



Media Release | 2024

Assurances that Okanagan yilík^wlxkn (Bighorn Sheep) are not left behind- Okanagan Nation Alliance and the Wild Sheep Society of BC pick up Bighorn program while BC grapples with budget constraints.

tkwəłniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory: Approximately 700 bighorn sheep are spread across four population units in the Okanagan and Similkameen portions of Syilx Okanagan Territory: Granby, South Okanagan, Similkameen-Ashnola, and Westside Road. These units are geographically isolated with limited interactions. The health of the yilík^wlxkn (Okanagan bighorn sheep herds) has been compromised by several diseases, including epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) outbreaks, persistent pneumonia outbreaks linked to *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (M. ovi) and issues with external parasitism from *Psoroptes cuniculi* that have further impacted their health and numbers.

Bighorn sheep are an integral and critical part of the Syilx Okanagan Nation culture since time immemorial. "The bighorn sheep is a relative with whom we have shared tmx^wulax^w (land) and resources for thousands of years. There is an inextinguishable responsibility to care for the land and the tmix^w (all living creatures), including bighorn sheep." – says Jordan Coble, the Okanagan Nation Alliance's (ONA) Natural Resource Committee (NRC) Chairman. "

The ONA is aware that the Provincial Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) is grappling with budget constraints that are impacting BC's ability to implement the work that must continue in order to steward the Bighorn sheep and their habitat. As noted in several [previous articles](#), this year's budget allocation to WLRS amounts to less than half of what was spent the previous year, for an already chronically underfunded program. This has meant that the disease monitoring program, crucial for protecting these populations, is losing some of its' support, as Provincial budgets and capacity dwindle. Provincial budgets and support are only part of the equation when it comes to yilík^wlxkn stewardship though, and the ONA certainly will not allow a lack of Provincial support to **'cancel'** the Bighorn programs. These circumstances, in the ONA's view, only add pressure to BC to advance co-management agreements, and acknowledge and recognize the Syilx Okanagan Nation's responsibilities for wildlife. BC has a responsibility as well, to work to ensure that wildlife are protected and managed, and to act as partners with the ONA in doing so.

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is very aware of the threat to many important issues, including Bighorn sheep, and remain committed to finding pathways and solutions to ensure these important programs are not lost. In partnership with the Wild Sheep Society of BC, ensuring continued efforts to protect these herds is a top priority. "We understand that a combination of awkward timing, budget constraints and adjustments after multiple re-organizations in WLRS are creating challenges, but British Columbians can be assured that Bighorn work will continue. The Syilx Okanagan Nation's work on the Wildlife matters long predates that of BC's DRIPA. We hold steadfast to our responsibility to advocate for Syilx title and rights, and rightful role in the context of wildlife stewardship. Specifically for the yilík^wlxkn, we have been partners in every aspect of this work for many years and will continue to step forward and hold the line regardless of Provincial dynamics and politics' -Cailyn Glasser, ONA NRD Manager.

Okanagan Nation Alliance

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Kyle Stelter, Chief Executive Officer of the Wild Sheep Society of BC, comments, "Bighorns are an iconic wildlife species in BC and are an important part of our natural ecosystem. In recent years, the Society has invested over \$1.3 million towards bighorn sheep management and raised another \$1 million through grants and partner funding. Our members are dedicated to investing in the vitality and health of wild sheep populations across BC, and we will continue to work with the Syilx Okanagan Nation to ensure that the bighorn sheep disease management program continues to run." The Okanagan Nation Alliance and the Wild Sheep Society of BC have developed a memorandum of understanding, committing to partnership to ensure BH Sheep recover and persist in the Okanagan.

[B.C. fish and wildlife programs are in 'crisis' | The Narwhal](#)

[Okanagan bighorn sheep disease monitoring program cancelled | iNFOnews | Thompson-Okanagan's News Source \(infotel.ca\)](#)

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