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Syilx Okanagan Nation Commend the Biden Administration for release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to Restore ki?lawna? (Grizzly Bear) to the US North Cascades Ecosystem

It is with much anticipation and hope, of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, that with the release of *the Draft Environmental Impact Statement* to restore ki?lawna? to the North Cascades that we will be able to collaborate and move forward to restore grizzly bear populations to this transboundary ecosystem together. We acknowledge the work of the US Department of Interior, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US National Park Service to launch a public review of this statement which outlines the options for restoration.

ki?lawna? has been an integral part of Syilx culture and an important indicator of the health and well-being of the land and Syilx people, since time immemorial. “Only within the last 150 years have ki?lawna? been absent from the North Cascades landscape- a result of persecution and overhunting by settlers. Much like our people, the tmix^w (all living things) are resilient. The ki?lawna?, is a part of who we are, our nation has worked tirelessly to restore salmon, and now we continue the journey to bring ki?lawna? home to the North Cascades,” stated Chief Clarence Louie, Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) Tribal Chairman.

In 2014, the Syilx Nation declared ki?lawna? protected across Syilx Territory, and mandated the ONA to take action to restore and protect endangered populations, including the North Cascades. ONA has since led recovery and stewardship planning efforts, in partnership with neighbouring Nations, the BC Ministries of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship and Forests, BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and supporting ENGOs. Just as the Syilx Okanagan Territory is transboundary, the North Cascades is a transboundary population and thus requires coordinated efforts on both sides of the Canada-US border. In the fall of 2022, the Syilx Okanagan Nation called on the US Government to relaunch the recovery planning efforts in the US portion of the North Cascades. It is with great pleasure that we learn of this relaunch of the EIS, and re-confirm our commitment to bringing ki?lawna? home to the North Cascades.

Syilx Nation Natural Resources Chair, Jordan Coble also added, “The announcement of the EIS review process in the US marks an important moment in time for recovery efforts on both sides of the border. Many decades of work, by many committed people have led us to where we are now. From the Syilx Nation’s perspective, our partnership with BC on this work is a demonstration of implementing DRIPA in its’ purest form- we are collectively righting a wrong, and returning ki?lawna? to an ecosystem that depends on their presence.”

We look forward to continued work with our many BC and US partners to restore and protect grizzly bears in the North Cascades. Through the Joint Nations Grizzly Bear Initiative we continue to advance work towards restoration of the North Cascades population in many ways, including the development of a Stewardship Strategy which contains the necessary steps to advance recovery, as per the BC Auditor General’s 2017 recommendations and referenced in BC’s Provincial grizzly bear strategy.

The ONA is committed to conserve, manage, co-manage the wildlife, lands and waters of the Nation’s territory. In doing so, the Nation will be true to its spiritual and environmental values, mindful of the cultural and social needs and aspirations of its individual bands, and strong in its assertion of the Nation’s rights and title to its entire area of occupancy and use.

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