

COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY

Information and Updates



The Syilx Okanagan Nation has never signed a treaty with any federal or provincial governments, and we have never given up our inherent rights or responsibilities to care for our lands, waters, and resources. In the past, both the federal and provincial governments have often used a “divide and conquer” tactic against First Nations, including our Nation. This tactic would pit neighbouring communities against each other and quite often resulted in huge developments like the CRT dams to move forward throughout our Territory without our participation, consent, or benefit.

- Aboriginal Title and Rights are held and recognized collectively. The Syilx Okanagan Nation, through our shared language, customs, culture, spiritual practices, governance systems and familial ties, are tied together and through a unified and collective approach, we can protect, defend, and advance our Title and Rights throughout Syilx Okanagan Territory (including the Upper Columbia) – no one community can do this alone.
- A Nation-based approach like this is consistent with the principles and values of the Okanagan Nation Declaration that re-affirms our inherent rights and of the rights belonging to future generations of Syilx Okanagan people – those yet to come.
- First Nations across Canada have fought hard to protect their lands and territories against colonization for centuries. They have fought for their Title and Rights in Canadian courts and have made great strides that have benefitted us all. Legal cases like Tsilhqo'tin's Nation's Title claim at the Supreme Court of Canada has emphasized the importance and effectiveness of First Nations engaging as a Nation to continue protecting their territories while enabling resources and benefits return to member communities of a Nation.

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

Okanagan Nation Declaration

ONA Activities in the Columbia

ONA has a long standing history of engagement in the Columbia, including, but not limited to:

- 6 tours with Syilx elders and community members in the Columbia (2018-2019)
- Over 25 monitoring and restoration projects active
- Signage initiatives (such as Beaver Creek) affirming Syilx presence
- Unity Run 2015-2018 reconnected hundreds of Syilx youth to the Columbia

HOW WILL THE CRT NEGOTIATIONS POSITIVELY IMPACT SYILX OKANAGAN COMMUNITIES?

Over the years, the Chiefs Executive Council and their team have worked strategically to advance our collective Title and Rights in the CRT process and to set a foundation to ensure that benefits from the CRT flow back to our communities. Overall, the Nation continues to build and extend capacity for *sux˘txtem* in the Columbia, to increase land, water and fisheries work within our territory and to fight for our Nation's right to have a meaningful role in the ongoing governance and stewardship of our Territory's lands and resources.

- At the direction of the CEC, the ONA has participated in the review of every major project that requires an environmental assessment certificate. This participation in the environmental assessment review has allowed us to advance, protect and defend our collective Title and Rights.
- The Nation's longer-term goal in its negotiations is to ensure that environmental and cultural objectives are considered in future CRT dam operations so that our Nation will have a role in decision-making. A decision-making role in dam operations will enable us to advocate for both greater environmental protections and ensuring the decisions reflect Syilx Okanagan cultural values for future generations.
- In a parallel process, a "Letter of Agreement (LOA) concerning Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction" was signed in July 2019 with five (5) signatories: Syilx Okanagan Nation, Ktunaxa Nation and Secwepemc Nation, Canada, and British Columbia. This LOA established the Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (CRSRI). This is a collaborative effort to bring salmon back to the Upper Columbia River region. Our Nation is a nationally recognized leader in this work and we have an established record of success of salmon reintroduction in the Okanagan system. The long-term vision of this work is to return fish stocks for First Nations' food, social and ceremonial needs.
- The ONA actively encourages knowledge keepers, elders, and Syilx Okanagan community members to re-connect to the Territory through cultural practices, ceremonies, and gatherings on the land. Numerous land-based actions and learning initiatives have taken place that promote connection to all parts and aspects of the Territory. These have included elder tours and teachings at specific locations on the Territory, on-the-land knowledge gatherings and recording, youth events, such as the unity run and specific community ceremonies.
- The ONA have invested time and resources in working with knowledge keepers in cultural research initiatives to ensure that *nsyilxcen* place names, stories and historical sites are recorded and catalogued, including in the Columbia. With the support of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, we have used this information for place name signage at different interpretive stations in the Columbia to reaffirm and raise public awareness of our rightful presence and connection to the Territory.

In addition to our work in the CRT negotiations, the Syilx Okanagan Nation (through the ONA) has strengthened our presence and connection to the Columbia Basin through several ways:

- Over the years, ONA has built up significant capacity and expertise in its departments. In fact, ONA Fisheries is one of the largest inland fisheries organizations in Canada and we are nationally recognized for our leadership in salmon reintroduction. Through this capacity and expertise, we have been able to carry out our inherent responsibilities to restore and protect our multispecies, fisheries through habitat restoration, monitoring and creating greater awareness in the Columbia region. Our work includes 25 projects currently taking place in the Columbia as well as the establishment of an ONA office in Castlegar.

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For any questions or concerns regarding the Syilx Okanagan Nation's involvement in the CRT negotiations, please contact:

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