of helping to ensure appropriate services for Indigenous residents.

**Data Advocacy:** The Syilx Data Team have been providing support to the Integrated Activity Agreement (IAA) pilot project initiative in Kootenay Boundary. The IAA is a legal framework for health authorities and physician practices to share identifiable information with each other to improve patient outcomes. As well, ONA has been reviewing and providing suggestions about the health data sharing agreement between First Nations Health Authority and the governments of BC and Canada.



Photo: Coyote Rock

### Data Sovereignty

Data plays an important role in the Indigenous self-determination. Advocating for appropriate access and control over Syilx data is an important function of the Data Team. The Team works together with Community members, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Band staff, Band Councils, and Nation leadership in order to bring the voices of the people to political tables and advocate for informed discussions for needed changes. The work builds upon the efforts of past generations in order to move forward towards standing up Syilx Okanagan inherent jurisdiction related to data regardless of where the data is stored.

**Language Speakers Data Gathering (Oct 1-2, 2022):** brought together 18 Nation members to discuss data governance and sovereignty. Key insights included that data sovereignty is stored in *nsyilxcən*, so it is important to continue to work on *nsyilxcən* wording and concepts for data and that Syilx need to claim and control Syilx data. The Gathering resolved that more discussion is needed on the usefulness of a data declaration, principles, and policy.

**OIB Community Presentation (Feb 21, 2023):** The draft data governance plan was presented to OIB. Elders Jane Stelkia and Delphine Armstrong spoke about the importance of data.

**Language Speaker Meeting (March 17-18, 2023):** Met as follow up to the gathering in October to discuss ways in which *sqəlxcw̓tcawtət* approach discipline throughout the data lifecycle—preparing, collecting, storing, analysing, sharing, and protecting Syilx data and information.



# SERVICES CLOSER TO HOME

## RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY VOICES

The Nation Shared Services approach makes it possible to have dedicated, specialized resources available to support community members in areas across the wellness spectrum. ONA scrutinizes all government funding structures currently in place that are meant to prioritize investments in health with needs on the ground.

### Shared Services In Practice: Current Allocation of Funds to Communities

It is important to recognize that ONA has, and continues to, respond to the funding policies dictated by government. This opportunity with FNHA is an example of changing the bureaucracy specific to our own identified priorities and has led to continuous funding for key activities in Syilx Communities. Our community engagement feedback has been especially clear about on-the-land healing, Traditional Wellness, and mental health as three priorities. The struggle against the toxic drug crisis is also currently paramount. Funds were obtained through both FNHA and IH and included supports for nurses, as well as continuous supports for COVID impacts. Each member Syilx community applies the funds to fit their local setting and priorities.

Highlights of community supported services and coordinated efforts:

- UNB hired nursing staff to provide services to members with specific health issues. They focused on exploring reconciliation, how we reconcile ourselves with our families, our victims, and learning about our rights and traditions including getting out on the land, gardening, and eating healthy foods as a means of addressing and raising community awareness about health. Group conversations were encouraged on how to transform from colonial thinking to our Syilx ways of thinking.
- OKIB had a strong focus on harm reduction services, applying literature reviews and community research, and collaborating with other organizations, to arrive at the best possible scenario for a Mental Wellness Hub and Harm reduction Program.
- LSIB focused on Traditional Wellness and did many family community ceremonies including a sweat lodge to support a group of men on a weekly basis. Brushing off ceremonies were held in October and November. For a women's group, weekly sewing sessions were provided to make ribbons skirts and shirts that ultimately foster community connection and support families.
- PIB focused on establishing a recovery house and day treatment initiative with peer support groups, healthy

lifestyle sessions including exercise programs also via zoom, and workshops on harm reduction and other prevention work, including naloxone training. PIB has also been building a healthy leaders program with a holistic approach that includes exercising and on the land activities.

- USIB took many band members on the land: berry picking, harvesting medicines, fishing. Elders and youth worked together on storytelling, engaging and creating awareness about language and culture. Traditional games and foods were shared with youth as well as discussion about sexual health.
- WFN increased traditional wellness with the Fathers of Tradition program, led by Elders supporting youth men to be healthy fathers and care for their families. They also funded Wellbriety and created training positions for two cultural liaisons and a youth outreach working living in community.
- OIB held ceremony and workshops on *siw+kw* and how water ties in with health, culture, plants, and place names. They hosted on-the-land learning sessions with guest speakers, traditional meals, sweat lodges, and traditional healers. There are plans to make on-the-land sessions an annual event.



## Jordan's Principle

Jordan's Principle is named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a young boy from Norway House Cree Nation. Jordan's Principle is a child-first and needs-based principle used to ensure that First Nations children have equitable access to all government funded public services. In 2020, the Syilx Nation became one of the first Tribal Nations in BC to have our own federally-funded Service Coordinators for Jordan's Principle. The program helps ensure that First Nations children under 19 have access to the health, social, emotional, and educational services that they need—when and where they need them. Common requests include respite care, occupational therapy, dental work, autism spectrum disorder assessments, speech and language supports, and medication that is not covered by FNHA benefits. Over the past year, ONA has focused on sharing information more broadly to ensure families are aware of Jordan's Principle, reaching out to daycares, HeadStart programs, youth, and youth workers, as well as engaging with schools, and Grandmothers Groups where eligibility criteria is clearly stated.

- In the past year, requests for access doubled.
  - 24 files in 2020-21
  - 83 files in 2021-22
  - 170 files in 2022-23
- Appeals succeeded in having 10 previous denials overturned.
- \$1M was the total amount approved for supports and services as of September 2022.

## Navigating Healthcare

Our individual health journeys can be complicated and confusing. Through Nation-shared positions, ONA is able to support Syilx community members to better access the services and resources that are available through the healthcare system. When necessary, these positions can also advocate for the rights of members.

The Health Advocate dedicates time to assisting members working to bridge gaps, improve access to services, and provide one-on-one advocacy as needed. Supports range from helping members get a doctor, access required health benefits, and even linking Elders, Families, and individuals with food bank supports.

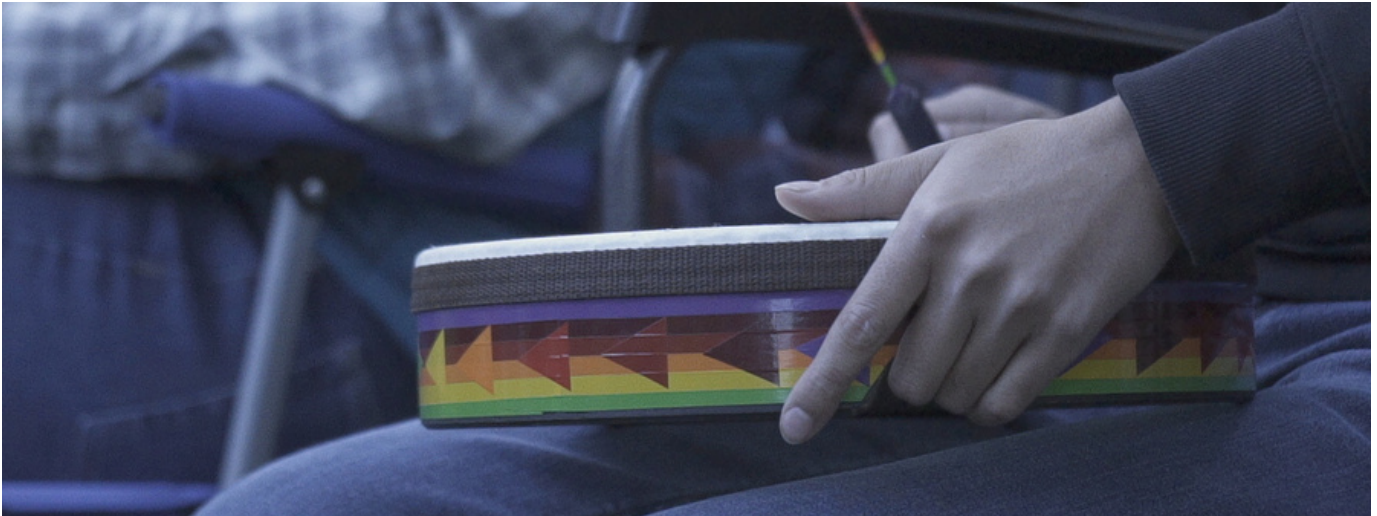
- Provided 107 visits
- Communicated with 120 health professionals and community staff
- Provided FNHA benefits presentation to 24 Elders



The Mental Health and Addictions Specialist saw more people reach out for services in 2022-23. Supports included individual counselling and treatment referrals, working with band health and wellness staff on case management and coordination, capacity building, and discussions to identify and address gaps in care. Education initiatives were targeted to reduce shame and promote harm reduction as means of decreasing overdose and increasing healing.

- Served and closed 18 files
- 10 active files





**Photo:** Drummers & singers at the Syilx Nation Day of Action regarding fraudulent child protection worker Robert Riley Saunders

## THERE IN A CRISIS

### THOSE WHO HELP

The work of cultural revival and shifting into Indigenous-driven policies and programs is moving forward. This is how we create a future that moves beyond being in response mode. At the same time, There are ongoing needs in communities to support members and manage crises. Collectively and individually, our wellbeing as Syilx Okanagan people is challenged by the ongoing revelations about unmarked graves, the tragedy of toxic drugs, the wildfires and floods of climate change, and more. Connecting regularly with Communities while working at a Nation level, ONA is able to provide specialized crisis services for members, bring Communities together for education and connection, and escalate Community voices to ensure they shape regional and provincial plans and services.

**Emergency Management:** This was the first year that the ONA Emergency Planning Coordinator was in place. The Health Team joined Natural Resources in joint planning to ensure alignment and contribute to the Emergency Social Services plan, including making it more culturally appropriate.

