

## **OKANAGAN LAKE DAM EAST SALMON PASSAGE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY**

**Penticton, BC – March 7, 2025** – The salmon are returning home. On March 7th, the Syilx people and partners celebrated a historic groundbreaking ceremony for the East Salmon Passage at Okanagan Lake Dam. This long-awaited project marks the first time in generations that Indigenous salmonids will be able to pass freely into Okanagan Lake, accessing their ancestral spawning grounds and restoring a crucial link in the region’s ecosystem.

The ceremony was more than just the beginning of a project—it was a cultural reminder about our connection to the land and water, that underscored the importance of bringing the salmon home. Elder caylx Richard Armstrong, who has led countless salmon ceremonies shared the importance and uniquely individual responsibility we all have to take care of the water and land for all living things: “Our hard work, our prayers, and our ceremonies have made this possible. This is a proud moment for all of us, as we see the salmon return to the waters where they belong.”

“Today the Okanagan Nation Alliance is the largest First Nations Fisheries management team in Canada. Our nation has continued for a long time to help bring the salmon back, and although we have had our battles with the province, we the Syilx people will continue as the responsible authority to the salmon,” said Chief Clarence Louie.

“Our collective success has been a series of processes all coming together, like keeping the water flowing in the river, restoring the habitat that we had available and then adding more habitat over time” says Chief Greg Gabriel “everyone in our Nation has been supportive of this important work and many have worked directly with the ONA Fisheries department to get the work done”

The East Salmon Passage will create a nature-like fishway channel bypassing the Okanagan Lake Outlet Dam, allowing over 2 million salmon and other Indigenous fish to pass through to Okanagan Lake for the first time. The fishway will optimize migration conditions, with adjustable barriers to prevent invasive species, while supporting dam operations during drought and lake level fluctuations.

“In the Yakima basin there wasn’t any sockeye there for over 100 years, because of the reservoir dams. Because of our reintroduction and the help from the Okanagan Nation Alliance and coming here to learn, we are now in the process of completing permanent fish passage at Cle Elum Lake Dam, the largest lake in the Yakim Basin,” said Councillor Brian Saluskin, from the Yakima Nation.

Chad Fuller, ONA Fisheries Program Manager, highlighted the significance of this milestone: “This is more than just a project; it’s the next chapter for salmon in the Okanagan. It restores migration routes, supports the ecosystem, and brings the salmon back to their rightful place in the land.” The project will also enhance riparian and lakeshore habitats, benefiting native wildlife, including species-at-risk. A monitoring station will be established to support future research and conservation efforts. This is a crucial step in ensuring the sustainability of our salmon populations and the entire ecosystem. The work we’ve done today will have a lasting impact for generations to come.

“We have built an amazing collaborative partnership to this point where we meet at the culmination and see the last of the barriers to free passage of Okanagan sockeye” said Jocelyn Campbell Director for the Province of BC Ministry of Water and Resource Stewardship.

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*For over 20 years, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and Syilx people have worked tirelessly to bring salmon back from the brink of extinction. This new fishway channel will bypass the Okanagan Lake Outlet Dam, ensuring safe migration for over 2 million salmon and other Indigenous fish species. The project also includes safeguards against invasive species and will continue supporting the dam’s operations during fluctuating water levels and extreme droughts.*

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*This project is made possible through the collaboration of the Penticton Indian Band, the City of Penticton, the Province of British Columbia, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, with funding from the Habitat Conservation Plan, the Habitat Subcommittee of the Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee, and TD Friends of the Environment Fund.*