



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2024 - 2025

One Language, One Land, One Culture, One People



# ONE LANGUAGE. ONE LAND ONE CULTURE. ONE PEOPLE

## way' xast sxləxʔalt iʔ p\_ isnəqsílxʷ

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) was formed in 1981 as the inaugural First Nations government in the Okanagan to work collectively on areas of common concern and to advance and assert Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights over Syilx Okanagan 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 2024-2025 fiscal year, which reports on initiatives, activities and progress as we continue to work to uphold the Okanagan Nation Declaration.



Watch the video of Dave Parker reading the declaration in 1987 at Komasket Park, Vernon, BC



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## INSIDE THIS REPORT

03 Message from the xaʔtus

05 Executive Director's Reflections

07 Title and Rights  
skc'əxʷəxwiplaʔuʔ stəʔtaʔ

16 Syilx Visibility and Voice  
xəli kʷu sqilxʷ

21 Syilx Wellness  
iʔ scxasəsmiltət

27 Upholding Our Responsibilities  
naqsmiʔst xəl tmixʷ

34 Restoring Balance for the tmixʷ  
səxʷtxətnitkʷ

39 Operations  
nəcip



# OKANAGAN NATION DECLARATION

Yeeh koo S-Ooknahkchinx kgoolheniem yatpnah shehelheharlt kchlktdekmintet  
kgel yayart yeeh sonisoo - weeptet. Oothl yalah yarpnah koo tsoot.

We, the Okanagan Nation make this declaration today as a sign for  
every generation to come. Therefore, we hereby declare that:

Mneemthltet yeeh koo xahrmaskehilwk, koo temskehiwhewh yatlah te temwhoolahwh, yeeh toomhtemhtet.

We are the unconquered aboriginal peoples of this land, our mother.

Telh kqoolhentsooten swhitzetzxtet weeh toomhtemhtet, ksnpee -  
eelshmenhtemh, kstxetdenhtimh oothl kskgethlkehiwhenhtemh.

The creator has given us our mother, to enjoy, to manage, and to protect.

Telhs meeas qchesapihs, yeeh koo xahtmaskehilwh koos queleewtx eel toomhtemhtet.

We, the first inhabitants, have lived with our mother from time immemorial.

Yeeh koo S-Ooknahkehinx yeeh tzohehentsootentet koo xeehxeehstim koo  
kgel yayart phehwikstmentem an hehastan yeeh telh toomhtemhtet.

Our Okanagan Governments have allowed us to share equally in the resources of our mother.

Loot penhkinh tde xeehxeehxeexmentem yeeh stethltethltet yeeh kgel toomhtemhtet, yeeh  
telh toomhtemh an hehastantet, yeeh txideeplahtentet oothl yeeh noononwheenahtentet.

We have never given up our rights to our mother, our mother's  
resources, our governments and our religion.

Loot penhkinh koo tdeks nizespoolawhahx. Peentk ksixtdiplahntemh yeeh telh  
toomhtemh an hehastantet koo ---- yayart, telh yarpnah oothl tdeswhoois.

We will survive and continue to govern our mother  
and her resources for the good of all for all time.



## MESSAGE FROM THE XA?TUS

“ *The syilx Okanagan Nation is following in the footsteps of our ancestors as we push for justice and wellbeing for our people, the tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>, and the siw<sup>tk</sup>w.* ”

Essential to moving forward is our willingness to work together—as communities, as a Nation, with other Indigenous peoples, and across jurisdictions. The Okanagan Nation Alliance is premised on this collectivity that is our birthright as syilx peoples. Mindful of self-determination and the value of the work at every level, the ONA is also focused on ensuring that resources flow directly to communities. The responsibilities that we carry are full of challenges and opportunities, with this year again seeing strides made on every front.

**Setting Precedent on the Columbia:** We know too well the tragic impacts of the Columbia River Treaty on syilx Okanagan peoples and our territory. The new agreement reached this year is a testament to the power of a unified approach. After many years of advocacy with the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc Nations, this agreement with the governments of Canada and the United States—for the first time—brings Indigenous values and ecosystem health as core components of the modernized treaty. While much work remains to address the devastation caused by the dams, this agreement sets an international precedent and brings a long-overdue flow of funds into our communities. Meanwhile, talks with Canada and BC continue on compensation, with long-term revenue sharing and a role in decision-making on the table—along with the question of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

**Standing With Our People:** This past year saw the trial of a sexual offender who preyed on syilx women. While the justice system once again failed our women, the Chiefs condemned the outcome, stating that violence against syilx women is a violation of our laws, and formally banishing the offender from syilx Okanagan lands. The CEC also united in addressing the blatant racism of a handful of MLAs who made statements denying the realities of Indian residential schools and undermining public understanding of the constitutionally-protected status of First Nations sovereignty. syilx Chiefs called out these politicians for failing to respect our inherent rights and urged all British Columbians to reject their divisive rhetoric.

**sux<sup>w</sup>txtem:** ONA is challenging the government at every step to reclaim jurisdiction in access to the forests, waters, and animals—establishing our own guidelines and using our practices. Ongoing work for our relative siw<sup>tk</sup>w produced a historic agreement that brought syilx leaders together with local governments in a syilx-led watershed planning initiative that is rewriting how the Okanagan and Similkameen care for life-giving siw<sup>tk</sup>w. At the same time, innovative partnerships support ki?lawna? (Grizzly Bear) and yilík<sup>w</sup>lxkn (Bighorn

Sheep)—leading advances in wildlife management among BC First Nations. Syilx initiatives to protect biodiversity for all tmiḡ are ongoing including our Nation-based fishery and diverse partnerships that honour the reality that sc'wín, kiḡlawna, lynx, and caribou do not know borders.

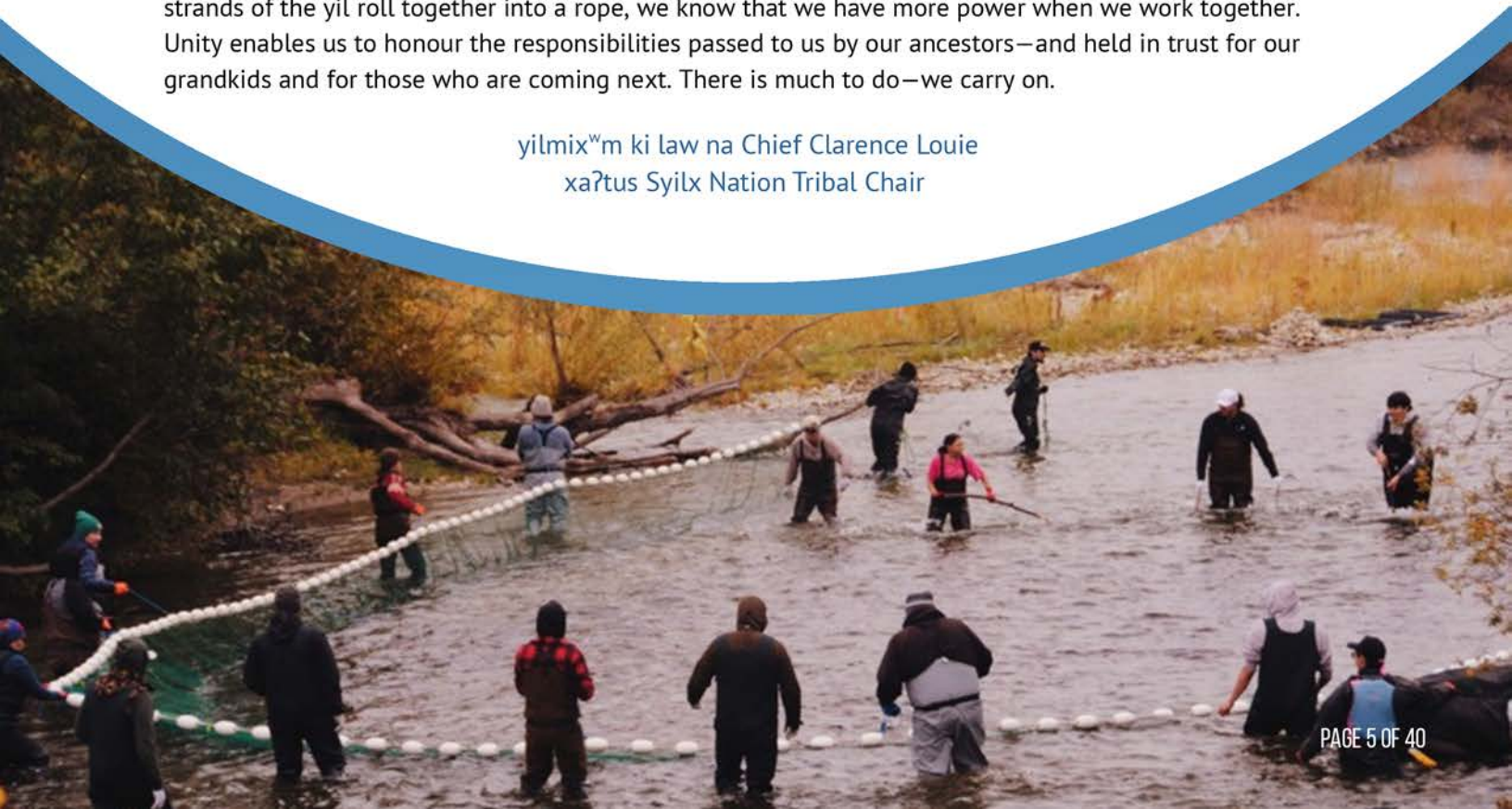
**Economic Wellbeing:** More than ever, we know that a healthy economy requires acknowledging the facts of climate change. tmiḡ reminds us to stay alert to the challenges. The CEC continues to push forward with responsive economic ventures such as the solar power project that will be finalized in the coming year. As we consider the necessity of achieving sustainable growth, we factor in the imperative to close the social gap in our communities and innovate with social enterprise, business development, and economic opportunities that include a range of ideas and interests.

**One Nation:** The repercussions of division show up in the situation with the Colville Confederated Tribes and their creation of the Sinixt Confederacy which is being used to misrepresent history and try to split our Nation. Sinixt have always been part of the syilx Nation. We are one people with one language, one culture, and one land. For years, syilx Chiefs have respectfully tried to resolve this issue as a family, but the Colville Business Council turned away from our shared Syilx Unity Declaration. Instead, they are now aggressively seeking rights and benefits within Canada that go far beyond the scope of the Supreme Court decision in Desautel (2021). This past year, as the Sinixt Confederacy sought to lay exclusive claim to the Arrow Lakes and enter into consultation with Canadian governments, the CEC broke its silence and shared our syilx-Sinixt history and position. A joint statement with Premier David Eby affirmed that First Nations in BC must always be the priority of Canadian governments, along with a commitment by the province to engage with BC First Nations to develop a policy framework for the growing issue of US-based groups vying for consultation.

**Stronger together:** In July 2024, the syilx Nation rode on horseback in unity with the Secwépemc people across the imposed border between Canada and the United States, demonstrating sovereignty and solidarity. In September, I joined others for a 3-day ride as part of the Okanagan Columbia River 2024 Salmon Motorcycle Run to save the salmon, stopping at historic fishing sites gone now due to the dams, and creating awareness of what sc'wín need as they make their epic journey home again.