**The Syilx Mental Wellbeing Plan:** This has been developed as an overarching framework for holistic and culturally responsive programs and services. This past year, it was approved at community presentations and is now being revised to include individual Community plans based on the understanding that effective Nation planning must be built upon Community plans. These coordinated efforts effect and impact Community and Nation budget requests. Mental health transformation discussions are ongoing with the government to support funding for implementation.

### Addictions and Toxic Drugs: A Provincial and National Crisis

Three of the opioid hot spots in BC are in Syilx Okanagan territory—Kelowna, Vernon, and Penticton—and First Nations continue to be disproportionately impacted. Unprecedented rates of harm from illicit drug activity continue to traumatize our families and communities. First Nations people are five times more likely to experience an overdose in BC. This alarming inequity is directly linked to intergenerational trauma and the impacts of poverty, economic disparity, lack of housing, and other social determinants of health stemming from a history of displacement and colonization.

ONA has been working to respond to the issue of addictions since the Nation Drug Forum was first held in 2004 after tragic events at the Penticton Indian Band. This led to the development of ongoing prevention activities such as the Syilx Unity Run, land-based camps, and the Okanagan Nation Response Team (ONRT)—with new developments in the past few years including the Purple Ribbon Campaign and the dialogue regarding a targeted Aboriginal youth treatment centre.

**Syilx Nation Drug Forum:** ONA has been hosting annual forums since 2018. The 2022 forum was held May 13th at OKIB. A panel of community members spoke about their experiences with addictions and recovery, including the perspective of family members providing support to a loved one. A clear message was shared by participants about ending the stigma and the silence. There was discussion about how important it is for families to step in and support those living in addiction, while also respecting the need for

families to have support and respite. Another key message was the need to continue to have the hard discussions as families, communities, and as a Nation about the responsibility that is held collectively to address the drug crisis.

**Purple Ribbon Caravan:** This annual campaign saw the Caravan travel through Syilx territory and connect with hundreds of people from August 29-30, 2022 in support of Nation members and their families facing addiction issues while also sharing resources, raising awareness, and reducing stigma.

**Youth Treatment Centre—Ashnola at The Crossing:** This is a long standing vision to have a residential substance treatment centre that moves away from the western medical model to an approach that is grounded in the tmixw, youth-focused, family-centred, and built from the community vision of doing things sqilxwawt. Work by ONA to strengthen relations with partners resulted in funds being secured from multiple sources to do a full planning cycle to doors open. In the upcoming fiscal, funds will be received and a contract team put in place to do the planning.

### You Empowered Strong (YES)

This was the 7th year for the YES Program bringing Syilx knowledge and strength-based practices to creating a Nation-shared response to family violence where each community determines what resources and trainings they need. Several years ago the CEC signed a resolution calling for the expansion of YES and in January 2023, YES received substantial new funding towards the self-determination of Syilx communities in addressing Indigenous-specific, systemic causes of gender-based violence and sexual assault. This is timely as the work of responding to family and sexual violence suffers from both underfunding and a lack of capacity. The more work we do, the more the need comes to light. In the coming year, YES will continue to fight through stigma and move towards a Syilx view of understanding violence and its root causes.

This past year, YES engaged in four different program streams in order to build the capacity of Syilx families to respond to the ways in which the intergenerational effects of colonization have normalized family violence and sexual assault in our communities.

**Response:** YES provided one-on-one support in 16 situations of family violence and 11 situations of sexual assault. Supports are tailored to those involved. Each family receives support in creating holistic wellbeing and safety plans.

- Within the 27 files YES supported there were: 8 spouses who participated, 10 cultural connections, 26 children, 34 community helpers, and 195 points of contact.

**Cultural Education and Prevention:** These included healing sessions, a series of workshops on healthy relationships with dinner and childcare provided, youth sessions, and a variety of events around Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2Spirit (MMIWG2S) including the Syilx Nation MMIWG2S Gathering in Kelowna (Oct 5-6, 2022). One focus of the event was getting input for a Nation family violence strategy as well as the sharing of more information and resources to improve safety for Indigenous women, girls plus. 500 copies were distributed of Coyote Quarrels with Mole: A resource guide for families and community members on family violence.

- 50 posters, 226 pink T-shirts, and 500 decals were shared as part of the We Love Language Campaign (Feb 2023).



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“My role is to be an example – healing and loving myself before I help others. Be an example as someone who already broke the cycle.”

- Syilx Nation Drug Forum

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**Collaboration and Partnerships:** The Syilx Family Violence Network met 3 times in 2022, bringing together crisis specialist throughout the Nation to discuss trends and link service providers with communities. Our external partner, South Okanagan Women in Need Society has an active Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) working to create wraparound services with other providers as well as doing awareness and outreach to reduce sexual violence. YES works regularly with this group, providing cultural safety in their work with Syilx communities.

**Specialized Trainings:** YES hosted workshops on family violence and workplace wellness and hosted the Frontline Wellness Gathering (Mar 2-3, 2023) that brought together 27 Band staff to increase capacity through training on how to respond to sexual assault as well as much-needed support with personal healing and wellness. This was followed up with the Building Strength Speaker Series which featured four speakers from March 20-23, 2023.

#### **səx<sup>w</sup>kənxit əlx: Those Who Help**

ONRT is a team of Syilx community members who have extensive training in suicide education, community mobilization, and critical incident response. The team is made up of community members who receive training at least twice a year to enhance their skills. ONRT continues to provide timely and culturally appropriate resources in crisis situations including tragic deaths, mental health crises, and extreme environmental events.

- Mobilized 43 times
- ONRT intake of 27 files
- Responded to 3 suicides, 11 incidents of youth violence, and 13 suicide ideation/attempts
- Provided 15 group sessions including suicide training, grief, cultural sensitivity, lateral kindness

14th Annual Spirit of Syilx Unity Run (June 3-5, 2022) is a means of building crisis prevention and response capacity within Syilx communities, sharing cultural teachings, and creating awareness of suicide and violence. The run brought 125 Syilx youth and members together to run 288 kilometers from Kamloops Indian Residential School to the Syilx Indian Residential School Monument on the Penticton Indian Band.

#### **Indian Residential School Program**

Together with the Syilx Indian Residential School Committee, this program provides support to community members living with the inter-generational impacts of Indian residential school and works closely with communities to identify ways in which ONA can support their healing. This has included helping with 30 Day School claims. The program also hosts workshops to share understanding about Syilx experiences in the Indian school system with youth and community members.

The Syilx Indian Residential School Healing Gathering was held November 27-29, 2022 at Spirit Ridge with 130 Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors gathering to share stories and provide each other with emotional and cultural support. Feedback from participants was they want smaller gatherings in their communities so they can connect more and help each other on their healing journeys.



# FOR OUR FAMILIES

## REACHING FOR THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF CARE

The ONA is committed to creating the social changes required to ensure every family is able to assert their inherent rights and responsibilities to raise their own children in their own homes, supported in their own communities and Nation. ONA programs take several approaches to supporting our families.

- Direct service delivery through programs like Family Decision Making and Jordan's Principle support.
- Providing supports for bands and their staff through programs like Syilx Early Years.
- Working with communities to co-develop planning tools and frameworks like the Syilx Nation axá i? scuntət i? tɪ ʔaʔxitət ʔl i? nəqsíltət (Family Declaration).
- Hosting Nation-wide events that promote Syilx Nationhood and Wellness.
- Building capacity such as the Family Support Workers Network, and with other partners and agencies that support the frontline workers in our communities.

**Advocacy for Our Children:** The ONA will continue to be an active advocate for fair and equitable treatment of Indigenous children and youth within the provincial and federal child welfare system. This past year, the Robert Saunders case has showcased the continued failure of government to take these injustices seriously. In July 2022, this fraudulent, former child protection worker with the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) was convicted in a criminal case and sentenced for stealing nearly half a million dollars from the primarily Indigenous youth on his caseload. In June 2022, while the Saunders criminal case was being heard, the ONA staged a Syilx Day of Action at the Kelowna courthouse to raise awareness of this situation, and Nation Chiefs sent an open letter to the BC government calling for a public inquiry to hold MCFD responsible and ensure that lasting systemic changes are made. The BC government's response to the open letter was inadequate and so this call for action will continue.

### Child & Family Planning

Work on systemic change is ongoing. The Saunders case highlighted above is just one example of the injustices we advocate and take action on. This is so that we can stay apprised and better support our communities to achieve their desired outcomes related to child and family wellbeing. This systemic work is also co-developing Syilx processes to address the lack of equitable resources and increase supports and services available to our children and families.

A focus has been on moving away from the colonial culture of silos and working instead to ensure regular, robust linkages between programs serving our children, youth and families, supporting communication and collaboration at both the community and Nation levels.

The Syilx Nation nəqsílt | Family Plan is the most recent evolution of the Nation's collective efforts to revitalize aspects of our people's sqilx<sup>w</sup>ca<sup>w</sup>t (ways of being) related to family wellness. In 2022, the nəqsílt | Family Plan was approved by the CEC and then presented individually at community dinners to OIB, OKIB, PIB, LSIB, and UNB, with other community presentations pending this year. The nəqsílt | Family Plan lays out cultural ways of being and services that support families in holistic ways, grounded in sqilx<sup>w</sup>ca<sup>w</sup>t. It was made possible by the syilx Okanagan Elders, parents, aunts, uncles, youth, and children who shared their knowledge, perspectives, and dreams for the people-to-be.

The syilx Nation axá i? scuntət i? tɪ ʔaʔxitət ʔl i? nəqsíltət (Family Declaration) was signed at the ONA AGA in July 2022 after 6 years of community engagements, numerous drafts, consultation with Elders and leadership, presentations at Nation events, and direct work with a Nation language speakers group. The resulting document is the culmination of years of collective efforts, listening to diverse inclusive voices throughout the Nation. We raise our hands to all those who took time to provide input, and especially to the language speakers who shaped the document into what it is today. The Declaration 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. It can be used as the base for protocol agreements with partners, building up and fostering working relationships across sectors. It can be a guide for community wellness policies, and as the foundation for a future written expression of Syilx law, customs, principles, and protocols.

