ks_kəɬqayxʷntim iʔ siwɬkʷ

WE WILL PROTECT THE WATER

Okanagan Nation Alliance



A SYILX STRATEGY TO PROTECT AND RESTORE SIWɬKʷ 2021



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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

I. INTRODUCTION 7

1.1 Vision

1.2 Purpose

1.3 Methodology

II. AN ORIENTATION TO SYILX PEOPLE AND SIWŁKʷ 10

2.1 Interconnection with siwɬkʷ 10

2.1.1 nsyilxcən Language

2.1.2 captikʷɬ

2.1.3 The Four Food Chiefs

2.1.4 Inherent Right to Care for siwɬkʷ

2.1.5 Roles of tkɬmil'xʷ and speplal?

2.2 Principles for siwɬkʷ 14

2.3 Syilx Okanagan Work to Protect, Manage, and Sustain siwɬkʷ 15

2.3.1 Overview of siwɬkʷ in Syilx Territory

2.3.2 Syilx Nation Declarations

2.3.3 Stewardship Activities

2.4 Key Threats to siwɬkʷ 18

2.4.1 Threat #1: Lifestyle and Livelihood

2.4.2 Threat #2: Governance and Leadership

2.4.3 Threat #3: Bio-physical and Geo-climatic

III. ACTION PLAN: APPROACHES TO PROTECTING SIWŁKʷ IN THE SYILX OKANAGAN TERRITORY 23

3.1 Priority #1: Develop Syilx siwɬkʷ Laws in Alignment with siwɬkʷ Declaration 24

3.1.1 Develop syilx Framework for siwɬkʷ Management and Governance

3.2 Priority #2: Assert Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Authority 24

3.2.1 Establish Syilx siwɬkʷ Caucus

3.2.2 siwɬkʷ Responsibility Plans

3.2.3 siwɬkʷ License Referral System

3.2.4 Community-Based Monitoring

3.2.5 Establish Water Sustainability Act (WSA) siwɬkʷ Use Plans



3.3 Priority #3: Protect and Restore siwɬkʷ **26**
3.3.1 Headwaters: Wetland Protection Strategy
3.3.2 Headwaters: Syilx Okanagan Forestry Strategy
3.3.3 Headwaters: Mountain Beaver Restoration Plan
3.3.4 Valley Bottom: Wetland Strategy
3.3.5 Protect Through Acquisition
3.4 Priority #4: Take the Lead on syilx Research Related to siwɬkʷ **28**
3.4.1. Facilitate siwɬkʷ-Related Knowledge Gathering
3.4.2 Implement Syilx Okanagan Research Ethics
3.4.3 Interface with Academia
3.5 Priority #5: Engage in syilx Okanagan Adaptation Planning for siwɬkʷ **29**
3.5.1 Continue Flood Adaptation Initiative
3.5.2 Develop Nation-Level Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management Plans
3.5.3 Develop Climate Adaptation Plans
3.6 Priority #6: Build Collective siwɬkʷ Consciousness **31**
3.6.1 Continue to Host the siwɬkw Water Forum
3.6.2 Hold On-the-Land siwɬkʷ Ceremonies and Gatherings
3.6.3 Create and Share Resources to Increase Awareness and Understanding of siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ
3.6.4 Encourage Personal Responsibility for siwɬkʷ Consumption

IV. NEXT STEPS **32**

V. NSYILXCƏN GLOSSARY **33**

It is important to note that the enactment of Syilx Okanagan best practices will be place-based and led by the Syilx Okanagan communities who are responsible for that area with support from the Nation.



Approaches to Protecting siwɬkʷ in the Syilx Okanagan Territory

Summary of Priority Actions

1. **Develop Syilx siwɬkʷ Laws in Alignment with siwɬkʷ Declaration.**
   Develop Syilx Framework for siwɬkʷ Management and Governance

2. **Assert Syilx siwɬkʷ Authority by Establishing:**
   - Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Caucus
   - siwɬkʷ Responsibility Plans
   - siwɬkʷ License Referral System
   - Community-Based Monitoring
   - Water Sustainability Act (WSA) siwɬkʷ Use Plans

3. **Protect and Restore siwɬkʷ**
   - Headwaters: Wetland Protection Strategy
   - Headwaters: Syilx Okanagan Forestry Strategy
   - Headwaters: Mountain Beaver Restoration Plan
   - Valley Bottom: Wetland Strategy
   - Protect Through Acquisition