We know that just like the sc'wín, the syilx people have remarkable strength and resilience. Just like the strands of the yil roll together into a rope, we know that we have more power when we work together. Unity enables us to honour the responsibilities passed to us by our ancestors—and held in trust for our grandkids and for those who are coming next. There is much to do—we carry on.

yilmix<sup>w</sup>m ki law na Chief Clarence Louie  
xaḡtus Syilx Nation Tribal Chair



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REFLECTIONS

“The work continues, rooted in the wisdom of our elders, respecting our laws and ceremonies, our language, and the time-immemorial commitment made to steward our lands and waterways in such a way that they may sustain all who live in interdependent connectivity with them.”



way’—

In our work at ONA, we are so fortunate to be involved with children, youth, families, elders, neighbors, and partners. So many aspects of our development have come from the relationships that have been built between the syilx Nation and the leaders we follow, the people we serve, the communities we work with. All of these relationships have enriched my life beyond words. And even as I am enriched, I understand our communities are also enriched as they reach always to do better. Together, we are engaged in the ancestral responsibility to ensure that the people-to-be can sustain their families, care for their children at home, and steward the lands in their respective communities “for the people.”

So many shared initiatives are underway defending and rebuilding healthy ecosystems so that our tmix<sup>w</sup>, tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>, and siwtk<sup>w</sup> can thrive. The groundbreaking work of ONA fisheries celebrated 20 years of the fry release in Penticton with more than 600 young students, part of our commitment to the long term survival of the Okanagan sc’win. The epic vision, shared with Ktunaxa and Secwépemc Nations, of returning sc’win to the Upper Columbia saw a small release of adults into the Arrow Lakes—the first time since 1938 that salmon swam free in these waters. How else will our sc’win come back without the people upholding these sacred covenants? Likewise, our Natural Resources team continues to raise the bar in areas from wildlife management to watershed planning, building these achievements on years of advocacy and hard case law with respect to Indigenous Title and Rights.

Our work builds also on hard-fought battles for the wellbeing of our children and families in justice, health, language, and education. It is inspiring to see our recent graduates and hear the words of hope as more of our people pursue education and the opportunities it presents, whether to work for their communities or take their place in other changemaking roles. At ONA, there is an array of careers available—long-term sustainable employment for those who want to work for Indigenous people as we reclaim our place in our Territories, continue the decolonizing, and foster the conditions within which we can thrive in our own ways just as our ancestors did before us.

We witness the work of our Energy Executive Committee, CRT Band Liaison Committee, Natural Resource Committee, Wellness Committee, syilx Indian Residential School Committee and Columbia River Reintroduction Initiatives syilx representatives and all their investments of time, input to further the work of

the syilx Okanagan Nation as a commitment to our Food Chiefs.

The decades-long commitment of our leadership for recognition of the impacts of the Columbia River Treaty on our people and territory finally resulted in money being paid, with the CEC determining how funds flow directly to communities. Gratifying after all these years of seeking justice but knowing, at the same time, that there will never be enough to compensate for the harms done, the disconnection, Indian residential schools, the 60s scoop, the racism and economic marginalization. We haven't settled the housing crisis, the opioid crisis, or diabetes. Keeping our children out of stranger care. Defending our women from violence in their own homes. We are in troubling times in the international context, as well as closer to home. Our world grows smaller with technology as we witness the injustices beyond our borders, reminding us that as sqilx<sup>w</sup> we are connected to all of humanity.

In carrying out our many responsibilities, ONA manages dynamic operations with specialized staff needed in different sectors and a core administration team—all of our staff doing such good work amidst the challenges of every day. Business operations are not perfect but, as this report shows, we continue to leverage more as a collective than we can alone. Our administration has internally managed the proposal writing for us to continue building on our Capacity Assessment Plan, undertaking key projects that advance best practices and the work of decolonizing. We also have leadership training offered to staff by Okanagan College. The many initiatives undertaken within the whole of operations, all intended to hold up accountability and transparency so that we stay current in supporting the CEC mandate and upholding Syilx cultural protocols, laws and customs.

Yes, what we do is bureaucratic and it is busy, but it is ultimately about us collectively holding space to rebuild the inter-dependency that is at the heart of our Nationhood. The truth and strength inherited from our ancestors. The work continues, rooted in the wisdom of our elders, respecting our laws and ceremonies, our language, and the time-immemorial commitment made to steward our lands and waterways in such a way that they may sustain all who live in interdependent connectivity with them. Courage is needed in these times so that we might all rise together and leave a legacy that befits our Nation.

limlāmt,

suiki?st Pauline Terbasket  
Executive Director





## TITLE AND RIGHTS

skc'əḥ<sup>w</sup>əḥwipla?uḥ steḥtaḥ

“ This ongoing work is vital to securing a future for our children, grandchildren, and generations yet to come, while honouring our enduring connection to the land. ”

We, the Sovereign Syilx Peoples, are the recognized titleholders of our lands and resources. United in political, cultural, social, and economic purpose, we exercise our inherent responsibilities to protect, preserve, and practice our language, culture, and traditions—ensuring the health, education, and prosperity of our people.

Syilx Title and Rights are not theoretical—they are embedded in every aspect of our living world and reflect our sacred responsibilities to all our relations. These rights are the foundation of our identity and essential to the well-being of both present and future generations.

Over the past year, the communities and Chiefs of the Okanagan Nation have stood in unwavering unity, confronting some of the most significant external threats to our Title and Rights. Guided by strength and clarity, the Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) has led with determination, issuing strategic directives and taking decisive actions to assert and protect our Nation's collective rights.

To fulfill our Nation's vision, we must persist in defending our Aboriginal Title and Rights. This ongoing work is vital to securing a future for our children, grandchildren, and generations yet to come, while honouring our enduring connection to the land.



In alignment with this mandate, the CEC has focused the Nation's policy and legal efforts on two key priorities: advancing Syilx Aboriginal Title and Rights through ongoing negotiations and Nation-building initiatives, and protecting those rights from external threats. As part of this work, a Title and Rights Gathering was held in January 2025 to engage community members in dialogue on two critical topics: securing free, prior, and informed consent in the modernization of the Columbia River Treaty, and defending the eastern portion of Syilx Okanagan Territory.

This year, the ONA welcomed both the Pacific Salmon Treaty Commissioners and representatives from the Yakama Nation to Syilx territory as part of our salmon restoration and transboundary relationship-building efforts. These visits offered an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding and showcase the strength of Syilx-led stewardship. Guests observed Syilx youth involved in the CRSRI Salmon Warriors program assisting with broodstock collection—demonstrating intergenerational commitment to salmon recovery. The tours also included a visit to the Nation's hatchery in Penticton, where guests learned about our conservation-based hatchery practices rooted in Syilx values. These exchanges strengthened relationships and advanced collaborative momentum toward restoring salmon throughout the Columbia Basin.



*"History is being made every time we meet... How do we protect our watersheds? How do we protect our future? The only way we can do that is to work together."  
- ýilmix<sup>wm</sup> simo Robert Louie*

## THE SYILX NATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOSTER REGIONAL SIWŁK<sup>w</sup> COLLABORATION

On November 15, 2024, a historic Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed in snpink'tn, British Columbia, marking a significant milestone in regional water collaboration and a new path for syilx-led water governance. This agreement unites over 130 elected leaders from the syilx Nation and local governments across the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds, formalizing the commitment to work together at the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table. The ONA is coordinating and facilitating the Leadership Table with the support of our partners, the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program and the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources.

**The purpose of this MOA** was to formalize a government-to-government Leadership Table to set strategic direction and address matters of common concern to protect and restore siwłk<sup>w</sup> in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds now and for future generations. The MOA outlines the Leadership Table's vision, shared principles, goals, and areas of common concern, including governance and decision-making, protection and restoration of ecosystems, water quality and quantity, and addressing climate change impacts.

The Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds each have their own personality, needs, and ways of being. From a Syilx perspective—and based on guidance from our knowledge keepers—both need to be planned for together. The Similkameen River is an important tributary to the Okanagan Watershed for cold, clean flows for salmon. The Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds face unique challenges that require innovative solutions and united efforts. To address these complexities, the Collaborative Leadership Table is working on the Okanagan and Similkameen Watershed Responsibility Plan, a 250-year, Syilx-led plan to create the long-term commitment to restore and protect the watersheds and to work towards a new water governance and decision-making framework.

**MOA Shared Vision:** Our relation siwłk<sup>w</sup>, our most sacred medicine, must be kept healthy to restore and hold its relationship to tmix<sup>w</sup>, in order to ensure resiliency of all, for the good of all, for all time. As the Okanagan and Similkameen regions continue to grow, the importance of the Leadership Table will only increase. Its success will depend on maintaining the collaborative spirit and ensuring that all water voices and perspectives are heard. This ground-breaking initiative is a powerful demonstration of what can be achieved when Syilx and local governments come together to address shared water challenges. This partnership is poised to be an essential driver of positive change in the region for years to come.

Learn more about this historic collaboration here



## KEY 2024/2025 INITIATIVES

aḵa? l kwu syilx itmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>tət, lut pnkin tə ḵ<sup>w</sup>ickmntm km tə tumístmntm

### ADVANCING TITLE AND RIGHTS IN COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY (CRT) NEGOTIATIONS

Canada entered into the CRT with the United States (US) 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, or consent from, the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The treaty resulted in the construction of three major dams in the Upper Columbia Basin that converted the Upper Columbia watershed into a massive reservoir system, resulting in the flooding and devastation of large swaths of Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory, the loss of Nation members' ability to exercise rights in areas of the Territory, and desecration of ancestral burial and cultural sites.

Canada and the US started renegotiating the CRT in the spring of 2018. The Syilx Okanagan Nation (along with the Ktunaxa and Secwepemc Nations) participate in these international negotiations as an Observer, which is an international precedent and a testament to the strength of a unified approach. Through its role as an Observer, the Nation has been able to advocate for the inclusion of measures in the CRT to protect the ecosystem and support salmon. In July 2024, Canada and the US reached an agreement in principle ("AIP") on a modernized CRT. The AIP includes the following provisions:

- dedication of water flows for juvenile salmon migration;
- commitment to work on salmon reintroduction in the Upper Columbia;
- additional flexibility to use specified volumes of water for ecosystem and First Nation cultural values in BC; and
- a First Nation and Tribe-led ecosystem and Indigenous cultural values body that will undertake adaptive management and make recommendations to the US and Canada on CRT-related operational issues.

Canada-US negotiations to translate the terms of the AIP in a new, modernized CRT have been paused since the Trump administration came to power. However, the Nation has continued to participate in domestic negotiations with Canada and BC to try to ensure that the Nation's title and rights are reflected under a modernized CRT. These negotiations are focused on three matters:

- new governance processes that involve Syilx Okanagan Nation as a decision maker on key issues under the CRT moving forward;
- long-term revenue-sharing with BC under the CRT to ensure benefits are shared; and
- redress from Canada and BC for past impacts from the CRT and the CRT dams.