**Grandmothers Gathering 2022:** This event brought over 50 tupas (grandmothers), representing all Nation communities, together in-person for the first time since the pandemic. Those gathered discussed how to revive and uphold the roles and responsibilities of grandmothers, including the need for programs and funding to connect youth, as well as the healing self-work required by the whole community, which our matriarchs once represented, to reconnect relationships in a safe environment.

- Attended by 56 grandmothers
- Matriarchs to 346 grandchildren, 79 great-grandchildren, and 6 great-great-grandchildren

There is also a Nation Virtual Tupas (Grandmother) Group that meets every other month. The Virtual Tupas group is a space facilitated by the Child and Family Planning Team to support Nation grandmothers to connect, share teachings with one another, and take part in trainings when available.

### Youth Wellness

Syilx youth need support to navigate the complexities of being a teenager today. In response to community voices, ONA worked closely with communities to create programs to empower youth to make positive choices—and to increasingly ground these in land-based connections. This past year, the Youth Wellness Program actively engaged with Syilx youth ages 12-19 in all communities, as well as their parents and caregivers. Special efforts were made to build strong collaborative partnerships with Band youth workers and schools through regular engagement and involvement in community events.

Youth Wellness is focused on the critical issues of drug use, violence, depression, and suicide. Cultural activities, on-the-land experiences, and pride in Syilx identity are woven throughout the program. Services include one-on-one coaching and mentoring, supports to individual youth including counselling services, support with school and employment, linking to treatment and after-care, and gym memberships to support healthy habits. Traditional games groups were shared with youth in all communities, and the R'Native Voice program began again and was successfully delivered in LSIB.

The program also organized and participated in events including the Syilx Youth Gathering, the Elder and Youth Summit, the Unity Run, and various on-the-land events held throughout the Nation. A highlight of 2022 was the successful graduation of a youth who, despite struggling with illiteracy, secured employment working for their band, which significantly boosted their confidence, clarified their abilities, and fueled their desire to continue their education.

- 7 Traditional games groups
- 15 targeted youth outreach
- 83 group sessions
- 175.5 hours of events

kʔulusmntm iʔ nəqsiltət | Family Decision Making (FDM)  
The FDM program, which was first created by ONA Wellness almost 20 years ago, has been of great benefit to Syilx



communities through its powerful ways of promoting safety and connection while providing space for healing and planning. FDM Coordinators supported Syilx and guest Indigenous families to exercise our rights to make decisions that are in the best interest of our children and family members. Families led the process, guiding who was invited to the meeting and setting the agenda. FDM brought together family support networks—parents, children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors, and close family friends—to make important decisions that might otherwise be made by social work professionals. This helps to address the inherent imbalances between child welfare agencies and the families they serve. While service agencies may participate in FDM, they do so in the role of providing information and supporting families to create and carry out their own plans.

- Supported 15 families, primarily of Syilx ancestry, with numerous Circles
- Facilitated 12 Community Circles
- Facilitated 8 enowkinwixw trainings for communities

### Syilx Early Years

ONA works to increase linkages between early years staff across Syilx Okanagan Bands by holding monthly meetings of the Syilx AECD Network and hosting the annual Syilx Early Years Gathering which, in 2022, saw 40 staff and managers attend with their involvement in the gathering counting towards the hours required for their licensing. This program helps link communities with culturally-relevant early years resources and appropriate child development services including providing supports to case management and referrals to other ONA or community programs as needed. With staff shortages impacting many early childhood programs, one area of focus is helping communities consider staffing solutions and promoting access to early years training.

kʷu əc' ʉlluʔs

# SYILX CONNECTION

As Syilx people, gathering together for an event is a time honoured tradition.



At the center of Syilx well-being is our time-honored instinct to connect and support each other, out on the land and waters of our territory, as families, communities, and a Nation. Gathering is a tradition for our people, and the ONA has continued to promote this custom through events that help instill cultural teachings, education, and awareness for the Nation and citizens at large.

# BRINGING THE PEOPLE TOGETHER

## COMMUNITY FOCUSED EVENTS HELP INSTILL CULTURAL TEACHINGS, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

### Four Food Chiefs Gathering 2022

The Four Food Chiefs Gathering was held in Penticton and focused on how we can connect with and protect our *tmxʷulaxʷ*, *tmixʷ*, and *siwʷkʷ*. This gathering has become a model of integrated service delivery with all departments sharing responsibility for engaging community members in the collective work of ONA. Over the two days, keynote speakers from outside Syilx territory shared their wisdom and experiences.

Kalehua Krug from O’ahu talked about the power of Indigenous language and the importance of the Hawaiian worldview for guiding environmental justice. Saysewahum from Treaty 6 shared experiences from the Idle No More movement that she co-founded to defend all lands, waters, and animals.

ONA presentations shared information about work to enhance *stxʷaʷq* (huckleberries) and protect our endangered *kiʷlawnaʷ* (grizzlies). Throughout, there was a spotlight on *ntytyix* (Chief Salmon) with a tour to see ONA staff collecting spawning salmon in the Okanagan River, another tour to the hatchery, and a presentation about research into how the return of salmon has been experienced by Syilx people in terms of diet, food security, and overall wellbeing.

The gathering also included a data discussion with 50 Nation members present to talk about the bigger picture of data. *kʷuləncútn* gave the laws and data is about protecting the laws. Data is our culture, it is our way of life, and everything we do every day. The discussion concluded that it is important to continue the work to describe data in *nqilxʷcən* and that discussions are needed about data policy to determine what data is stored and protected at different levels: family, community, and Nation.

- Breakout discussions gave the 121 participants opportunities to reflect on how closely our wellness is tied to the land.

### Fish Distribution

With strong sockeye returns in 2022, the Health Team worked closely with Fisheries staff and member Bands staff to ensure salmon distribution to communities. The collaboration was treated as a learning opportunity with lessons identified to inform community distribution processes in subsequent years. The Health Team also participants in food sovereignty gatherings and initiatives organized by IH

and FNHA which contributed to ongoing work towards developing a Syilx food sovereignty approach.

### capti’kwil Forums

Together with En’owkin Centre, ONA hosted three capti’kwil Forums as opportunities for community engagement and feedback around what role capti’kwil can play in Syilx Nation building. Syilx Members are keen for the cultural teachings and over the past few years there has been steadily growing involvement in these forums. Participants were invited to consider how lessons from the capti’kwil connect with our modern ways of living and to explore how to integrate Syilx values and principles from the capti’kwil into contemporary policy and planning processes. The sessions were enriched by the participation of the first graduating class of *nsyilxcən* language fluency students from UBC Okanagan. They shared the capti’kwil in *nsyilxcən* and contributed on panel and breakout discussions. The first forum (Dec 15, 2022) featured *skwəʷ xan naʷ sʷ aʷ aʷ kʷ xn* (Crane and Frog). The second forum (Jan 19, 2023) featured *š wšilxw uʷ snkʷ lip uʷ nš aʷš ʷitkw* (Fox and Coyote and Whale). The third forum (Feb 9, 2023) featured *naʷmtus* (The Camus Woman).

- An average of 68 people attending each of the recent sessions.





# SYILX NATION EVENTS

THESE EVENTS GIVE CAUSE TO IGNITE THE SPARK AND PASSION IN THE JOURNEY OF SYILX PEOPLE

## April 2022

April 12-13: Grandmothers Gathering, PIB  
 April 21: Syilx Family Plan Session, OIB

## May 2022

May 5: Sockeye Fry Release Ceremony, akł xʷumina?, Shingle Creek  
 May 10: Sockeye Fry Release Ceremony, nxʷaqʷa?stn, Mission Creek  
 May 10: Bear Witness Day  
 May 11: Sockeye Fry Release Ceremony, Six Mile Creek  
 May 13: Syilx Nation Drug Forum, OKIB  
 May 14-15: xʷəxʷmína? Trout Fishery, Trout Lake  
 May 17-18: Sockeye Fry Release Ceremony, sn̓uxwqnm, Castlegar, takliɬaickst, Slocan Lake, snk̓ykntn, Revelstoke  
 May 19: Syilx Family Plan Session, OKIB

## June 2022

June 3-5: Spirit of Syilx Unity Run, KIRS to PIB  
 June 15: Syilx Family Plan Session, PIB  
 June 19: Salmon Calling Ceremony, snq'əq'ula?xntn, Kettle Falls Wa  
 June 23: Syilx Nation Day of Action, Kelowna Courthouse

June 27-30: Salmon Calling Ceremonies, s̓luxʷqaynm, Castlegar, sk̓ykntn, Revelstoke, n̓ɬaylntn, McIntyre Dam, sən̓k'lip i skʷants, Enloe Dam

## July 2022

July 11: Syilx Family Plan Session, LSIB  
 July 19: Syilx Family Plan Session, UNB  
 July 21: s̓cwin (Sockeye) Salmon Fishing, s̓xʷəxʷnitkʷ, OK Falls  
 July 27-28: Annual General Assembly & Syilx Elder Youth Summit Hosted by OKIB, sk̓ykntn, Revelstoke

## August 2022

August 17: Workplace Well-Being, Virtual  
 August 29-30: Purple Ribbon Caravan, UNB, LSIB, OIB, PIB, WFN, OKIB

## September 2022

September 8: Syilx Family Plan Session, OKIB  
 September 16-18: Salmon Feast, s̓xʷəxʷnitkʷ, OK Falls  
 September 30: Walk For The Children, PIB