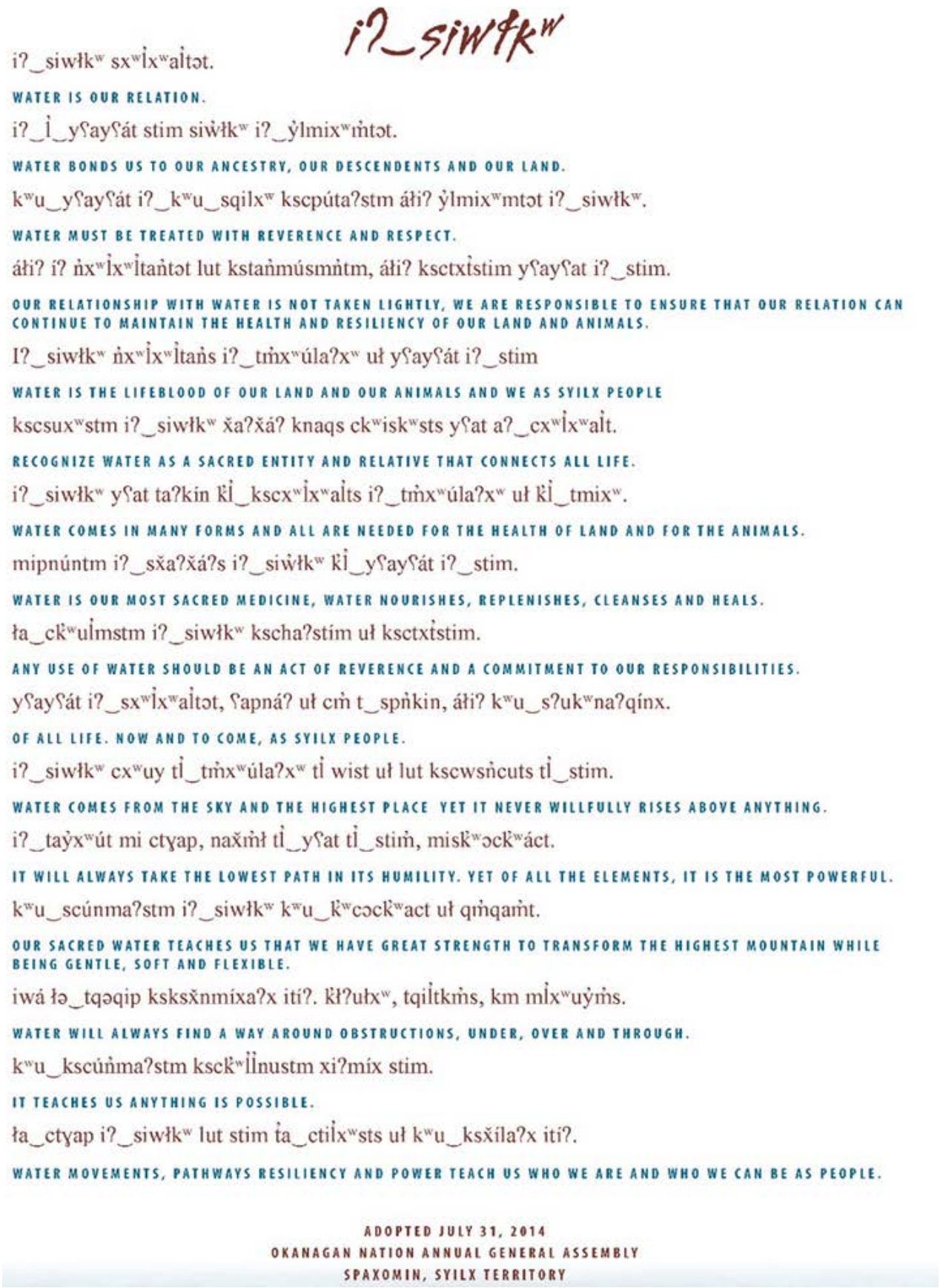
4. **Take the Lead on Syilx Research related to siwɬkʷ**
   - Facilitate siwɬkʷ-Related Knowledge Gatherings
   - Implement Syilx Okanagan Research Ethics
   - Interface with Academia

5. **Engage in Syilx Adaptation Planning for siwɬkʷ**
   - Continue Flood Adaptation Initiative
   - Develop Nation-Level Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management Plans
   - Develop Climate Adaptation Plans