Canada and BC have committed to seek the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the Nation to the modernized CRT. Following direction provided at the Title and Rights Gathering, communication materials are being prepared to continue to engage with community members on CRT-related matters so that the CEC will be in a stronger position when the time comes to make a decision on whether to provide FPIC to a modernized CRT.

In addition, the CEC Lead on the CRT negotiations, Chief Keith Crow, and the Syilx Okanagan Nation's CRT negotiation team continue to meet quarterly with the CRT Liaison Committee, which is made up of representatives from Syilx Okanagan Nation communities, to share information about negotiations.



Learn more about the AIP  
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/columbiarivertreaty/agreement-in-principle/>

Photos Courtesy of Aaron Hemens: caylx, drumming, Slocan Fry Release





Photos Courtesy of Aaron Hemens: Castlegar Salmon Fry Release Ceremony

## BRINGING THE SALMON HOME: THE COLUMBIA RIVER SALMON REINTRODUCTION INITIATIVE

This past year, the Nation continued its leadership in Bringing the Salmon Home: The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (CRSRI), working alongside other participating Nations to advance technical and cultural efforts to return salmon to their ancestral spawning grounds above Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee Dams. Technical studies on fish passage and habitat conditions progressed with multi-year federal support, while Syilx knowledge holders and staff ensured our Nation's laws and responsibilities remained central. Youth and community engagement was also a priority, with Syilx youth contributing to the Salmon Warriors initiative and participating in the 2024 Bringing the Salmon Home Gathering. The initiative's award-winning documentary, *Bringing the Salmon Home: The Story of the Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative*, was shared widely this year, offering a powerful tool for education and cultural revitalization.

The Bringing the Salmon Home Secretariat, hosted by the ONA, expanded its coordination capacity to support inter-Nation collaboration, technical working groups, and engagement with Crown governments. The Syilx Okanagan Nation's salmon reintroduction success continues to inform and inspire the work of this initiative. As the initiative transitions from planning to early implementation, the Syilx Nation remains committed to restoring salmon in a way that upholds our Title, legal orders, and responsibilities to tmixw and future generations.

View Annual Report here:  
<https://columbiariversalmon.ca/2024-2025-annual-report/>



## PROTECTING THE SYILX OKANAGAN NATION'S TERRITORY

The CEC continues to prioritize legal and communications work to respond to threats to the Syilx

Okanagan's Territory in the Columbia region following the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. v. Desautel*. The Desautel case 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/s?altikwtx ancestry are not extinct. The ONA intervened in that case to protect and advance the Nation's Title and Rights in the Arrow Lakes, as the representative of people of Sinixt ancestry in Canada. As a result of that intervention, 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.

The Desautel decision created a lot of confusion in relation to who represents people of Sinixt/s?altikwtx ancestry in Canada and whether there is a Sinixt "Nation". CEC Lead Chief Robert Louie has been directing the legal, policy and communications team on a strategy to ensure Syilx Okanagan Nation's title and rights in the area are understood. Communication efforts have included news articles; media interviews; letters and meetings with federal, provincial and local government representatives; and development of a policy framework for consultation with US Tribes that will ultimately apply province-wide. As a result of this work, the narrative around the Sinixt has begun to shift and the Nation's representation of people of Sinixt ancestry in Canada has been recognized, including in a joint statement by Chief Robert Louie and Premier Eby in October 2024.

In addition, work continues to collect the Nation's evidence of title and rights in the eastern Territory, including interviews of Elders and knowledge keepers. At the same time, the CEC recognizes the importance of working together with the CCT so as to protect the lands and resources in the area and continues to reach out to CCT representatives to maintain the dialogue.



Photo: Chief Greg Gabriel, Syilx Children and Families Governance Representative, providing opening remarks at the Spirit of Syilx Unity Run.

## SYILX HEALTH

In support of self-determining communities, the CEC has appointed Governance Representatives to address core policy and legal work in interconnected areas of syilx wellbeing.

Together with other Nations in the Interior Region, ONA has been engaged in refocusing relationships with Interior Health (IH) and First Nations Health Authority. The work with IH reflects the change in orientation that IH is not a government but a provider of programs and services. This shift moves from top-down info sharing from IH to the Nations in favour of mutual understanding and respecting distinct Nations. At a Special Chiefs Assembly (Sept. 13, 2024) attended by BC Health Minister Adrian Dix, the ONA advocated for Nations to have input into the mandate letters for regional health authorities. Meetings were also held with IH to review the Letter of Understanding (LOU) with Syilx Communities resulting in a new draft ready for Chiefs and Councils to review, followed by CEC and legal. The LOU Joint Committee is preparing a work plan and finding ways to share the LOU commitments.

Recognizing that governance work needed at the Nation level is significant, ONA advocated with FNHA to flow capacity to Nations including infrastructure and administrative core funding. Syilx leaders participated in a meeting with First Nations Health Council (Dec. 11, 2024) supporting the federal-level legislation work of changing engagement to directly consult with Nations, resulting in a principles document for review at Gathering Wisdom. Also, at the direction of the CEC and Wellness Committee, ONA has moved away from the FNHA Urban and Away From Home project to initiate our own engagement to learn directly from health leads in each community about challenges and opportunities to support those who live off reserve.

## ADVOCATING FOR OUR CHILDREN

In furthering the wellbeing and autonomy of syilx families, the work continues to benefit from the efforts of the CEC-appointed Governance Representative who supports partnership and advocacy efforts in various political forums. The work is guided by the wisdom of our *axá i? scuntət i? tł ʔaxítət ʔl i? nəqsiltət*—the Family Declaration, which is referenced at political tables and in letters to governments, and is increasingly used in Nation and community work, including bylaws, legal procedures, and jurisdiction planning.

At the federal level, Chiefs across Canada voted in October 2024 to reject the \$47.8B Final Settlement Agreement to reform child welfare programs, calling instead for a re-negotiation and better outcomes for our children. This is a major development with impacts on our families and communities. The ONA and our Governance Representative continue to demand stable, sustainable resources, even as the federal government is pulling funding back in multiple areas and further restrictions have been placed on Jordan's Principle.

Provincially, the ONA continues to work with the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) on multiple fronts including furthering the priority to build capacity for implementing family supports and services in our Communities. The ONA and our Governance Representative give strong voice to issues with discrimination against families, reduced supports, and decisions made without consent, demanding respect for syilx autonomy, increased cooperation in family planning, and equitable supports for Communities.

## ENDURING RELATIONSHIP

nkʷəttwistmntəm

In 2011, BC Hydro and the ONA and UNB committed to develop an Enduring Relationship (ER) built on the principles of recognition and respect, transparency and early engagement. Since that time, the relationship has grown and transformed, but more work remains ahead of us. Under the Energy Executive Committee (EEC) Chaired by Chief Robert Louie and reporting back to the CEC, two new sub-agreements were reached under the umbrella of the Enduring Relationship with the Nation to support the Nation and Band's joint work together:

### **Governance & Initiatives Sub-Agreement (effective 2023-2028)**

- Communications and administrative support
- EEC meetings
- Oversight Committee meetings
- EEC and ER Working Group support
- Support for language initiatives and cultural heritage restoration initiatives

### **Procurement and Education Sub-Agreement (effective 2023-2028)**

- Communication on business opportunities
- Support for an ONA Community and Business Liaison and member community Liaisons
- Procurement Opportunities: \$40 million target goal over 5 year term for direct contact awards for primarily Band-based and member businesses in construction, maintenance, and environmental work opportunities
- Support for employment and training initiatives for Syilx Okanagan members

Collaborative work continues on policy development aimed at ensuring that the Nation and its communities have increased roles and involvement in new projects and on-going initiatives aimed at protecting the territory and improving opportunities where acceptable activities occur.

Collaborative work continues on policy development aimed at ensuring that the Nation and its communities have increased roles and involvement in new projects and on-going initiatives aimed at protecting the territory and improving opportunities where acceptable activities occur.

BC Put out a Clean Energy Call requesting independent Alternative Power producers submit bids for developing new energy sources in the province. The EEC wrote a policy report and advocated successfully for these projects to have a required participation level of 25%-51% ownership by First Nations within whose territory the project resides. BC is developing a second energy call for new project in the coming months.

### **Procurement and Contracting**

This year, Raf Deguevara, Community and Business Liaison, reactivated the Procurement Working Group, which had previously been inactive, to ensure that member bands receive timely and relevant information regarding emerging BC Hydro projects. Efforts have also been directed at enhancing early engagement processes and improving communication strategies between all parties involved. In addition to committee support, Raf has contributed to the administrative function of the ER by updating several Terms of Reference for key groups, including the EEC and associated working groups.

A priority this year included the ongoing development of a Business Directory intended for use by ONA member bands and business owners interested in procurement opportunities with BC Hydro. In the upcoming year we will be coordinating the annual Oversight Meeting to take place in April—a high-level gathering between ONA Chiefs and BC Hydro Senior Leadership, as required under the ER.

Photos Courtesy of Aaron Hemens: Salmon Feast





## UPHOLDING THE FOUR FOOD CHIEFS

Photo: Traditional foods served at the Four Food Chief Gathering

Throughout the year and at various gatherings, ONA alongside community upheld syilx traditional foods. By upholding these foods, it serves as a reminder of the syilx peoples inherent right and responsibility to care for the land and all living things within their territory.

This covenant is a fundamental part of our culture and is passed down through our stories, traditions, and laws. It is a reciprocal relationship where we are entrusted to protect and manage our homelands, and in return, are cared for.

## DATA PLANNING

ntk<sup>w</sup>?salq<sup>w</sup>m: ack<sup>w</sup>um i? scktpa?xtət

kwəlncutn and sən'lip laid down laws and responsibilities for the Syilx people to carry forward for all time, including how knowledge and data are protected and shared. These responsibilities hold instructions for how data is to be gathered, stored, used, and respected. Syilx caretaking of data prioritizes the best interests, health, and well-being of our siwtk<sup>w</sup>, trnx<sup>w</sup>úla?x<sup>w</sup>, tmix<sup>w</sup>, and people.

### Self-Determined Decision Making

As title and rights holders of unceded Syilx territory, the Syilx Nation uses knowledge, data, and information to make decisions that guide us today and into the future. Informed by our ways of being and knowing, Syilx data is used to support sustainable and self-determined governance. In our modern context, oral storytelling through captik<sup>w</sup> and smýmaý carries forward laws, customs, values, governance structures, and instructions. These teachings define rights and responsibilities to the trnx<sup>w</sup>úla?x<sup>w</sup>, language, and culture. Rooted in nsyilxcən, our stories and data connect us to our ancestors, future generations, the natural world, and all our relations.

Since 2020, the ONA has worked alongside members, cultural knowledge keepers, and data specialists to explore syilx data practices. This work resulted in ntk<sup>w</sup>?salq<sup>w</sup>m: ack<sup>w</sup>um i? scktpa?xtət (Stories Twined Together: Our Thoughts Are Stored). This Wellness Data Governance Plan reflects years of work rooted in syilx knowledge systems and community priorities. The plan

guides how wellness-related data is carried, cared for, and acted upon. The focus is on three interrelated areas: data rights, responsibilities, and practices—ensuring data management is ethical, accountable, and community-driven.