**October 2022**

- October 4: Sisters In Spirit Vigil, Kelowna Courthouse
- October 5-6: MMIWG2S Gathering, Kelowna
- October 5-6: River Restoration Workshop, PIB
- October 14-16: Syilx Youth Camp, Peachland
- October 17-18: Four Food Chiefs Gathering, PIB

**November 2022**

- November 20-26: National Addictions Awareness Week, Virtual
- November 27-28: Syilx Indian Residential School Gathering, OIB

**December 2022**

- December 15: capti'kwil: kwæckwæcstim? i? stə'tatətet, Virtual
- December 21: Honouring ki?lawnə? Ceremony, LSIB

**January 2023**

- January 19: capti'kwil: kwæckwæcstim? i? stə'tatətet, Virtual

**February 2023**

- February 9: capti'kwil: kwæckwæcstim? i? stə'tatətet, Virtual
- February 7-24: We Love Language, Virtual

**March 2023**

- March 2-3: kwu æc'ullu?s: Frontline Wellness, OIB
- March 20-24: Building Strength: Speaker Series, Virtual
- March 22: Syilx Water Forum, Summerland



“Drugs came into our community and we watched our kids die... It is not just up to one person to be responsible for the healing. It is a communal responsibility... Everyone has the ability to break the cycle.”  
- Syilx Nation Drug Forum 2022

“My grandmother was in residential school and I’m still feeling the effects of it now as we move on. I pray that our younger generations come up, they’re gonna start feeling it less and less but they’ll never forget.”  
- yilmixw'm Keith Crow

# BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

## RECOGNIZING SYILX STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENTS

The ability of Syilx students to access post-secondary education or further their Trades and Skill Training is central to our Nation moving forward into a better future. This year the ONA is pleased to announce twelve bursaries as part of this year's Building a Better Future Bursary Program. The 2022 recipients are:



"I always try to remember my roots. My family and community have played a huge part in my success so far and I hope I will be able to give back and help them and others."

**Teigan Peterson** Teigan graduated from Similkameen Elementary School with honours. She has always had a love for math and science so has decided to follow that passion into the field of engineering. Teigan has been accepted into the Schulich School of Engineering at the University of Calgary. Engineering is her first step to achieving her ultimate goal of becoming a doctor of optometry.



"With all my experiences I just hope to share with the younger ones and show them just how much life can offer you, if you just try new things."

**Vanessa Michel** Vanessa graduated this year from Merritt Secondary school. She maintained being an honour roll student throughout high school with an A average as well as being selected as her classes valedictorian. Throughout high school she participated in numerous She has been accepted into the bachelor of science program for kinesiology in University of Calgary, where she will attend in the fall.



"Registering for this program lit a much bigger fire than I could have imagined inside of me and my motivation to complete this program has a much bigger meaning to me now. I have realized how healing, that reconnecting with my roots and learning language, has been for my soul and how important that it is that I share this learning far and wide with community."

**Kimberlyn Kosik** Kimberlyn is a member of the Westbank First Nation, and is currently in her second year in the Bachelor of Nsyilxcen Language Fluency Degree Program at UBCO (in partnership Enowkin)



"My goal is to give back and help our people and communities to the best of my ability...The children, youth and the next generation drive me to follow my educational goals."

**Lepika Saddleman** Lepika attends the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, where she is taking an Arts Degree, and intends to then pursue a Social Work. Her education is preparing her to be a leader who can create change in community and Nation.



"Growing up I always admired the business owners of the community. Not only was it astonishing to see their dreams come to life, but also see their business thrive."

**Qui Parker** Qui graduated this year from WL Seaton Secondary School. He will be attending the Thompson Rivers University to pursue a Bachelor of Business Administration. In the future he plans on using his business experience to help his community as well as opening a business of his own.



"When I realized that I wanted to attend college, I was able to apply myself and focus on my work to get better grades."

**Kwelaxen Louis** In 2022, Kwelaxen graduated from Similkameen Elementary Secondary School. His future plans are to attend Okanagan College Culinary Arts Program. His motivation to pursue his education comes from assisting with catering community events and liking to eat good food. He hopes to implement indigenous foods in his cooking and learn new and different ways to prepare fish and wild game.



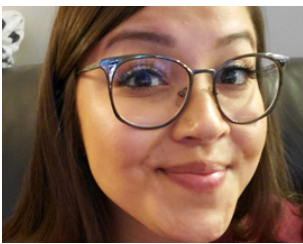
"My grandmothers voice was taken from her. I'm reclaiming it for her and all the others who lost their voices... the language is yours to claim. It's in you waiting to be woken."

**Llana Teichroeb** Llana is currently enrolled in her 3rd year in the Bachelor of nsylxcen Language Fluency Program at the UBCO (in Partnership with Enowkin). Her goal is to be an asset to her people and to advocate for language revitalization and reconciliation.



"I was privileged to be raised by many grandmothers. The most important lesson I was taught was that whenever possible I give back to my people. These teachings guided me into choosing a profession in healthcare. "

**Kirsten Lindley** Kirsten is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Health Science, with a Major in Public Health, from the University of Lethbridge. One of her goals is to develop sexual health materials from an Indigenous perspective.



"I am extremely passionate about learning the language because it encompasses who we are as Syilx people. Being Syilx, there is a meaning for everything we do and our language is very powerful."

**kwák'wísla?qn Dina Brown** Dina is a member of the Okanagan Indian Band. She has a Bachelors Degree of Kinesiology and a Master's of Occupational Therapy from the University of British Columbia. She has been working as an occupational therapist for over 2 years with Interior Health. Dina is currently taking the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology Nsyilxcen Language Fluency Diploma and has completed her first year of the program.



"I want to ensure that Indigenous history, cultural heritage, and cultural cultural belongings are made accessible to Indigenous communities. "

**k'ayk'aitkw Hall** K'ayk'aitkw is now pursuing a Masters of Archival Studies from UBC. She is passionate about documenting and preserving history, with significant investment in continuing Indigenous knowledge, culture, language, and art.



"Teaching from community and nation have helped me stay on track with my dreams... its about moving forward like my ancestors have done before me "

**Kaleb Reid** Kaleb graduated this year from Mount Boucherie Secondary School, and plans to attend the Okanagan College Business Program this fall. He has invested a lot not only in basketball but himself as a person by always learning; how to change his mindset, how to journal, meditate and listening to podcasts of successful people to gain insight from their experience.



"I want to teach our youth our language, bring the classroom outside and be on the land. I want to teach our youth to be strong and resilient..."

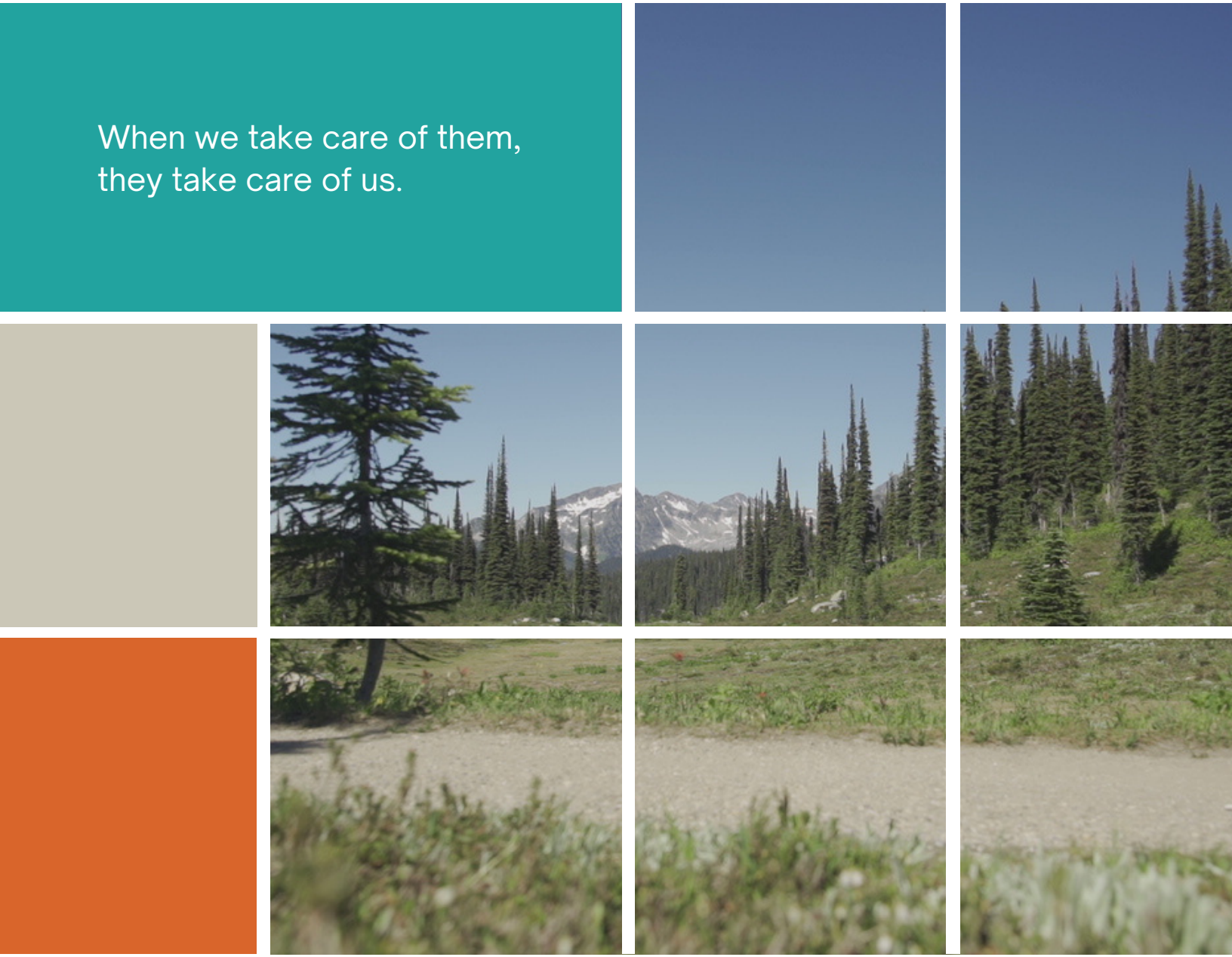
**Alicia Marchand** Alicia is currently enrolled in the Indigenous Teacher Education Program at UBC. This program provides her with the opportunity to talk about Syilx ways of being and the ability to engage with Elders as she continues to learn.



sux<sup>w</sup>txtem

# ASSERTING RESPONSIBILITIES

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



The Syilx Okanagan Nation has the inherent jurisdiction to manage the land and resources within its territory. We consider the tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup> as the foundation of our way of life and culture. All Syilx Okanagan Nation members have sacred bonds and inherent sux<sup>w</sup>txtem (caretaker) responsibilities to protect the interdependent web of tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup> (land), siw<sup>4</sup>k<sup>w</sup> (water), and tmix<sup>w</sup> (all living things) in perpetuity.



