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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



The Syilx Okanagan Nation Declares a Watershed Emergency

stqaʔtkwłniwt, Westbank, Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory: The Syilx Okanagan Nation has formally declared a Watershed Emergency across the Okanagan, Nicola, Similkameen, Kettle, Salmon, and Bessette watersheds in response to accelerating drought, ecosystem decline, and growing threats to water security.

The Syilx Nation has long affirmed its rights, responsibilities, and jurisdiction to protect and care for siwłkw- water in accordance with Syilx law, knowledge systems, governance, and the Syilx siwłkw Declaration (2014).

Elders, knowledge holders, and technical staff across Syilx Territory have observed accelerating environmental changes, including early hot temperatures; low snowpack; unusually dry upper watershed creeks, springs, and wetlands; increasing water temperatures and ecosystem stress; the early die-off of spıləm-bitterroot, and declining streamflows impacting xwəxwłmınaʔ-rainbow trout populations in Mission Creek and other tributaries.

As of May 1, 2026, snowpack levels across Syilx Territory ranged from just 9% to 69% of normal, raising urgent concerns about water shortages, ecosystem collapse, extreme wildfire risk, and long-term watershed health. These conditions represent an escalating cultural, ecological, and governance emergency that threatens communities, ecosystems, and timxw-all living things.

“The Syilx Nation is acting within its inherent jurisdiction and responsibility to protect siwłkw for future generations,” said Chief Robert Louie. “Water is life, and the health of our watersheds can no longer be treated as secondary to development and short-term interests.”

Current government and management systems have failed to adequately protect watershed health.

This is compounded by major knowledge gaps around headwaters, groundwater interactions, and cumulative impacts that continue to limit informed decision-making.

The Okanagan Nation has long demonstrated leadership in watershed collaboration through initiatives such as salmon reintroduction, the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative, and the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table.

In response to the escalating watershed crisis, the Nation is calling on the Province of British Columbia and all relevant agencies to take immediate and coordinated action through the following measures:

- **A moratorium on new surface and groundwater licences;**
- **Mandatory reductions in water use;**

- Establishment of a Syilx Nation–BC co-governance forum on water scarcity;
- Inclusion of local governments in coordinated watershed management; and
- Protection of critical fish flows through emergency measures.

All levels of government are called upon to prioritize long-term investment in watershed restoration, climate adaptation, wetland and riparian protection, and First Nations-led stewardship and monitoring.

The Syilx Okanagan Nation emphasized that all water users—including agriculture, industry, municipalities, and the public—share responsibility for reducing water use, preventing pollution, and protecting watershed health for future generations.

This is a formal call to action for governments, organizations, industry, and communities **to work in true partnership with the Syilx Nation** through shared decision-making, accountability, and urgent collective action.

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