In 2024, a mapping of data management, policy, and training needs was undertaken using insights from past Nation engagement and an internal data capacity assessment. This work helped identify Nation and organizational needs—across all departments—to support data protection, collection, usage, and sharing. In 2025, Nation engagement began and will continue to develop a data strategy with tangible goals.

### Grounding Data Principles in sqlx<sup>w</sup>tcawtət

A foundational element of the data strategy is developing principles. ONA has worked with language speakers, knowledge keepers, and Nation members to understand how data principles can uphold title and rights, affirm decision-making authority over all resources—including data—and foster understanding. These principles are being developed through nsyilxcən, sqlx<sup>w</sup>tcawtət, and captik<sup>w</sup> learning processes. In 2025, this included a captik<sup>w</sup> literature review, a captik<sup>w</sup> forum on data, and an analysis of stories in relation to data. This process is continuing through a consensus-building approach with language speakers to shape Syilx data principles and educational materials.





ǰǰli k<sup>w</sup>u sqilx<sup>w</sup>

- Grand Chief Dr. Stewart Phillip

**APTN'S ANIMAL NATION SERIES FEATURES SYILX  
OKANAGAN NATION'S INSPIRING SALMON STORY**

Communications and Fisheries to conduct interviews with staff, elders, and youth, showcasing ONA as Canada's first Indigenous-owned and operated hatchery dedicated to salmon restoration. The series is set to air on APTN in early 2026.



SCAN HERE

SIWLK<sup>W</sup> WATER CURRICULUM K-12  
TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

The ONA's social media platforms play a crucial role in enhancing communication and reaching a variety of audiences. We witnessed remarkable growth on our social media channels. Interactions on Facebook surged by 126%, averaging 71,108 views, compared to 31,399 the previous fiscal—resulting in 1,739 new followers. Meanwhile, Instagram experienced a 100% increase in interactions, with 522 new followers.

This past year we developed signage for Spotted Lake. In addition, worked in partnership with various organizations to develop interpretive signage. These signs are a tool to educate, engage, and invite visitors and community members to learn about Syilx worldviews, language, and the significance of place. Signs can be seen at Giants Head in Summerland, Myra Canyon and in the Ketter River Watershed.

## BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

### iscmypnwɪn əc xʷəstustn k'l' isnxʔcinəm

The Building a Better Future Initiative is a testament to our commitment to supporting the educational endeavors of Syilx Okanagan Nation members. The ONA has built partnerships to assist with providing this scholarship, bursary, and awards initiative. With the help of our partners we aim to provide financial assistance to eligible individuals, recognizing their perseverance and achievements as they pursue higher education.



#### **\$1500 Education for Life**

Sponsored by FortisBC

**VANESSA MICHEL**

University of Calgary, BSc in Kinesiology

"I have this feeling within myself to prove that anything can be done despite the fact that most of the time it seems like it can't be. That no matter how difficult the outcome may seem to achieve, I feel like I will be the one to do it... I have always been proud to come from Syilx people and I find it an absolute privilege that I get to create my own story under an amazing legacy of the people that have come before me."



#### **\$1500 Education for Life**

Sponsored by Fortis BC

**KIERA TAILLEUX**

University of British Columbia, Degree in Dental Science (Dental Hygiene)

"My Syilx background will help me navigate the academic world with a unique perspective and approach and give me the resilience to succeed in adversity. In my educational journey, having a strong cultural identity is my source of empowerment. My values and knowledge give me the motivation and a sense of purpose to become a Dental Hygienist and advocate for Indigenous health and well-being through oral health."



#### **\$1500 EMB Bursary**

Sponsored by EMB

**TIYANETKW MANUEL**

University of British Columbia, Okanagan BA in Indigenous Studies

"I strongly believe that being syilx gives me strength. I truly love my culture and Indigeneity so much. I believe knowing how strong my ancestors were, and all my relatives have been gives me the strength I need to pursue my dreams. How strong they had to be in harsh historical times, gives me that special strive to continue standing up for our people."



#### **\$3500 Engineering Bursary**

Sponsored by EMB

**LUKE CASSIDY**

Okanagan College  
Mechanical Engineering Technology

"Being Syilx gives me strength by knowing that we are resilient, we don't give up and we continue to push forward. This will help me in my educational journey by knowing who I am and where I come from, I may face challenges, but I will continue as I am a strong and resilient syilx person."



#### **\$1500 Walking My Learning Forward**

Sponsored by EMB

**COURTNEY FITZPATRICK**

Brown University, History MA, PHD

"I am committed to the integration of Indigenous knowledge into the academic discourse. My goal is to become a catalyst for change within academia, where Indigenous narratives and resilience are not only acknowledged but celebrated. To this end, I aspire to pursue a PhD in Indigenous History at Brown University."



#### **\$1500 Surveying Bursary**

Sponsored by EMB

**ROBERT EDWARD JR.**

Thompson River University,  
Natural Resource Science

"I am a syilx person, and it is important to me to be useful to my community. This led to me choosing to pursue a career as a registered professional forester that balances western knowledge with traditional ecological knowledge. So, I applied for the Natural Resource Science program at TRU."



#### **\$1500 Progressive Fence Bursary**

Sponsored by Progressive Fence

**CELY-RAE STREET**

Thompson River University,  
Juris Doctor Law

"After the death of both my mother and father, I began to re-evaluate my life as it were - throughout my grief and emotional suffering, I came to the stark realization that my destiny is to pursue my dreams, one of them being to come a lawyer, representing Indigenous people experiencing systemic oppression and discrimination within Canada's justice system."

## 2024/2025 KEY EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

kʷu əc'ulluʔs

### GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF THE EAST SALMON PASSAGE AT OKANAGAN DAM

On March 7th, the Syilx Nation and partners celebrated a historic groundbreaking ceremony for the East Salmon Passage at Okanagan Lake Dam. The long-awaited project marks the first time in nearly 100 years that Indigenous salmonids will be able to pass freely without impediment into Okanagan Lake, accessing their their ancestral spawning grounds and restoring a crucial link in the region's ecosystem.



### 20TH ANNIVERSARY SOCKEYE FRY RELEASE CEREMONY

The 20th anniversary celebration of the sockeye salmon fry release along the Penticton channel riverbanks, with over 700 students in attendance, was a heartwarming display of community involvement and commitment to environmental stewardship.



Photo Courtesy of Aaron Hemens:  
Jane Stelkia, Unity Ride

### BORDER CROSSING UNITY RIDE

On July 2024, the Secwépemc and Syilx Okanagan Unity Ride made a powerful cross-border journey—on horseback—at the Osoyoos–Oroville port of entry.

Demonstrating unity between Secwépemc and Syilx Nations, the ride was a moving display of Indigenous sovereignty and intergenerational cultural strength, emphasizing our border-crossing rights.



“ In our culture and our history, we have stories about people that can travel. Stories about our power, to go places in our mind. This border represents limitations in our customs, in our culture. We didn't have any limitations to what our power was in our mind. ”

- nk'lxwcin (Chad Eneas) on the Border Crossing Unity Ride

- |   |  |   |  |  |                                     |
|---|--|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| • Syilx Indian Residential School Gathering | • Sockeye Fry Release Ceremonies, Shingle Creek, Lower Vernon Creek, Six Mile Creek, Mission Creek | • Spirit of Syilx Unity Run, ncaʔm (Christina Lake) to Duncan Dam                         | • Syilx Elders Summer Luncheon                           | • First Speakers Language Gathering  | • First Speakers Language Gathering |
| • River Restoration Workshop                | • YES Dissolve Performance   | • Grizzly Summit  | • Border Crossing Canoe Paddle                           | • Building Relationships: Primary Care Providers and Syilx Peoples Session 1 | • Syilx Elders Fall Luncheon        |
| • capikw̓t: kʷəckʷəcst̓im 17 stəʔt̓at̓et̓   | • Sockeye Fry Release Ceremonies, Castlegar, Slocan, Revelstoke                                    | • First Speakers Language Gathering   | • Indian Residential School Information Session          | • Okanagan/Columbia River Salmon Motorcycle Run                              | • Okanagan/Columbia River Salmon    |
| • Grandmothers Gathering                    | • Chinook Fry Release Ceremonies, Spallumcheen River, OK Falls                                     | • Chinook Fry Release Ceremonies, Salmon River  | • Border Crossing Unity Ride                             | • Grandmothers Meeting   | • Grandmothers Meeting              |
| • xwəxʷm̓inaʔ Trout Fishery                 | • CRSRI Transboundary Tour,  | • Salmon Calling Ceremonies, Kettle Falls, Castlegar, Revelstoke, McIntyre Dam, Enloe Dam | • Annual General Assembly and Youth Leadership Gathering | • Salmon Feast   | • Salmon Feast                      |
| • Collaborative Leadership Table            |  |   |  | • BC Rivers Day  | • BC Rivers Day                     |
|   |  |   |  | • Walk for the Children  | • Walk for the Children             |
| APR   | MAY  | JUN   | JUL  | AUG  | SEPT                                |

## CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF RUNNING FOR SUICIDE VIOLENCE AND AWARENESS

The 2024 Spirit of the Syilx Unity Run commenced at nca?m (Christina Lake) Provincial Park early last summer. The theme, “running to the heartbeat of snk’lip,” was inspired by captikwł, illustrating the paths of snk’lip, both the big and little coyote, carved from the mountains, with the heart of the little coyote positioned in the middle of Slocan Lake. After covering over 330 kilometers, the run concluded near qalisu? (Trout Lake). In addition to the many youth that participated, there were also families and Elders who came out contributing to a powerful unifying run filled with love and support.



## FOUR FOOD CHIEFS GATHERING

The 2024 Four Food Chiefs Gathering, inspired by the teachings of the Four Food Chiefs, included workshops, panels, and keynote presentations on Syilx leadership, language revitalization, early teachings, and our connection to salmon. It also celebrated 20 years of salmon revitalization with an honouring dinner and featured hands-on activities, a Mission Creek restoration tour, and presentations on Syilx governance, emphasizing resurgence and collective responsibility.

## ELDERS LUNCHEONS

This year the ONA hosted three Elders luncheons. These luncheons bring Elders from throughout the Nation together to share food, laughter and provide them an opportunity to reconnect and visit one another.



## FIRST SPEAKERS LANGUAGE GATHERINGS

The ONA hosted 4 sessions of the First Speakers Language Gatherings in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Hosted as a three-day event exclusively for Syilx Nation members—with priority and supports for fluent and first-language speakers—this gathering creates a dedicated space for collaboration on sqilxw language renewal. The gatherings align with ONA's ongoing strategy to support Elders, retain linguistic knowledge, and guide forward-looking revitalization efforts - welcoming supportive learners while centering the voices of fluent speakers.