Photo: cikilax<sup>wm</sup> (prescribed burn)

# PROTECTION AND RESTORATION IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

## TACKLING THE CHALLENGES

As part of the Nations commitment to ensure that these responsibilities are affirmed throughout the territory the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and a number of Nation based committees have advanced a complex and diverse range of work. This includes recovery, restoration, and monitoring programs, as well as a broad range of partnerships to affirm that our voice and vision are heard and followed. At the root of all this work we recognize that Syilx culture and our nsyilxcen language is inseparable from these responsibilities and must be deeply woven into all the work that we carry forward.

Even though we are securing a range of opportunities, we recognize that communities and ecosystems across the territory are also grappling with increasingly pervasive and destructive challenges. The impacts of climate change are becoming more pronounced, with wildfires, flooding and landslides threatening communities and all relations across the territory. This is to say nothing of unbridled industrial, commercial and real estate development and imposed colonial governance structures that continues to fragment ecosystems and threaten the survival of many species. Responding to these challenges we must continue to unite as a People, for the good of all for all time.

From the intensification of wildfires to escalating flash flooding, the impacts of climate change are becoming more pronounced throughout our territory. These extreme climatic events are threatening our communities and destroying key habitat for the many relatives that call these ecosystems home. ONA recognizes that part of Syilx People's inherent

responsibilities to our territory include restoring habitats to ensure that the worst impacts of climate change can be diverted.

Syilx Okanagan territory has historically been maintained by cultural fire events. Active fire suppression, mainly due to colonial land management practices, have led to the build up of dead of vegetation, also known as fuel loading. Combined with hotter and drier weather patterns due to climate change, fire suppression has led to longer, more intense, and more destructive wildfire seasons and a less resilient forest ecosystem. A less resilient forest ecosystem degrades cultural, ecological and social values, increases threats to communities and infrastructure, and provides fewer natural resources.

### Emergency Prevention

The Munro prescribed burn project is the result of hard-earned relationships between the ONA, Penticton Indian Band (PIB), local industry (Gorman's), the Provincial Government and the Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC). It has successfully combined timber harvesting with Syilx cultural-ecological restoration and created a template to model future prescribed burn and wildfire risk reduction projects. Over the last year this work included, 170 ha treated by Gorman's and in the fall of 2022, a 60 ha low intensity, prescribed burn was successfully implemented by the project partners.



ki?ṣacqḥwu? (Crater Mountain) Prescribed Fire Project is a partnership between Ministry of Forests (MoF), the Lower Simalkameen Indian Band (LSIB), and the ONA and is intended to build relationships, share knowledge, and contribute to a common goal of renewing fire-dependent ecosystems. Phase II of this project remains a priority for community protection, habitat enhancement, and protection of cultural values. Prescription development activities are set for 2023 and will include an 1124 ha area known as Crater Mountain Prescribed Burn Phase 2.

Over the last year we have continued to also invest in supporting the Nation with planning and preparation to mitigate the impacts of extreme floods and wildfires. ONA's Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) worked with each community, as well as other local government, regional district, and provincial or federal ministries to ensure adequate access to information, programs, resources with the intent of optimizing response and reducing trauma to the land and the people. We recognize the crucial role that all our partnerships serve in time of crisis.

Over the last year the EMC engaged local and regional Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) as a liaison to connect Syilx leadership with local operations. This included connecting PIB's Chief Gabriel to ensure participation in the RDOS YouTube Live Media Briefing during the Skaha Creek Wildfire and assisted with response during a power outage.

The flood and wildfire response was only a fraction of the duties for the EMC program in our efforts to expand the role and function needed for our Planning developments. Advocacy and contribution of time and resources at every level is required as the Provincial and Federal governments are updating Emergency Response legislation, the ONA EMC was participating in the Modernization of the Emergency Program Act and took a very active role in the BC Flood Strategy.

### **A Home for All Our Relations to Thrive**

From large mammals like caribou to song birds, frogs and snakes to predators like the lynx, the Syilx territory is home to a vast array of interconnected species. The diversity of these relations is under increasing threat, and demands the ecosystems be protected and restored to ensure that all life has the opportunity to thrive. This requires that we both monitor species and restore their habitats so that they remain resilient.



### **ki?lawna?**

For the Syilx people, ki?lawna? (grizzly bear) is a significant part of our laws and protocols. For generations, habitat fragmentation, ecosystem degradation and a number of other factors have contributed to the decline of ki?lawna?. As such, the ONA has been taking action to reduce pressures on ki?lawna? and recover threatened populations. Under the CEC's direction to restore and protect threatened ki?lawna? populations the ONA's is working on several initiatives to help bring healthy populations back for future generations.

The North Cascades region supports one of the most imperiled ki?lawna? populations in North America. This region hosts areas with good quality bear habitat, however much of the region has been fragmented by highways and roads. The ONA has continued working as part of the Southwest BC Grizzly Bear Steering Committee, alongside the Sto:lo, Nlaka'pamux, and Secwépemc Nations, the Province of BC, and Conservation Northwest, to address the challenges and threats facing grizzly bears in the North Cascades. Together we have developed the objectives and identified priority actions required to support healthy ki?lawna? populations, drafted within a Stewardship Strategy for ki?lawna? (Grizzly Bears) in the North Cascades of British Columbia. To initiate these steps, the ONA team began developing a Habitat Restoration Prioritization Mapping Tool to first identify places where need for restoration and outreach are greatest. The first draft of the map was made using the ecological and human footprint information we have collected through GIS spatial data and field habitat surveys.

During the 2022 field season, ONA field crews partnered with Syilx community members and technicians to conduct habitat quality assessments and identified possible high-risk areas for human-bear conflict along roads, trails and recreation sites. In total, 38 habitat surveys were conducted, and field crews obtained aerial imagery from drone flights.



The next phase of the mapping project is gathering Syilx knowledge and understandings of ki?lawna?'s life requirements, existing habitat conditions, and teachings about human-bear relationships to identify restoration and education needs in the western territory.

In 2022, the ONA participated in biannual meetings held by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee's (IGBC) North Cascades Ecosystem Subcommittee. The ONA is not involved with the US recovery process but participates to keep informed of efforts being made to bring grizzly bears back into the southern portion of the North Cascades region.



The ONA recognizes the importance of protecting and monitoring key food species that contribute to both Syilx food sovereignty, and that are also the sustenance for other relatives, including stxa? (black huckleberry). Over the past decade ki?lawna? numbers have slowly started to grow in the Kettle-Granby populations, following decades of decline. To strengthen this population recovery process, the ONA is conducting a multi-year project focussed on enhancing the availability of important plant foods, namely stxa?, while also striving to increase habitat security and connectivity for bears. This work has been informed by Syilx Elders and Knowledge Holders and members of the Syilx Huckleberry Women Protectors. ONA started by initially identifying candidate stxa? enhancement sites based on their potential for having large patches of stxa?, their distance to roads (minimum of 150 m away) and the inclusion of beneficial berry patch characteristics identified by Syilx knowledge keepers. In 2022, field crews visited 5 different sites to verify candidate enhancement sites before narrowing down to one final location. The ONA team is developing an enhancement prescription that will include a variety of restoration techniques and Syilx cultural practices targeted at improving berry productivity, spring plant foods and whitebark pine trees.



As part of the habitat enhancement field investigations, the field crews have also deployed wildlife cameras to observe timing of ki?lawna? and other tmix<sup>w</sup> moving through and between different seasonal habitat. From the 10 cameras deployed, ONA have seen a high diversity of wildlife species, including two grizzly bears. ONA is currently developing preliminary habitat map layers for ki?lawna? which build on the understanding of how population density and distribution are affected by current habitat conditions and road densities in the Kettle-Granby. With guidance from Syilx Elders and knowledge keepers, we will work on assessing areas requiring connectivity and food security enhancement.

### **sty?cá?**

Revelstoke Complex and Central Selkirk Caribou sty?cá? Technical Working Group's (RCCSCTWG), has been working for approximately 2 years to create conservation tools to protect sty?cá? and their habitat in the Columbia Region. Given BC's change in direction away from collaborative processes and shared-decision making with Indigenous groups it is imperative to prepare available management tools that will contribute to the conservation of sty?cá? and their habitat. Current tools under development include adoption of additional habitat protection measures involving both Nation and member band level mechanisms and the development of a draft Section 80 Petition under the Species at Risk Act.

The Working Group is currently planning to meet in April, 2023, for a 2 day 'Caribou Summit' to strengthen working relationships, learn about recovery actions of the Níkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society in northeast BC, and discuss the protection of caribou habitat in the Columbia region. A key intended outcome of the Caribou Summit is for the group to work towards the development of a 'Caribou Declaration' to recognize our cultural and spiritual relationship with caribou as an important part of the ecological system and to develop collective efforts to provide safe space and environment across our territories for caribou and caribou habitat.

