# OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE

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**Open Letter: Correcting False and Dangerous Claims of the Sinixt Confederacy and Finding a Way Back to Unity**

January 9, 2025

Way' to all our relatives,

Many of you have seen Facebook posts from supporters of the "Sinixt Confederacy," claiming Chiefs of the Syilx Okanagan Nation and the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) are telling stakeholders in the Arrow Lakes to stop telling Sinixt stories, that we have called for the border to be shut to Sinixt people, and that we have said we want to "bury the Sinixt."

All of these claims are false. They are provoking threats of violence against our Chiefs and creating confusion and division among our people. Is this our sqilxw ways? Is this the example we want to show our youth, and the future we want for them?

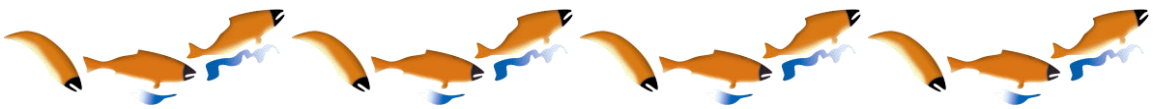
This has become so personal and divisive, that we need to share some important facts.

**A Way Back to Unity**

When the border was drawn along the 49th parallel, both sides of our Nation were left to fend for ourselves against colonial governments. We all endured devastating impacts.

Today, Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) is compensated for impacts on the US side of the border and controls over a million acres of land. In Canada, we are still fighting for our sovereignty, Rights and Title. Despite these challenges, we have continued to foster collaboration with all US entities to advance the healing and reinvigoration of our waterways and lands.

The truth, according to our Elders (including those who testified at the Desautel trial), is that the Sinixt have always been part of our Syilx Okanagan Nation. We have one language, one culture, one land and one people. We have never claimed extinction or separation. In fact, we have consistently worked with CCTBC on many issues from salmon reintroduction to border crossing gatherings, and our offers to mediate this issue have been rejected but remain open.



We appeal to all our relatives for unity. We remain committed to abiding by the principals of our Okanagan Nation Declaration (1987) and the Syilx Unity Declaration we all signed in 2010, and to upholding those values to respect each other's rights and needs.

The Syilx Unity Declaration made four important agreements:

1. Political Unity: We agreed to foster cooperation through political unity and alliance.
2. Cultural Unity: We agreed to protect, preserve, and promote our common culture, history, and language.
3. Economic Unity: We agreed to foster and expand economic development within our communities.
4. Territorial Unity: We agreed to make best efforts to proceed in unity on all claims or assertions to title and/or rights that pertain to our Indigenous territory or special claims.

This is the path of shared success, and it requires leaders who are willing to respect and uphold the principles embodied within the Syilx Unity Declaration, and who are committed to maintaining unity among all our relations, for the good of all, for all time.

**We Had to Act: Colonial Governments Excluding Us from Our Territory**

This is not our first disagreement or conflict with CCT Business Council (CCTBC). However, it is important to point out we did not walk away from, tear up, or disregard the 2010 Syilx Unity Declaration. Instead, it is the CCTBC who unilaterally walked away and created the "Sinixt Confederacy" in our Eastern Territory without consulting us, and without our consent.

Until recently, our Chiefs tried to resolve this conflict behind closed doors as relatives. This changed this past fall when we decided to sound the alarm because the federal and provincial governments and other stakeholders were starting to exclude us from projects and decisions in our Eastern Territory, including the Arrow Lakes. Meanwhile, they were expanding consultation with the "Sinixt Confederacy," including on the Big White Ski Resort expansion in the heart of our Territory.

These are threats to our Nation. As such, we have begun reminding governments, companies, and partners in the Arrow Lakes that we hold and exercise Title to our Eastern Territory, and we are the representative and successor group for Sinixt people in Canada, and that many members of our communities are of Sinixt descent.

The truth is that our Chiefs, past and present, have always supported our US-based Sinixt relatives' right to hunt and gather in our Territory. Where we draw the line, is the right to economic benefit from modern uses and projects within our Territory.

Just as the Colville Tribes wouldn't expect us to come south and start demanding money, land and consultation on the US-side of the border, we expect our US-based relatives to honour the same principle. Instead, the Desautel Supreme Court ruling, which we supported in good faith through the testimony of our Elders, is being used as a weapon against us, turning an Aboriginal right to hunt, into a reason to reach across the border and claim exclusive rights to our Territory.

Rather than upholding principles of unity, the CCTBC, through the "Sinixt Confederacy," is pursuing a path of division and exclusion. It is undoing our cooperative successes like salmon restoration, and it is unravelling ties between our once unified Nation, and for what?

**We Will Do Everything to Protect, Defend and Advance Our Rights and Title**

Our Chiefs have not tried to reach across the border into Colville Tribes' business areas to demand money or land. We have not hired expensive lawyers and PR firms to seek unilateral involvement and say over Syilx Okanagan Territory in the United States. We have not done any of these things, but as sure as salmon, we will fight the strongest current, and we will do everything to protect, defend and advance the Rights and Title of our people in Canada.

The recent threats made against our Chiefs online are a form of violence, just as efforts to rewrite history and claim and exclude us from our Arrow Lakes Territory are a form of colonial violence. The Syilx Okanagan are a strong people. We have consistently defended our lands and resources throughout our whole territory since time immemorial. We will continue to do so, and our collective resolve is stronger than ever to protect, defend and preserve our Aboriginal Title and Rights to all of our lands and resources. We only hope peace and unity will prevail with our relatives south of the border.

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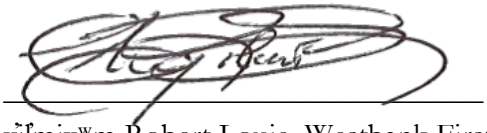

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