Photo Courtesy of Aaron Hemens: Herman Edward, Border Crossing Canoe Paddle

- Syilx Hunting Camp
  - Syilx Youth Camp
  - River Restoration Workshop
  - Building Relationships: Primary Care Providers and Syilx Peoples 2
  - Pacific Salmon Treaty Tours and Negotiations
  - Syilx Nation Family Declaration Presentations, OIB
  - Yakama Nation Salmon Tour
  - yilikwłkn Drug Trial Opening Ceremony & MOU signing
  - Syilx Nation Data Governance Plan Presentation, OKIB
  - Syilx Nation Family Declaration Presentations, USIB
  - Four Food Chiefs Gathering
  - Collaborative Leadership Table MOA Signing
  - First Speakers Language Gathering
  - Syilx Elders Winter Luncheon
  - YES Specialized Training
- OCT NOV DEC

- captikwł: kwæckwæcstim i? stætłatłt Session 1
  - Syilx Okanagan Nation Gathering
  - kwu æc'ullu?s: Frontline Wellness Youth Winter Gathering
  - OK Dam Fish Passage
  - Groundbreaking Ceremony
  - captikwł: kwæckwæcstim i? stætłatłt Session 2
  - Junior All Native Basketball Tournament
  - Syilx Water Forum
  - First Speakers Language Gathering
  - Building Relationships: Primary Care Providers and Syilx Peoples Session 3
- JAN FEB MARCH



## SYILX WELLNESS

### i? sc̓xasəsmiltət

“ We stand firmly with the survivors and their families as they heal. The safety of our women is a priority, and we will continue to advocate for justice and resources that support the long-term well-being of our communities. ”

-yilmix<sup>w</sup>m sil-teekin Greg Gabriel, ONA Child & Family Governance Representative

As syilx Okanagan people, we live within nested layers from the individual to our families, then our community and Nation; being engaged in an ongoing process of decolonizing that involves working to understand and articulate the roles and responsibilities of each of the different layers. Just as there are family and community roles, there are also Nation layers of responsibility. We collectively hold our title and rights, carrying our sovereign responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of our people.

Wellness works under the mandate of the CEC, with direction from our Syilx Wellness Governance representatives and ONA Wellness, Education and Indian Residential School Committees. Annual strategic planning is done with CEC and with our community leads in health, social development, and education. This sets the agenda and ensures their directions are embedded in staff workplans.

The work at the Nation level is about what we can—and should—do together. ONA wellness plans are about our collective effort as a Nation—they are not about overtaking what communities are doing. ONA takes direction from communities about issues that we can collectively address. ONA programs and services are the same—they provide capacity that is complementary to communities.

Wellness emphasizes bringing our families and communities together throughout the year in a variety of different ways. These are not just events—they

contribute to our collective unity and identity as a people with shared language, culture, and history. Nation gatherings give space for those with cultural knowledge to share it with others. This helps maintain our traditional relationships and contributes to healing and identity—and provides opportunities for family members to access cultural knowledge. It is an opportunity for those who have been disconnected to reconnect with family and community. It is a valuable space for language speakers to talk to one another.

In education, the work of breathing life into a Nation-based approach is moving forward. The Okanagan Nation Education Committee is meeting and discussing priorities including focusing on a collective syilx curriculum for nsyilxcən, as well as developing curriculum materials on syilx history and Indian residential school. Other areas of focus this year include resource sharing, advocacy, and syilx control of syilx education.

The ONA is committed to improving the wellness of our People, both for our present community members and for the st'lsqilx<sup>w</sup>—the People to Be. We are honoured to be building upon teachings that have been passed down since time immemorial. The voices of our syilx communities and leaders tell us that our wellbeing is interconnected and holistic. Prioritizing this, Wellness is working to ensure our collective plans and programs are in alignment with our sqilx<sup>w</sup>łcawtət.



## KEY 2024/2025 INITIATIVES

### kʔulluʔsməntm

#### SPOTLIGHT ON JUSTICE

As we continue to see the justice system fail syilx people, the goal of advocating for syilx justice has been prioritized at the direction of the CEC and the Wellness Committee. Developing a justice strategy for the Nation is paramount. This focus on justice is also responding to the need to address community safety including violence in our families and communities. The intergenerational effects of colonization normalized violence amongst our people, and the Canadian justice system has been the source of harsh and discriminatory experiences for both victims and offenders. The result is a tangled web that is implicated in family breakdown, children in care, and has far-reaching impacts for the physical and mental health of syilx Nation members and communities.

#### suxʷtxtem – Asserting Responsibilities

The first Special Chiefs Assembly on Justice was held on Feb. 26, 2025 and additional meetings with 5 syilx Okanagan communities secured agreement to seek collective resources to address justice. Based on what was heard, the upcoming year will focus on working with communities on the following priorities:

- Discuss aligning strategies at the levels of our families, communities, and Nation for supporting mental health and reducing violence including syilx ways, strength-based practices, and community solutions to build the capacity of families.
- Consider syilx concepts of justice: Articulate syilx ways of how we are meant to interact with one another. Consider these as the basis for writing syilx laws.
- Push for policy and practice changes within the justice system through engagement with police, government ministries, and the BC First Nations Justice Council.

#### Nation-Based Action

During a 7-week trial of a sexual offender who grievously harmed syilx women while posing as a medicine man, impacted Nation members were provided daily supports. Following the trial, the CEC united in banning the offender from syilx territory, marking the first time such a ban had been imposed.

#### REVITALIZING NSYILXCƏN

Supporting the revitalization of nsyilxcən and identifying steps for implementing lʔ syilx iʔ sukʷnaqinx scqʷəlqʷilət (syilx Language Declaration) is another goal of syilx leaders and communities. The need to prioritize the protection of nsyilxcən has become more pressing as our fluent speakers grow older. Three gatherings for fluent speakers were hosted this year, providing an important space for speakers to come together, build relationships, and talk about their concerns for the language. Among other things, the gatherings are an essential means for speakers to contribute to nsyilxcən curriculum. Another ongoing focus for our fluent speakers is advising the Nation on the development of syilx Declarations and how these relate to articulating syilx laws and values.



Read the Syilx  
Language  
Declaration

#### axá iʔ sccuntət iʔ tl ʔaʔxitət ʔl iʔ nəqsiltət

The ONA Child and Family Team hosted meetings to discuss how the Family Declaration can be used as a foundation in the development of a codified syilx Nation Family Law. The working group consists of Elder Language Speakers and Knowledge Keepers from each Nation community, many of whom worked on the axá iʔ sccuntət iʔ tl ʔaʔxitət ʔl iʔ nəqsiltət. This work is being done primarily in nsyilxcən to ensure the foundation is built in our language. Subsequent meetings included younger adult speakers and focused on the appropriate



uses of written law and how the concept of “law” is framed in nsyilxcən. The Elders have invited community leadership and Wellness Committee members to attend this ongoing work. In the future, these understandings can be brought to legal experts who can speak to Canadian law and the format that formal written laws need to follow.

## POLICY & PLANNING

For syilx people, wellness is reflected in the health of the individual, family, and community. These nested layers are inseparable and cannot be looked at in isolation. The ONA works closely with communities to build a collaborative approach to supporting communities to provide responsive wellness services.

### What is Wellbeing?

Connecting with Nation members is a focus for the Policy and Planning Team. The captik<sup>w</sup> forums, developed with the En’owkin Centre, have become a place of rich discussion for exploring how captik<sup>w</sup> can guide our lives today. The forum held in January 2025 with 40-60 participants was based on Chipmunk and Rock Rabbit Sisters Part1 and considered how syilx people understand wellbeing. The insights from these forums are used to inform the process of continuing to transform ONA programs and services in keeping with sqlx<sup>w</sup>tcawtət.

## Syilx Health

Through engagement with communities, the Nation is moving away from a sickness model and incorporating a syilx wellness framework to drive plans and actions. Planning for health and mental wellbeing are drawing closer together in response to the voices of communities and leaders stating that health is interconnected and holistic. Work with communities and partners continues to map out service pathways and identify how they can be more effective. Advocacy work with the Governance Representative has included a focus on policy change around poverty, food sovereignty, and primary care.

### n?aysnúla?x<sup>w</sup>

A syilx Family Wellness Center, formerly known as Ashnola at the Crossing, this 58-acre site is being developed into a wellness centre for the Nation in a partnership led by LSIB. The center will provide culturally grounded services that address the needs of families and children, with a focus on promoting and empowering mental wellness. The project is scheduled to open in early 2027. Nation members have been engaged in a variety of ways to share their priorities including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, pop-up engagement booths, and presentations— with feedback to date from over 80 participants including youth and elders.

“ Always amazing to hear these stories, to hear them broken down, and the truths brought out. What appears on the surface is not always the deeper meaning. ”



## SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES

### uc k<sup>w</sup> iksk<sup>h</sup>xítm

Following the direction of leaders and requests from Nation members, ONA offers specialized programs, working, always in close collaboration, with communities. These Nation-based programs allow us to share strengths, advocate more effectively, and leverage resources in a way that is only possible through collective capacity. We hear regularly about the impacts that these programs have on our families and communities—as evidenced in the highlights shared below.



Info on ONA  
Programs & Service

### SYILX INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

syilx Indian Residential School Committee continues to create awareness and discussion about the impacts of IRS and what this means for our individual and collective wellbeing. As well as meeting regularly and engaging with communities, the Committee hosted an annual healing gathering on April 3-4, 2024, and the biggest-ever Walk for the Children on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

### YOU EMPOWERED STRONG (YES)

YES hired a new staff member this year and remains busy with referrals, reflecting the urgency in our communities to change the narrative of family violence. As well as directly supporting Nation members who experience violence, YES continues with powerful prevention programming targeting education among our young people.

### EARLY YEARS

syilx Early Years serves to link education and resources with families and community staff in the early childhood programs offered by syilx communities. Based on engagement with Nation members, two new workshop offerings have been developed. The one delivered in November 2024 offered reflections for families to consider before they conceive. The second, planned for 2025-26, offers guidance for syilx parents.

### YOUTH WELLNESS

Youth Wellness hosted three impactful gatherings including the largest-ever Youth Leadership Gathering held July 23-25, 2024 in Osoyoos, plus the annual youth camp, and a brand-new winter gathering. R'Native Voice and Traditional Games were also delivered year-round across all syilx communities alongside 1-1 youth wellness supports.



### JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

Jordan's Principle serves so many of our syilx families, working to ensure our children receive access to health, social, and educational supports in a timely way. Even as Indigenous Services Canada keeps changing keeps changing the process, our Service Coordinators help families navigate submissions, funding, and coordination of supports. In total, our Service Coordinators have helped secure more than \$2M in funding giving Indigenous children the supports they need.



### K?ULUSMNTM I? NƏQSILTƏT

Also known as Family Decision Making, k?ulusmntm i? nəqsiltət continues to support families to keep their children from being removed from their communities. The core of the program is the power of kinship and culture. This year, as well as supporting 22 families, the program hosted a new training to increase family dialogue skills within our communities. In its advocacy role, the program engaged with MCFD to improve communication practices, honour community autonomy, and respect syilx models of family authority.

### OKANAGAN NATION RESPONSE TEAM (ONRT)

ONRT is always there to support families in a crisis. This year, the ONRT provided daily supports for the duration of the almost 2-month long criminal trial of an offender who had violated Nation members. ONRT ensured Nation members were available to testify, engaged with Victim Services, and provided updates to leaders and the Wellness Team.



### HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

The syilx Health Care Advocate helps Nation members receive optimal—and culturally appropriate—care by bridging gaps in services. These can include FNHA Health Benefits, disability applications, managing chronic disease, supporting at appointments, discharge, follow up treatments, and connecting people with access to healthy foods.

### MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE ADVOCATE

The Mental Health & Substance Use Advocate is a new position focused on bringing a syilx cultural perspective to supporting Nation members navigate through the mainstream mental health system in a way that results in seamless and culturally appropriate care.

## MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

### ku kʷac kʷac twiɫx

#### SYILX INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

- More than 500 people—the highest number ever—joined the Walk for the Children
- The SIRS Committee held information sessions in 4 communities drawing 139 Nation members to share their priorities for action on Indian residential school programming.

#### MENTAL WELLBEING PLANNING

- The first of a series of community-based drug forums was co-hosted at 4 locations at OKIB in March 2025 to share information about harm reduction and addictions supports with 30-40 community members participating.

#### OKANAGAN NATION RESPONSE TEAM (ONRT)

- ONRT provided culturally sensitive supports at 9 wakes and funerals and 3 memorials.
- During a 7-week sexual abuse trial impacting Nation members, the ONRT assisted 30 Nation members including daily one-on-one supports.

#### HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

- The Health Care Advocate supported 22 individuals from across the 7 syilx bands to ensure access to health services, culturally appropriate care, and food security through 104 in-person appointments.

#### YOUTH WELLNESS

- Youth Wellness hosted a record turnout of 106 youth for the Youth Leadership Gathering held July 23-25, 2024. The first-ever Winter Gathering was held as Ashnola with 56 youth participating (March 7-9, 2025), and the annual Youth Camp brought 52 youth together at Silver Lake (Oct. 4-6).

#### HEALTH PLANNING

- The Health Planning Team co-hosted new Doctors on the Land dialogues to build relationships of trust between primary care providers and syilx peoples

Three sessions were held with 22 to 32 people participating each time—and more dialogues are planned.

#### EARLY YEARS

- More than 20 syilx Early Years educational resources are available for communities to borrow to enrich early years programs.
- A new workshop supporting pre-conception planning for children-to-be was developed and delivered to 90 participants.

#### JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

- Service Coordinators supported 373 children between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025 resulting in a total of \$1,965,651.03 being approved for supports and services.
- 10 group requests were submitted that included 10 children or more.
- The highest requested needs were in healthy child development, followed by dental and education.

#### YOU EMPOWERED STRONG (YES)

- 23 Syilx Nations members who experienced violence, including historic cases, were supported by the YES program: 14 were related to sexual assault, 9 were connected to family violence.
- Involved in 28 events, groups, campaign, and gatherings addressing violence in the syilx Nation.

#### DATA GOVERNANCE PLANNING

- The captikʷɫ forum, hosted in collaboration with the En'owkin Centre, on March 20, 2025 via Zoom engaged 43 participants in a discussion about how the captikʷɫ Chipmunk and Rock Rabbit Sisters Part 2 relates to the rights we hold over our data.

#### CHILD AND FAMILY PLANNING

- More than 60 Grandmothers and their helpers attended the Nation Grandmothers Gathering from April 24-26, 2024, collectively representing 327 grandchildren, 108 great-grandchildren, and 7 great-great grandchildren.

#### KʷULUSMNTM Iʔ NƏQSILTƏT

- FDM served 32 children in 22 families.





On Truth and Reconciliation Day more than 500 participants gathered in snpinktn, Penticton, for a walk to commemorate the children who never returned home from Indian Residential School. It was the biggest turnout yet for the 2km walk and included Syilx survivors, elders, nation members, local leaders.

This year's theme, niʔɬayp kus alaʔx, meaning "We Have Always Been Here," underscores the enduring presence and resilience of the Syilx people.

experiencing intergenerational trauma as a result of residential school history. Your support and honor today help guide us on our path toward reconciliation.”

PAGE 26 OF 40

## UPHOLDING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

naqsmi?st ǰæl tmix<sup>w</sup>

“ We must uphold our mandate as Okanagan people to look after the land in our way. ”

- Councillor ǰris Jordan Coble, ONA NRC Chair

The ONA continues to uphold the Syilx Nation's sacred responsibility to care for tmix<sup>w</sup> and to protect and restore our tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup> and siwtk<sup>w</sup>. This past year, our work spanned across grizzly bear and salmon recovery in the North Cascades, community-led habitat restoration, cultural fire stewardship, and water and wildlife governance. Grounded in Syilx knowledge and driven by community priorities, we continued to advance Nation-led stewardship while building capacity, deepening partnerships, and addressing urgent ecological challenges.

We saw significant progress through the release of the Northern Cascades Grizzly Bear Stewardship Strategy and the expansion of the North Cascades Grizzly and Salmon Stewardship Programs, which connect species recovery to long-term cultural and ecological restoration. The Bighorn Sheep Clinical Trial broke new ground in wildlife health, and our work in riparian zones, post-fire wildlife monitoring, and fuel management continues to protect both biodiversity and community values. Across the Columbia Region, restoration efforts such as those at Waterloo Eddy are enhancing habitat resilience and strengthening intergenerational relationships to the land.

A core focus was ensuring that resources flowed directly to communities, supporting youth employment, Guardian training, cultural burning, and land-based education as well as supporting communities to build Emergency Response plans. As we expand GIS, drone, and data-sharing tools, we are also building

infrastructure for Syilx-informed monitoring, decision-making, and data governance.

The 2025 Syilx Okanagan Nation Gathering hosted back in February brought renewed attention to the increasing stress on species and ecosystems, the urgent need for intergenerational knowledge sharing, and strong community support for Syilx-led monitoring and wildlife stewardship. These reflections directly shape how we prioritize our work and guide our planning.

At the same time, we continue to face growing challenges: habitat loss, climate-driven impacts like wildfire and drought, and jurisdictional barriers that limit Indigenous decision-making authority. In response, we are strengthening collaborative pathways through the Collaborative Leadership Table, Natural Resource Committee, Collaborative Stewardship Forum, Joint Nation Grizzly Bear Initiative, and many other partnerships, all of which are advancing Syilx governance in critical areas such as forestry, species protection, water, and cultural fire stewardship. Our goal is not just to respond—but to lead, proactively and reclaim Syilx inherent right and responsibility to care for tmix<sup>w</sup>.

We raise our hands to all the Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and community members whose vision, teachings, and time make this work possible. With unity and determination, we continue to uphold our responsibilities to the tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup> and ensure our work reflects our laws, values, and future generations.





## AKSPAQMIX - VASEUX FLOODPLAIN RE-ENGAGEMENT

Photo: Vaseux Floodplain, Inset photo: Replanting of riparian plants, courtesy of M. Bezener

During the mid-1950's the Okanagan River was channelized, severely impacting the health of the Okanagan River watershed. In the early 2000's, the ONA initiated the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative to return portions of the channelized Okanagan River to a more natural state and regain some of the lost habitat quantities and qualities. This project continues to build on that work.

The project goals of the Vaseux Floodplain Re-engagement Project were to use a phased, adaptive, ecosystem-based approach to restore the ecological function and resilience of approximately 5 ha of floodplain, conserve and/or minimize impacts to

existing site values and engage the community in a land-based learning environment.

Some key elements of this project are to:

- Support locally endangered plants like tule, black cottonwood, and water birch
- Provide rearing habitat for Chinook and other salmonids
- Contain breeding ponds for amphibians like tiger salamanders and spadefoot toads
- Cool, filter, and store water
- Trap sediment
- Dissipate some of the erosive energy of rivers

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### putaʔəntm iʔ siwʔkʷ

The Okanagan Nation Alliance Natural Resource siwʔkʷ Program's role is to coordinate and support the implementation of the Syilx siwʔkʷ Strategy endorsed by the Chiefs' Executive Council (CEC) in 2021. The strategy's detailed Action Plan upholds CEC's mandate to ensure accessible, clean and healthy water for generations to come. The Action Plan outlines approach to protecting siwʔkʷ in our Territory, addresses the key threats, and aligns with the guiding principles shared by Nation members.

#### The Action Plan includes the following six priority actions:

1. Develop Syilx Okanagan siwʔkʷ laws in alignment with the Syilx Okanagan siwʔkʷ Declaration.
2. Assert Syilx siwʔkʷ authority.
3. Protect and restore siwʔkʷ.
4. Take the lead on Syilx Okanagan research related to siwʔkʷ.
5. Engage in Syilx Okanagan adaptation planning for siwʔkʷ.
6. Build collective siwʔkʷ consciousness.

#### ANNUAL SYILX WATER FORUM

In recognition of UN World Water Day, ONA hosts an annual Syilx Water Forum that focuses on different water tributaries, watersheds and bodies of water, to raise awareness around the state of Water within the territory. This year the forum was focused on n̓xʷaqʷaʔstn, Mission Creek. The forum included a blend of Syilx teachings, habitat restoration, and water informed conversations.

*Photo of eagle courtesy of A Hemens*



#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

One of the deliverables for the Collaborative Leadership Initiative is the creation of the Water Responsibility Plan for the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds. To help us prioritize water issues and our shared water responsibilities, we engaged with the community members at ONA's AGA with a survey on water issues.



#### SIWʔKʷ WORKING GROUP

In 2025, the siwʔkʷ Working Group have had three meetings establishing priorities and planning more meetings to take place on the land. Upcoming meetings will include an educational field trip to observe the creation of Beaver Dam Analogues (BDA). BDAs help create riparian zones, saturate soils, and store water for slow release, helping to regulate flow and temperature in fish-bearing streams.

#### SIWʔKʷ WOMEN'S GROUP

The creation of this group marks the beginning for women from across the Nation to come together to talk about water, provide direction on Nation's water work and take siwʔkʷ Action where they choose. A Basket Weaving Workshop was chosen for the first informal siwʔkʷ Women's Group meeting.





## BIGHORN SHEEP (YILÍK<sup>w</sup>LXKN): A CULTURAL AND CONSERVATION MILESTONE

Inset photo: Elder caylx, Greg Rensmaag President Wild Sheep Society BC and WFN Councillor Jordan Coble ONA NRC Chair

Since time immemorial, yilík<sup>w</sup>lxkn (Bighorn Sheep) have held deep cultural, ecological, and spiritual significance for the Syilx people. In 2024–25, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) made history by becoming the first and only First Nations organization authorized to tag and administer treatment for wild sheep. This milestone reflects years of capacity-building and leadership in wildlife stewardship. The ONA Natural Resources team is now advancing efforts to extend this expertise to grizzly bears and other at-risk species in alignment with long-term restoration goals.

This year, the ONA and the Wild Sheep Society of BC signed a Memorandum of Understanding, marking a

formal and respectful partnership that combines Syilx traditional ecological knowledge with Western science. Together, they launched Psoroptic mange drug trials at the Penticton Indian Band sheep pens—an urgent and proactive response to a debilitating skin disease affecting Bighorn Sheep herds. The project not only enhances the health of yilík<sup>w</sup>lxkn but also strengthens habitat connectivity and ecosystem health across Syilx territory.