### yilíkʷlxkn

Bighorn sheep 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. 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%. In collaboration with the Ministry of Forests (MOF), PIB Colville Confederate Tribe(CCT) Fish and Wildlife (CCTFW), LSIB, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Wild Sheep Society, provincial wildlife vets (part of the BC Ministry of Forests, Fish and Wildlife), and many others. ONA is now leading and creating 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 Okanogan County, Washington State. The document will be brought to the community once completed. ONA, PIB and MOF are continuing 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.

### Lower Columbia Rare Species and Ecosystem Enhancement Initiative

This initiative targets restoration and enhancement to support rare and threatened ecosystems and wildlife species on the Species at Risk Act (SARA). This is led by the ONA, with support from Selkirk College School of Environment, Trail Wildlife Association (TWA), Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP) and funded primarily by the Columbia Basin Trust. Efforts have been focused on riparian and dry fire-maintained ecosystem, including the newly red-listed shrub lands.

Eight SARA listed species associated with these ecosystems were identified as focal species (not exclusively) for habitat enhancement:

- ciwcu - Lewis's woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*)
- xʷaʔtqaylín - Yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*)
- qʷəlqʷlsinaʔ - Interior Western screech-owl (*Megascops kennicottii macfarlanei*)
- pʰaʔs - Common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)
- skʷʷʷaʔs - Great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*)
- aslaiyaʔqənə - Northern rubber boa (*Charina bottae*)
- qʷayqʷaytʷaps - Western skink (*Plestiodon skiltonianus*)
- nwiwiʔtʰniwʷt North American racer (*Coluber constrictor*)



“styílcáʔ has been an integral and critical part of Syilx culture since time immemorial. We continue to assert, as we have in the past, that it is our responsibility to collectively and cooperatively recover styílcáʔ (caribou), if they are to remain on the landscape. The Syilx Okanagan Nation leadership alongside other First Nation governments have been responding to declining caribou populations by leading with direction and advice from our Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and experts remain committed to doing what it takes to ensure the best outcomes for our relative

- Chief Clarence Louie, ONA  
Tribal Chair





Over the last year actions taken to protect our relatives included:

- 3,000 m2 area treated for invasive plants
- 829 Stems planted: black cottonwood, red-osier dogwood, and willow spp.
- 10 Nest boxes installed: 4 Western screech-owl, 1 Lewis's woodpecker, 5 wood duck
- 43 Wildlife trees protected from beaver herbivory
- 3 permanent educational riparian restoration and bank swallow signs installed at Dove Hill, Norns Confluence and Kinnaird Bridge sites.

Syilx People deeply understand the interconnection between land and water, and thus have also continued to monitor and restore water ecosystems throughout the territory. In collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), BC's Ministry of Forests and UBCO, ONA were able to collect and analyze over 100 surface water and groundwater samples from Vaseux Creek. Combining this information with monitoring techniques, including stream gauging and drone mapping throughout the year, we were able to increase our understanding of the relationship between Vaseux Creek flow, water diversions, and groundwater flow, helping to explain where the creek dries up and why. It also included Syilx traditional knowledge guidance in collaboration with the Osoyoos Indian Band (OIB). This work will allow us to better understand potential and actual fish rearing habitats and support water management decisions.

#### **nlux<sup>w</sup>lux<sup>w</sup>ƚcwix (Lower Trout Creek) Restoration**

This project in collaboration with the PIB is focused on rehabilitating the damage which channelization caused to the fish, wildlife habitat and ecosystem. Restoration activities include putting riffles and pools back into the creek so fish have areas to rest, eat, and spawn.

#### **siwƚk<sup>w</sup> Connects Us All**

Syilx People have an intrinsic relationship with siwƚk<sup>w</sup> (water). The western paradigm has created a human-centric view of siwƚk<sup>w</sup> where humans are separate and superior to siwƚk<sup>w</sup>. From a Syilx perspective, humans are not separate from siwƚk<sup>w</sup>. The translation of siwƚk<sup>w</sup> is of both humans lapping and animals drinking, establishing that both humans and other life forms have equal right to siwƚk<sup>w</sup>. Maintaining the integrity of siwƚk<sup>w</sup> and respecting its relationship to all life is essential to identity and is entrenched in responsibility to our Territory as affirmed in the siwƚk<sup>w</sup> declaration.

#### **Syilx siwƚk<sup>w</sup> Strategy**

As such, siwƚk<sup>w</sup> planning is a long-standing Syilx practice that has maintained the health of water systems throughout our territory for many thousands of years. ONA draws on deep Syilx knowledge to inform our approached siwƚk<sup>w</sup> protection and management, ensuring that these holistic processes are carried forward.. Rooted in these two foundational documents, the ONA continues to assert our inherent responsibility to siwƚk<sup>w</sup>.

#### **kƚúsƚnítk<sup>w</sup> (Okanagan Lake) Responsibility Planning**

A multi year Syilx-led planning and engagement process designed to bring Syilx and non-Syilx partners together to share knowledge and identify solutions for addressing the cumulative impacts threatening kƚúsƚnítk<sup>w</sup> and its watersheds. Through workshops, presentations and interviews the initiative is creating a greater understanding of how Syilx values, knowledge and leadership can provide new directions in the way we care for siwƚk<sup>w</sup> (water).

In 2022 35 interviews were held with Syilx leadership and community members and non- Syilx government staff and elected officials informed and engaged while the project plans unfold. This included interviews that gather input and direction on the future of siwƚk<sup>w</sup> governance and stewardship. Five themes emerged from the interviews.

- Re-imagining Governance
- Truth and Reconciliation comes first.
- Legal/Jurisdictional – DRIPA, a tool to be leveraged.
- Capacity Bridging – capacity needs to be built on both sides
- Syilx TEK is holistic and essential for overcoming colonial practices.

In 2023 the OKLRPI coordinating team will be presenting the outcomes of the 2022 interviews and presentations to Syilx members to gather input on the guidance of developing the Syilx siwƚk<sup>w</sup> Responsibility Action Plan.

On March 21, 2023, the 9th annual Syilx Water Forum was held, with the theme of "Waterway Restoration and Rejuvenation". This event gathered both Syilx and non-Syilx people from across the territory, and included a keynote presentation by Dr. Brittani R. Orona (Hupa, Hoopa Valley Tribe) who provided a highly engaging presentation focused on sharing experience from the Kalamath River and its successful dam removal. This was supplemented with a tour of nlux<sup>w</sup>lux<sup>w</sup>ƚcwix (Trout Creek) by ONA biologists that showcased the consistent efforts of fry releases and ecosystem restoration that have taken place.

? | pəlstim'

# SYILX FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Restoring, protecting, and promoting our First Foods



Syilx food systems are deeply rooted in our territory and way of life. However, colonization and modern, industrial developments have attempted to undermine these systems and alienate Syilx people from our land and relations. In the face of these challenges, ONA remains committed to restoring, protecting, and promoting our First Foods that are foundational and central to the well-being of our people.



Photo: Broodstock collection, October 2022

## RESILIENCE OF A MULTISPECIES FISHERY

### SYILX RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between Syilx people and our First Foods is a core bond directly tied to our wellbeing, identity, and survival. This relationship is nurtured and maintained through the unwavering persistence of syilx people to be out on the land, to harvest, gather, and pray. Evidence of this is in the work that the Okanagan Nation Alliance's fisheries department carries out each year to uphold and honour the responsibility of the syilx people. yilmixwm ntytyix (Chief Salmon) compels us to never give up, to keep going, and that home is embedded in our cells - we know what to do. Through this relationship, we maintain our collective resiliency, health, and our capacity to care for one another – food sovereignty is crucial to syilx people.

The complexities of restoring and rehabilitating syilx food fish and their habitats requires ongoing innovation, adaptability, and strong partnerships. However, the heart of this work is always ceremony, prayer, and presence – responsibilities that are carried out by the Syilx people who continue to uphold our ancestral ways.

The ONA fisheries department has seen some significant changes this past year. Two of our senior biologists co-managed until recruitment process was completed. They managed the delivery of our diverse program of activities across the territory. This work included managing one of the largest sc'win (sockeye) fishery to date, our hatchery egg take, rearing and releasing a record number of sockeye and chinook, as well as expansion of our salmon reintroduction activities in the Upper Columbia portion of Syilx territory. To support the CEC Columbia River Treaty negotiations team, the ONA Fisheries technical staff and project specific expertise on key modelling discussions with other members.

This included cultural values modelling and data and analysis for salmon reintroduction. A highlight for this year is in the return of approximately 5000 adult sc'win to spawn in tributaries of Okanagan Lake for the first time since the Okanagan Dam was installed in the early 20th century.

#### Looking Ahead

2023 will see an increased number of activities on salmon reintroduction in the Upper Columbia basin with the implementation of a large British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation grant. Overall, our department is planning to deliver over 120 projects throughout the territory. Our major partners in these projects are the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Washington State Public Utility Districts and BC Hydro.

Within the Okanagan basin, there will be a lower return of sc'win which will mean a reduced harvest and less eggs into the hatchery. However, we are expecting a larger Chinook return and thus plan to expand our Chinook broodstock collection. We also have a larger number of habitat projects underway this year including the next phase of Trout Creek restoration in addition to planning the Okanagan Lake dam passage.

"I witnessed an elder showing deep emotion while visiting Okanagan Lake dam to see the sc'win migrating through the fishway to spawn. They said they didn't believe it was possible in their lifetime to see the fish return."