These efforts embody the Nation's enduring responsibility to care for the tmix<sup>w</sup> (all living things), ensuring that four-legged relatives who once provided for the people are now protected in return.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### sux<sup>w</sup>txtem

Rooted in Syilx knowledge systems and driven by collaboration, science, and stewardship, the Natural Resources team worked across multiple disciplines and partnerships throughout 2024–2025 to deliver impactful projects that reflect Nation priorities and commitments. A few of our key initiatives are:

#### COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

A significant milestone was reached with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement, reaffirming Syilx title and stewardship responsibilities of the Okanagan and Similkameen watersheds. (see pg. 14 for more info)

#### THE SYILX HERBARIUM FOR PRESERVATION OF ETHNOBOTANY PROJECT

The Royal B.C. Museum Herbarium donated three herbarium cabinets composed of 48 plant species, 24 families and 53 specimens collected from April 19<sup>th</sup> to September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. This was part of a multi-year initiative that blended the scientific practices of plant collection and preservation with Syilx ethnobotanical knowledge and values.

#### GIS & EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Made Geographic Information System (GIS) capacity and geospatial servers available to communities, including spatial data tools, drone mapping, and remote sensing to support land use planning, stewardship and support data sovereignty initiatives for the nation.

#### GRIZZLY BEAR STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY

The long-anticipated release of the Stewardship Strategy for Grizzly Bears in the Northern Cascades of BC marked a major step forward in species recovery and Indigenous-led conservation of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, alongside the Stó:lō, Nlaka'pamux, St'át'imc, and Secwepemc Nations. (see pg 32 for more info)



#### LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER

ONA and Regional District of Central Kootenay began work at Waterloo Eddy Regional Park to enhance rare ecosystems that support species-at-risk and to restore habitat resiliency. We planted 600 native upland and riparian plants and completed forest enhancement and thinning.



#### TMIX<sup>w</sup> WORKING GROUP SYILX HUNTER'S HARVEST SURVEY

Collected over 120 Syilx nation responses to capture an up-to-date inventory on "traditional foods" that were harvested and consumed in the Syilx territory. The knowledge obtained through the survey will be implemented to inform Syilx-led wildlife management and inventory work and deepen our understanding of traditional practices and protocols for harvesting.

#### WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

In partnership with Okanagan Wildlife Consultants, Strategic Resource Solutions, and Upper Nicola Band, ONA completed the final year of its habitat enhancement project. After creating 290 wildlife trees, we assessed fungal inoculation and mechanical scarring treatments. Trees evaluated 2–3 years post-treatment showed early signs of decay and mortality—encouraging progress toward becoming suitable nest trees.

#### WILDLIFE HABITAT AREA ASSESSMENT POST-FIRE

In collaboration with the Province, OIB and LSIB, ONA monitored wildfire impacts on species-at-risk in Wildlife Habitat Areas. In 2024, habitat assessments were conducted for seven species affected by the Eagle Bluff fire, including Sage Thrasher, Grasshopper Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Western Rattlesnake, Half-moon Hairstreak, Blotched Tiger Salamander, and Lewis's Woodpecker. The project aimed to strengthen partnerships, evaluate habitat conditions, and guide post-fire conservation actions for SAR.





Photo: stunx (beaver) in ktusxnitk<sup>w</sup> (Okanagan Lake)

### CHOPAKA CIKILAX<sup>wm</sup> (CULTURAL BURN)

ONA supported community-led planning and implementation of cultural fire as part of landscape restoration and Indigenous fire stewardship of the LSIB led aktp'as Little Chopaka Prescribed Burn Project.



[Learn More](#)

### NĆUX<sup>w</sup> SIWS DARKE LAKE FUEL MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION

Fuel reduction treatments were carried out in winter 2024/25 to protect cultural values, maintain forest health, and utilize both merchantable and non-merchantable fibre. Approximately 16.9 ha were treated to reduce wildfire risk and transition a dense, high-fuel forest stand through the stem exclusion phase using mechanical methods.

### HERPETOFAUNA ROAD SURVEY PROJECT IN GRAND FORKS

ONA conducted seven road mortality surveys for Species-At-Risk (SAR) in September and October 2024 during fall migration, east of Grand Forks. SAR included Great Basin Gophersnake, Western Rattlesnake, Western Yellow-Bellied Racer, Great Basin Spadefoot, and Tiger Salamander. The survey also assessed potential wildlife movement corridors across Highway 3.

### SPECIES AT RISK TRI-LATERAL TABLE

Continued representation and leadership in Species at Risk (SAR) dialogues across provincial, federal, and Indigenous partners ensure Syilx perspectives are centered in key recovery planning such as riparian species and other SAR.

### COLLABORATIVE STEWARDSHIP FRAMEWORK STÚŁĆA? MULE DEER HABITAT ASSESSMENT

Under the Collaborative Stewardship Framework between the Syilx Nation and the Province, ONA and the Province agreed to develop and test an ungulate habitat assessment process in Syilx territory.



Photo: Mule deer on ONA trail camera

### COTEAY CREEK BEAVER DAM ANALOGUE

In partnership with the OIB and the BC Wildlife Federation we assessed potential for Beaver Dam Analogue's (BDA) at Coteay Creek in the Inkaneeep watershed. BDAs are small structures that individually hold back small amounts of water to help restore wetlands and riparian areas and attract beavers back to areas where they were historically present. Installation of BDA's is scheduled for September 2025.



### WESTERN SCREECH OWL MONITORING

ONA has launched a project using Motus-compatible radio tags to study territory fidelity and longevity in Western Screech-Owls. Five males were tagged in the South Okanagan and Similkameen and are being monitored long-term. ONA also conducted surveys to assess owl occupancy in previously documented habitats.



### OKANAGAN HIGHLANDS KI?LAWNA RECOVERY CAMERA GRID

Deployed 90 trail cameras to determine ki?lawna occupancy and develop a spatial model of their distribution. Five males were tagged in the South Okanagan and Similkameen and are being monitored long-term.

### BOUNDARY REGION RURAL RIPARIAN RESTORATION, BANK STABILIZATION AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

The project consisted of identifying, assessing the condition, and prioritizing yncqut, riparian areas, that mitigate challenges associated with sedimentation, streambank erosion, and flooding in the valley bottoms. This project assessed all the waterways in the Kootenay Boundary region. At Waterloo Eddy Regional Park 600 native upland and riparian plants were planted and completed forest enhancement and thinning along the nĭ<sup>w</sup>ntk<sup>w</sup>itk<sup>w</sup>, Columbia River.





*"This work is a clear example of naqsmi?st xəl tmixw—coming together for all living things. We are collectively righting a wrong and returning ki?lawna? to a transboundary ecosystem that depends on them."*

– Councillor Ćris, Jordan Coble

## GRIZZLY BEAR STEWARDSHIP PROGRESS AND THE PATH AHEAD

After years of Syilx-led advocacy, a landmark decision was made in April 2024 by the U.S. National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to actively restore grizzly bears (ki?lawna?) to their historic ranges in the Northern Cascades. Formalized on April 25, 2024, through a Joint Record of Decision, this moment marks a historic milestone in Indigenous-led conservation and transboundary ecological healing.

Since 2014, when the ONA Chief's Executive Council declared ki?lawna? protected across Syilx territory, a coordinated Indigenous-led stewardship approach has grown stronger.

In 2018, this momentum culminated in the formation of the **Joint Nations Grizzly Bear Initiative** (JNGBI) with the signing of the JNGBI Resolution (TCR 367), initiated by the ONA. This resolution marked the official commitment of several Indigenous Nations—including the Syilx Okanagan, Stó:lō, Nlaka'pamux, St'át'imc, and Secwepemc—to collaboratively restore and steward ki?lawna? populations in the North Cascades.

Over the past year, the Joint Nation Grizzly Bear Initiative, facilitated by ONA, has worked diligently to guide collaborative transboundary effort for ki?lawna? recovery. The recent publication of the Stewardship Strategy for Grizzly Bears in the North Cascades of BC

provides an adaptive framework centered on five key goals: coexistence, habitat stewardship, population recovery, and Indigenous-led monitoring and governance.

The Syilx Nation affirms its responsibility to guide the return of both ki?lawna? - grizzly bear and ntytyix-salmon to their rightful place on the land—ensuring that future generations can benefit from these culturally and ecologically vital beings. Recognizing

their deeply intertwined roles, the ONA is advancing landscape-level stewardship that goes beyond single-species focus to reflect a holistic, relational approach. Grizzly bears and salmon often share overlapping habitats and are mutually dependent within the food web and ecosystems they sustain. Their co-recovery is central to the broader North Cascades ki?lawna? Recovery and Baker Lake Salmon Reintroduction Programs. As part of the effort to reintroduce salmon into the upper Skagit region—above Ross Lake, Baker Lake Dam, and upstream of Sedro-Woolley, Wa.—several data gaps are being addressed to determine the reintroduction's viability.

In partnership with the Stó:lō Nation, Nlaka'pamux Nation the ONA is improving habitat classification using higher-resolution data and integrating both scientific research and on-the-land knowledge from Guardians and Knowledge Keepers. This combined approach helps identify barriers, threats, and opportunities critical to the successful return of salmon and grizzly bears.

This integrated work reaffirms our responsibilities under Syilx law, supporting the return of two keystone species to landscapes they have long shaped.

### Looking Ahead: A Path for All Our Relations

Just as we have watched ntytyix (salmon) slowly return—year by year—through ceremony, deep care, and community, we now walk the same path with ki?lawna?. Our Grizzly Bear Governance and Stewardship Strategy is a long-term, intergenerational commitment focused on restoring habitat, preparing communities, and strengthening Indigenous-led monitoring and response systems. This is the beginning of a long journey—one walked by our ancestors and carried forward by our youth.





## RESTORING BALANCE FOR THE TMIX<sup>w</sup>

səx<sup>w</sup>txətnik<sup>w</sup>

“ When we speak of the ONA mandate of *kt c̓palk̓ stih̓* – “cause to come back” – we speak of deep, purposeful work to restore native fish populations to their historic watersheds.

This work is not only about bringing fish back to the water; it's about restoring balance to tmix<sup>w</sup>—all living things—through ecosystem-based planning that unites our Natural Resources and Fisheries teams.

Our work continues to expand across Syilx territory. Through the North Cascades *ki?lawna?* Recovery and Baker Lake Salmon Reintroduction Programs, we are now engaged in a fourth key watershed in the Manning Park area, joining the Okanagan, Similkameen, and Columbia systems.

As Elder *caylx*, Richard Armstrong says, “Salmon reach from the very top of the mountain all the way down,” providing sustenance for all tmix<sup>w</sup>. That is why we begin with salmon—because it connects all of the work we do at ONA. It's about food sovereignty, cultural revitalization, and securing the future of the Syilx people for generations to come.

One of our most powerful discoveries in the Columbia system is the interdependence of species. We observed that even during prime spawning times, sturgeon were not reproducing—due to the lack of salmon, their primary food source. This reinforces our belief: if we bring salmon back, other species will return too.

This understanding informs our approach to the Columbia River Treaty, watershed restoration, hydrometric monitoring, and in-lake habitat work. It is science guided by culture, and action informed by salmon.

In 2024, we translocated 57 adult Okanagan Sockeye into Arrow Lakes to study migratory behavior. Remarkably, despite no salmon ladder, several fish swam through the HLK lock at Castlegar Dam—a feature designed for log movement, not fish passage. This unexpected result gives us hope: the fish are showing us the way.

We also saw one of our greatest successes: a Sockeye released by ONA in 2021 made it to the Pacific Ocean and returned four years later, reaching as far as Wells Dam. This was the first adult Sockeye from our Upper Columbia release program to make this full journey, signaling the potential for full reintroduction into the Arrow Lakes. We are now working with partners to explore options around the final barriers, including Chief Joseph Dam, to restore full connectivity.

In the Okanagan, we are completing a critical phase of our salmon recovery strategy. A new fish passage is being constructed on the east side of the Okanagan Dam at the base of Okanagan Lake in Penticton, creating long-awaited access for Sockeye to return to their traditional spawning grounds. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on March 4, 2025, to mark this major step forward.

Further downstream, we've also completed the 20-year Shuttleworth Creek restoration near OK Falls with the removal of the final concrete barrier. This site was one

of the first projects ONA Fisheries ever undertook, making its completion both symbolic and significant.

We also had our first ever confirmed adult Okanagan Summer Chinook pass through Penticton Dam fish ladder and migrate into Okanagan Lake—a fish released from our hatchery four years ago. Marking a historic milestone in restoring Chinook to their former range.

In May 2024, we celebrated the 20th Anniversary of our Fry Release Ceremony at akł xʷuminaʔ (Shingle Creek). Over 700 students from across the South Okanagan joined our Fish in Schools (FinS) program for this celebration. Each student was gifted a can of Okanagan Select Salmon, connecting them to the land, the water, and their future.

Our broader ecosystem work includes species at risk like sturgeon and speckled dace, as well as invasive species challenges. A Master's student hosted by ONA documented juvenile Chinook predation by invasive bass in Osoyoos Lake, especially where the river enters the lake. We also joined the provincial response to whirling disease and are monitoring zebra mussel threats near Spokane that could endanger native species.

Sturgeon recovery remains a long-term priority. Eggs are collected annually, and indexing work continues,

despite ongoing spawning failures—likely tied to downstream migration into Roosevelt Reservoir and ecosystem disruptions.

In 2024, Syilx members harvested over 50,000 salmon, five times more than the ONA's own collections. This shift is sparking important community conversations around fair distribution, reciprocal trading, and the resurgence of cultural governance and knowledge-sharing.

Our Hatchery also had a record-breaking year, producing over 5.6 million fry, most of which were released into the Okanagan and Columbia tributaries.

In support of Nation capacity, we continue to provide hydrometric data to bands upon request, empowering communities to make informed, culturally grounded decisions regarding water licenses and natural resource management.

“ 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 ”

- ʔilmixʷm ki law na Clarence Louie





## FIRST SUMMER CHINOOK MADE IT BACK INTO KŁUSXNITKW

Photo: chinook in the water at Okanagan Falls Release 2021 Inset Photo: adult chinook salmon

Following decades of work for salmon restoration, and habitat rejuvenation — the first summer chinook salmon made it back into kłusxnitk<sup>w</sup> Okanagan Lake on September 10<sup>th</sup>. This is the first ever confirmed ntitiyx, an adult Okanagan Summer Chinook, that has passed the Penticton Dam fish ladder and migrated into the Lake.

This was one of the fish we released from our hatchery 4 years ago. We are thrilled that the Chinook have returned to Okanagan Lake and this is a big milestone for our program to restore the population to their former range.

<https://youtu.be/0xMTKbWxmaE>





Inset Photo Courtesy of Aaron Hemens, First Sockeye Spawners in Arrow Lakes

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

kt c̓pəlk stím

### FISH PASSAGE AND HABITAT RESTORATION



- Fish passage construction began at Okanagan Lake Dam on March 4, 2025, improving Sockeye access to Okanagan Lake.
- Equesis irrigation dam fully removed, restoring natural river flow.
- Wilsey Dam sediment transfer study completed as a key step toward dam removal.
- 57 adult Sockeye tracked at HKL Dam (Castlegar); fish successfully swam through log lock and spawned in Deer Creek — proving potential for upstream movement.

### HYDROMETRICS & INDIGENOUS WATER GOVERNANCE

- Real-time hydrometric data collection across the Okanagan Basin to inform Environmental Flow Needs (EFNs), water license reviews and drought management planning. Also to support Indigenous-led decisions that reflect ecological and cultural priorities.

### HABITAT WORK AND SPAWNING RECOVERY

- 16 active habitat projects undertaken in Okanagan Lake tributaries.
- Collaborative work with DFO underway to reassess Okanagan Sockeye spawning capacity, informing updated escapement goals.

### WATER QUALITY & ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

- 6 lakes monitored for juvenile salmon habitat quality, including Okanagan, Skaha, Osoyoos, Wenatchee, Nicola, and others.
- In-stream restoration in places like Trout Creek led to observed return of fish after restoration phases.
- Monthly water quality testing at Shingle Creek ensures hatchery operations meet environmental safety standards.



### COLUMBIA RIVER REINTRODUCTION BREAKTHROUGHS

- First adult Sockeye from ONA's 2021 Upper Columbia release detected at Wells Dam, nearing Chief Joseph Dam — a major step in full return.
- Ongoing adult movement studies show fish finding routes through unexpected paths, like HLK log locks, offering new insights for future fish passage.

### INVASIVE SPECIES & RISK MANAGEMENT



- Osoyoos Lake bass predation study revealed high impact of invasive bass on juvenile Chinook at lake inlets.
- Northern Pike suppression continues in Upper Columbia, capture numbers appear to be going down.
- ONA participated in provincial provincial planning for Invasive Mussel threat
- Whirling disease coordination initiated with provincial partners to increase Syilx-led involvement.

### ENDANGERED & EXPATRIATED SPECIES RECOVERY

- Local Chinook broodstock recovery continues despite cross-border egg shortages.
- Evaluating Department of Fisheries and Oceans Critical Habitat Areas for Speckled Dace the Kettle River watershed.
- Sturgeon population work continues with egg collection and indexing to understand long-term recruitment failure.
- Fisheries Department supported grizzly recovery through salmon restoration projects.

### FOOD SOVEREIGNTY & HARVEST

- ~50,000 Sockeye harvested by Syilx members - the largest community harvest on record as a demonstration of return to cultural harvesting practices, strengthening community food systems and independence.





## RECORD-BREAKING HATCHERY PRODUCTION

Photo: Broodstock Team, Inset Photo: Salmon Eggs

As part of the *kt c̓pəl̓k stiṁ* (cause to come back) initiative, ONA has been seining and collecting eggs and milt from adult salmon in the Okanagan River for rearing and release into lakes and creeks. Our goal is to restore and rejuvenate salmon populations.

- **5,792,631 Sockeye eggs collected**
  - the highest total in ONA history, surpassing the previous 2016 record by over 294,000 eggs.

- 5,251,347 Sockeye fry released in 2025 following excellent survival rates:
  - 95.0% egg phase survival
  - 90.7% fry phase survival
- 10,305 Chinook eggs collected from 4 broodstock females to support local recovery planning.

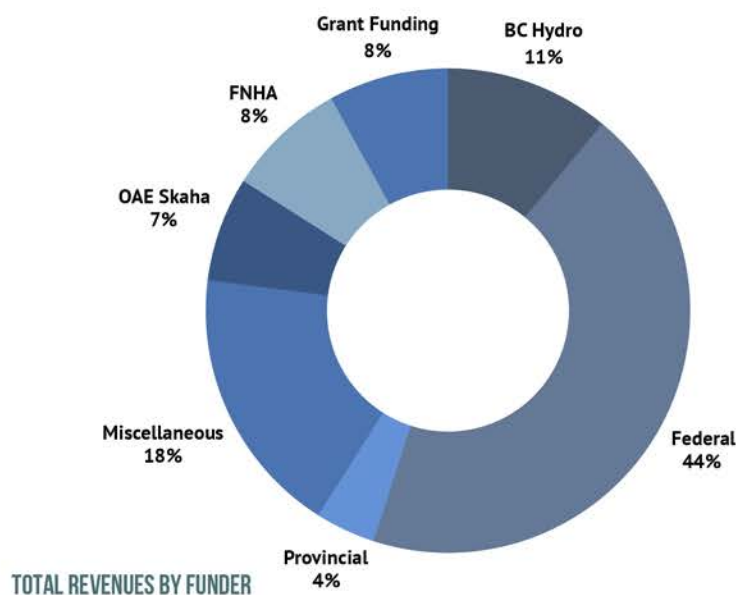
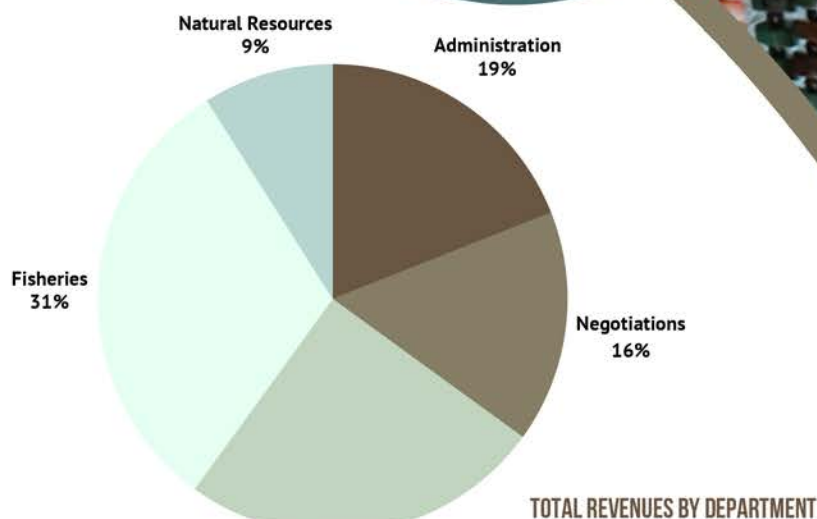
# OPERATIONS

## nŋcip

The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) operates primarily on a project and proposal-driven model, bolstered by limited core funding to support its foundational operations. Leveraging dedicated staff, robust systems, and strategic assets, the ONA consistently delivers dependable and impactful results for the Syilx Nation and surrounding communities.

Fiscal accountability is a cornerstone of the ONA Administration, which plays a critical role in supporting programs, initiatives, and projects to meet their contractual obligations and position the organization for future opportunities. The Finance Department provides essential services to staff, equipping them with the financial tools and insights needed to conduct research, deliver program outcomes, draft competitive proposals, and pursue innovative initiatives. Their efforts ensure the ONA remains compliant with all relevant accounting standards and continues its strong track record of clean audits.

The ONA has experienced steady, year-over-year operational growth since inception. This growth has been fueled by increased funding across all departments, driven by major initiatives such as the Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative, Wildlife Monitoring and Conservation Programs, as well as a dedicated Wellness Department supported by the private sector and both the Federal and Provincial Governments. In addition, cultural events like the Syilx Unity Run and Salmon Feast continue to receive strong and sustained support from community members, as well as corporate and other external sponsors.





# HONOURING OUR JOURNEY

TO LEARN MORE:  
[www.syilx.org](http://www.syilx.org) | Phone: 250.707.0095