– ONA Fisheries technician

# KŁ CƆƏLK STIM HATCHERY

## TO CAUSE TO COME BACK

The kł cƆƏlk stírĥ Hatchery and Broodstock Program remain an integral part of Syilx conservation efforts to return salmon to their rightful places within the territory. This year, a total of 5 265 709 sc'win eggs were fertilized which was the second highest hatchery production since the hatchery opened in 2014 (the highest was 5.5 million in 2016) and the second highest number released into Okanagan Lake.

It is important to highlight and commend the hard work and ongoing dedication of ONA Fisheries field technicians who are in the rivers and streams each and every year getting the work done for the salmon and for the people.

A significant highlight of this year was the capture of 1 female sk'lwist (summer Chinook) from spawning grounds near Oliver. This is the first time locally adapted Chinook eggs were fertilized and reared in the hatchery.

Summary of Okanagan Basin Sockeye releases (second highest release into Okanagan Lake):

Release Location	Dates	Total Fry Release
Shingle Cr.	April 18	741,529
Trout Cr.	April 20-21	792,722
Equesis Cr.	April 24	326,822
Nashwito Cr.	April 25	329,512
Whiteman Cr.	April 26	351,909
Lower Vernon Cr.	April 27	380,525
Mission Cr.	April 28, May 1-8	1,617,217
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>4,540,236</b>

### Laboratory

It is important to study and understand the smaller details that helps us to adapt to larger changes and impacts such as climate change and industrial projects. The ONA laboratory located within the hatchery, is a cutting-edge facility utilizing state-of-the-art methodologies to assist our overall salmon recovery efforts.

This year, the laboratory was able to take on new and advanced disease screening methods that were previously only conducted at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Genomics Laboratory. This occurred after an extensive training period and the hiring of a new laboratory technician

currently being trained at our lab. Specifically, we are working to increase our range of invasive and/or endangered species testing from environmental DNA samples, measure fish condition and health. This new capacity allows our staff to take a small water sample in a stream, amplify any fish cells in the water, then test whether a Chinook or Sockeye is present anywhere upstream. This integral and cutting-edge work ensures we have access to readily and the best available information is being utilized for salmon recovery.

For our 2022 sampling year, we had 11 532 fish or fish samples come through our lab. In addition to new techniques, we continue to utilize a variety of methods that build our growing database. For instance, the ATS or Acoustic Trawl Survey is a high-end fish-finder that allows us to count juvenile fish - once these records are processed, we can estimate the number of fish in each lake. Smolt sampling allows us to track hatchery released fish, and thermal marks on adult fish are examined to identify hatchery or natural salmon. Like counting tree rings to identify age, our staff also do this with fish ear bones by using a microscope to count rings to measure age. Importantly, our staff also conduct alevin/fry testing to ensure all hatchery fish are disease free and safe to be let out into the world.

### Reintroduction

Historically, sc'win (Sockeye Salmon) populations spawned throughout the nĭwntk'witkw (Columbia River) watershed and were present throughout the Okanagan basin. Extensive dam construction and channelization in the first half of the 20th century reduced sc'win abundance and limited distribution to areas downstream of McIntyre Dam. Restoration efforts resulted in the return of sc'win above McIntyre Dam in 2009, into tu?cin (Skaha Lake) in 2014, followed by a focus on restoring sc'win in kłusxənitkw (Okanagan Lake). Sc'win fry releases into kłusxənitkw began in 2016, along with monitoring efforts beginning in 2019 aimed at determining fish passage success of returning adults through the fishway at Okanagan Lake Dam and spawning distribution in kłusxənitkw tributaries.

Approximately 4.1 million Sockeye were released into Okanagan waters 2019 and have returned to spawn in record numbers. This year, more than 660 000 Sockeye entered the Columbia River over the Bonneville Dam, 2.5 times higher than the ten-year average.



80% of these fish are Okanagan salmon with roughly 480 000 Sockeye that migrated over Wells Dam. Around 79 600 Sockeye came home to Okanagan waters to spawn. This is the largest number of returning sockeye salmon since record keeping began in 1938!

### Okanagan Lake Dam

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. Our salmon now have free access and 2022 saw approximately 5000 adult Sockeye return to spawn in Okanagan Lake tributaries. This is 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 Equesis, Powers, Trout, and Mission Creeks. To improve effectiveness for fish passage, the ONA fisheries team has begun working with the Penticton Indian Band (PIB) to plan a bypass channel on the east side of Okanagan Dam.

In 2022, the ONA monitored sc'win fishway passage success at Okanagan Lake Dam, tracked the movement and distribution of spawners, estimated escapement to klusxnitkw tributaries and conducted a carcass sampling program. Methods included visual observations of sc'win holding below the dam; evaluating pool to jump height ratio in the fishway; video monitoring of jumping success and fallbacks at three locations in the fishway; acoustic and external tagging of a subset of sc'win ascending the fishway; acoustic telemetry tracking throughout klusxnitkw; stream walk surveys of klusxnitkw tributaries for spawner enumeration; and carcass sampling to collect biological data.

Monitoring programs conducted in 2022 revealed that despite inefficiencies with the configuration of the fishway at Okanagan Lake Dam, a substantial number of sc'win were able to successfully pass upstream and spawn in the tributaries of klusxnitkw. The return of exclusively hatchery origin sc'win and strong homing back to their release tributaries indicate the success of the re-introduction effort and provide guidance for future fry outplants into klusxnitkw. With the passage of salmon into Okanagan Lake, we will be updating the Environmental Flow Needs (EFN) recommendations for Okanagan Lake tributary streams to include anadromous salmon. We are continuing to work with the provincial drought response team to monitor and report on flows in the region and alert of any drought concerns.

Downstream, the Penticton channel had approximately 34 000 sockeye, a record high since 2011 which was the first year sc'win was confirmed in the channel. Additionally, approximately 26 000 kokanee spawned in the channel.

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“Bringing sc'win back to creeks and streams on klusxnitkw, like Lower Vernon Creek, are a direct result of Syilx advocacy, self-determination, and assertion of our Syilx collective responsibilities to govern, manage and stewards our lands and resources,”

- Chief Byron Louis (Revelstoke Review)

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# A MULTISPECIES FISHERY FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

## SOCKEYE HARVEST

2022 was a record year for returning sc'win, which led to an incredible harvest and food distribution across syilx territory. This high number can be attributed to favourable conditions in the ocean as well as water temperatures in the lakes and streams leading them home to syilx waters.

81 314 sc'win were harvested in syilx Okanagan Territory north of the Similkameen-Okanagan River confluence.

87% from Osoyoos Lake

Food, Social, Ceremonial: 11 502 (14%)

Recreational fishery: 7 408 (9%)

Economic: 51 622 (64%)

13 % from Okanagan River

Individual fishers: 10,782 (13%)

The consistent effort, support, care, love, and prayer from our communities over many years has resulted in the nourishment of our members by our beloved sc'win. Over 10,000 sc'win were harvested from Osoyoos Lake and distributed to Syilx Okanagan communities and members.

Lower Similkameen Indian Band	1100
Westbank First Nation	547
Upper Similkameen Indian Band	600
Upper Nicola Band	1750
Penticton Indian Band	1100
Okanagan Indian Band	1600
Osoyoos Indian Band	2321
Syilx Nation	995

Syilx fishers began food fishing in early July at s̓x̓w̓ə̓x̓wnitk̓w̓ (s-wuh-wuneet-kw) and n̓yaylntn (ny-lin-tn) pulling out over 10,000 fish to feed their families and loved ones. This was a touchstone year for many fishers, cleaners, cooks, and those that filled the canners and freezers – we express so much gratitude for all that participated in this year's fishery.

We give thanks for the large return; the ceremonies and protocols that our people continue to uphold is what continues to bring our sc'win home each year. May this year be a reminder that whether it's one sc'win or many, our gratitude, reverence, and prayers never stop – **we are salmon people.**

### Protecting Diversity and Extending the Range

In 2022, we continued to work on rebuilding the Okanagan Chinook population. This population is severely depressed

with a return of only 23 spawners in 2022. The juvenile Chinook releases undertaken by the k̓l̓ c̓p̓ə̓l̓k̓ st̓ir̓ hatchery play a key role in our effort to increase Chinook abundance in the Okanagan River. We released 25,200 Chinook smolts in January 2022 and 364 Chinook fry in May 2022 with release locations in Penticton, Okanagan Falls and Osoyoos. In 2023, we anticipate the return of spawners from fry releases that occurred several years ago.

Key aspects of the Chinook program are the hatchery and monitoring efforts as well as strong support from partners and community connection. Currently, getting Chinook eggs from Chief Joseph hatchery (CCT) makes the program possible until Chinook numbers increase and begin to spawn where we will be able to collect eggs.

### Raising Fry for Salmon Tomorrow

The ONA's Fish in Schools (FinS) Program is a hands-on aquatic education program that provides students with firsthand experience in raising salmon fry right in the classroom. Students and teachers learn about sc'win lifecycle and the importance of a healthy habitat. This program is now successfully run in schools throughout the entire Syilx Territory. The success of this initiative can be seen in the growing number of participating school districts, partners, and supporters each year.

This is the 5th year that the program has been offered in the Columbia region and we saw great success with 27 schools (up from 13 last year) across 5 school districts participating in the program. FinS is a clear demonstration of the growing impact, awareness, and interest in learning and supporting a successful reintroduction of sc'win.

"Staff and students across the district have learned so much about the Columbia River, and the lives it has supported since time immemorial, with the FinS program. We had 300 students attend the salmon release in the spring, after caring for the eggs in their schools. In so doing, they could feel the connection between water, salmon and Indigenous culture."

- Selina Metcalfe Selina Metcalfe, District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Education for Kootenay-Columbia School District

# EASTERN SYILX TERRITORY

## COLUMBIA PROJECTS

The ONA is a leader in salmon restoration in the Canadian portion of the Columbia River watershed.

### Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (CRSRI)

We continue to increase our efforts to support “Bringing the salmon home” to the upper Columbia. We remain active partners in building upon the work in this eastern region of our Territory. This year we expanded our ceremonial releases to 100,000 fry, including tagging 25,000 fish. Tagged fish provide information on the survival, location and potential success of sc’win as they travel through dams and reservoirs. Additionally, analysing this important data helps us to improve our planning and next steps for salmon restoration with our partners. In the coming year, as we learn how to overcome the technical barriers to salmon reintroduction, the ONA will be continuing to lead in addressing the ongoing transboundary, federal, and provincial challenging administrative barriers to the reintroduction efforts.

In addition to the fry releases, this year we completed the Salmon reintroduction experimental design Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports, as well as a Chinook Adult Transfer Proof-of Concept Project. The Experimental Design Reports lead directly to the development of the successful BCSCRIF project proposal that will start in the upcoming fiscal year. The BCSCRIF project work has enabled the addition of an additional Biologist in our Columbia office.

### Columbia River Treaty: Technical Support and Specialized Expertise

ONA has been collaboratively developing performance measures to assess the timing and flow of water through dams in the ne modernized Columbia River Treaty. ONA’s aim is to recenter and respect the needs of tmix<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup> and tmix<sup>w</sup> rather than simply regulating flow for the benefit of power generation. This includes providing water for salmon migration and improved sturgeon spawning, as well as restoring riparian vegetation and habitat. Thus, the work on Cultural Values which we have so much more work to undertake to ensure our interests are respected.

To support our negotiations teams we have staff and contractors involved in numerous CRT projects:

- Joint Steering Committee
- Indigenous Nations Group: Cultural Values
- Performance Measures Team - including subgroups for Flood Riparian and Wetland, Anadromous Salmon, Stranding, and Productivity
- Modeling group developing scenarios for Environmental Flows, Anadromous salmon, and System wide.

### Chinook Salmon are Returning

Since March 9, 2022, the ONA has received several reports from Anglers who have caught and identified chinook salmon in the eastern portion of syilx Territory — including in the Lower Arrow Lakes, on the Columbia River down river from the Keenleyside Dam and in the Waneta area.

On March 15, 2022, an angler delivered a chinook caught on Lower Arrow Lake to our Castlegar office staff. The fish was confirmed to have a PIT [passive integrated transponder] tag. The tag number was sent to Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) Salmon Reintroduction scientists and confirmation was that this chinook was part of a Spokane Tribe pen culture program in the Spokane Arm of Lake Roosevelt, released as a yearling on March 23, 2021.



The information from this one PIT tag indicates that this Chinook travelled the ~200 km upstream from Spokane Arm, Lake Roosevelt, through the Transboundary Reach, through the locks at HLK Dam, and was caught in Arrow Lake. This means that Chinook passage is possible through the Kettle River/Christina Lake, Transboundary Reach, and into Arrow Lakes, possibly up to Revelstoke Dam.

### **White Sturgeon**

White Sturgeon in the upper Columbia is an endangered population that has been of concern to the Syilx Nation for several years due to damming and habitat loss. Beginning in 2013, the Okanagan Nation Alliance has been working with BC Hydro to restore White Sturgeon populations by assisting and monitoring spawning as well as releasing and monitoring hatchery-reared juveniles in the Mid-Columbia River. Notably this year, 24 juvenile White Sturgeon (one captured twice) were captured between the Beaton Arm and Greenslide Creek on the Arrow Lakes Reservoir; this is the most captured in a single year for the past 16 years signalling increased survival of released fish.

### **Invasive Species**

Invasive species are a significant threat to the successful recovery and reintroduction of Indigenous fish species in Syilx Territory. Successfully managing and mitigating negative impacts of these invasive species is a necessary component of restoring Syilx Food systems. Northern Pike were observed in the Columbia River in 2010. The ONA has been actively suppressing Northern Pike since 2018. In 2022, 179 Northern Pike were removed from the system using gillnets and electrofishing. Northern Pike are a predator for salmon and managing their numbers is a priority for bringing the salmon back. Invasive Zebra and Quagga mussels also pose a significant risk if detected, as such, the ONA fisheries team has been monitoring the Pend d'Oreille Reservoir near Trail, BC since 2018 and as of this year, no invasive mussels have detected.

### **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, there has been an out planting of over 8000 Chinook eggs to begin seeding upstream habitats so future returning Chinook spawners will migrate upstream of the dam site in previously blocked reaches.





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# OPERATIONS AT A GLANCE

Serving the Bigger Picture



The Syilx Okanagan Nation has the inherent jurisdiction to manage the land and resources within its territory. We consider the *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>* as the foundation of our way of life and culture. All Syilx Okanagan Nation members have sacred bonds and inherent *sux<sup>w</sup>txtem* (caretaker) responsibilities to protect the interdependent web of *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>* (land), *siw<sup>4</sup>k<sup>w</sup>* (water), and *tmix<sup>w</sup>* (all living things) in perpetuity.



Photo: Waldie Island, Castlegar

# CORE SERVICE

## ENHANCING THE COLLECTIVE WORK

During the past fiscal ONA, HR continued to deliver a one stop service in the areas of staffing, employee relations, strategic intervention, health and wellness in the workplace that included and emphasized the active creation, monitoring and maintenance of safe workplace requirements in a post Covid-19 environment.

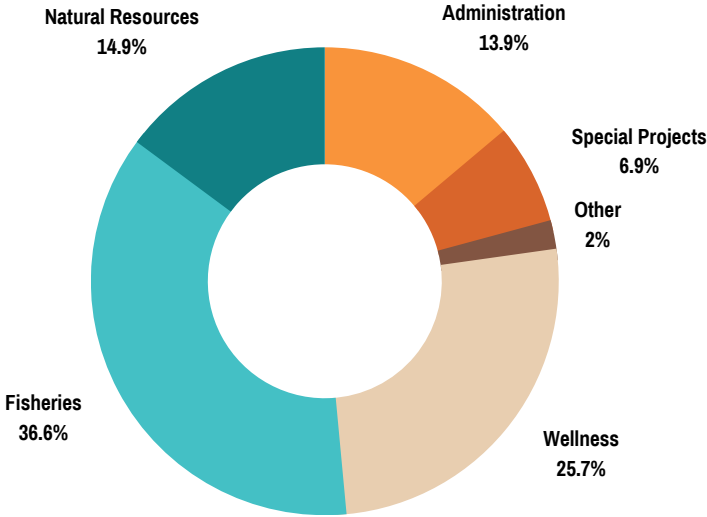
Other areas of impact and service delivery were day to day consultation and interaction with ONA departments, and where applicable, government departments and other First Nation organizations, metrics monitoring, general participation in the application of ONA governance best practices, ONA organization development systems and structures as well as continuous application and monitoring of retention strategies and total rewards management.

The planning and rolling out of the first wave of Bill C-65 mandatory training was a critical activity within the ONA HR workplace. Bill C-65 came into effect on January 1, 2021 and is an Act that amended the Canada Labour Code. This Act introduced a number of amendments to strengthen the framework for harassment and violence prevention, including sexual harassment and sexual violence in federally regulated workplaces. Staff, supervisors and senior role-players are required to attend training sessions to be acquainted with the impact of bill C-65, the processes to follow, the mechanisms to be put in place, and the possible consequences for non-compliance.

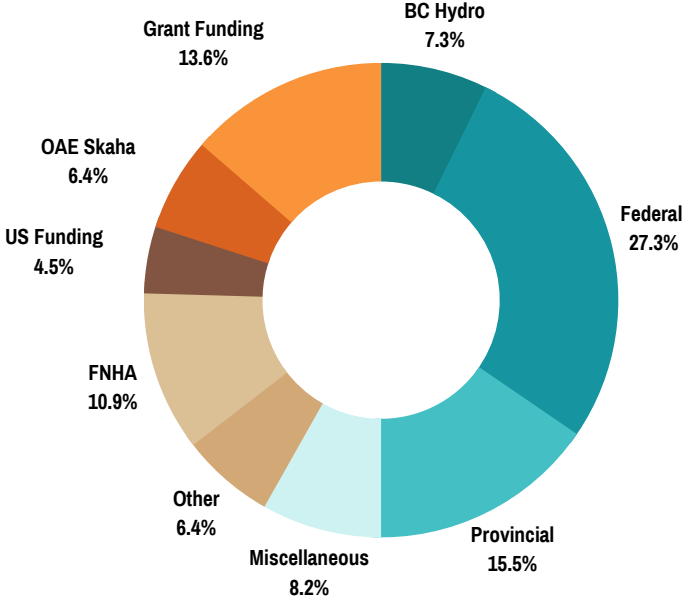
### Financial Review

The Okanagan Nation Alliance is primarily a project and proposal driven organization with a small amount of core funding to support overall operations.

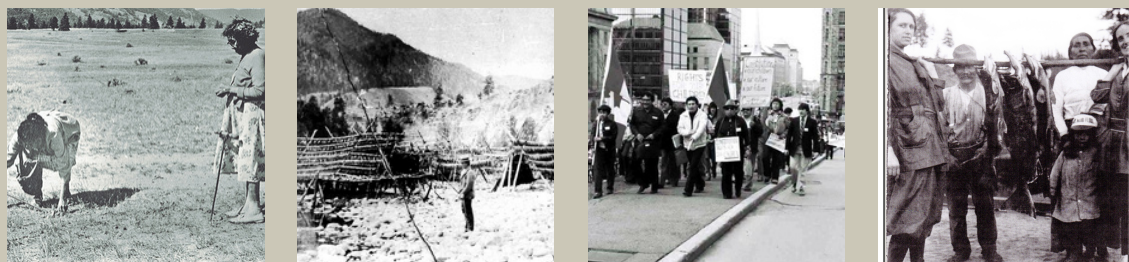
Total Revenues by Department



Total Revenues by Funder







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