6. **Build Collective siwɬkʷ Consciousness**
   - Continue to Host the siwɬkʷ Water Forum
   - Hold On-the-Land siwɬkʷ Ceremonies and Gatherings
   - Create and Share Resources to Increase Awareness and Understanding of siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ
   - Encourage Personal Responsibility for siwɬkʷ Consumption

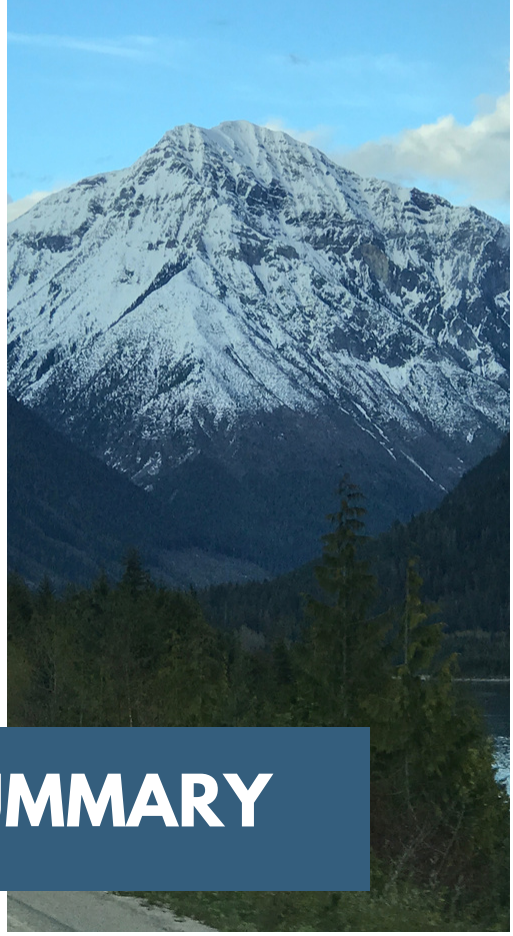


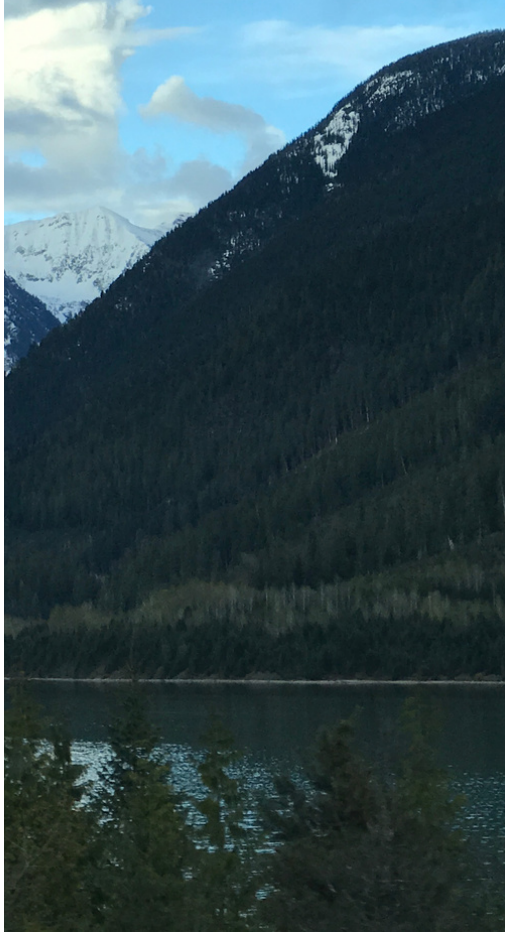
We came into this world through water, we were carried to life in water, when we were born that water was returned to the earth to continue to give life" - laxʷ/axʷtkʷ, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong



Excerpt from the Syilx Nation siwɬkʷ Declaration







EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This document responds to longstanding directives from the Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) to recognize our collective, sacred responsibility to siwɬkʷ (water) and to enhance Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ governance. In 2011, the ONA Natural Resource Committee (NRC) was tasked with developing a strategy to protect and manage siwɬkʷ. This Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Strategy is a call to action that outlines how the Syilx Okanagan Nation intends to steward and care for our Territory and to ensure that siwɬkʷ is properly respected and available for all living things. It is built on the understanding that the Syilx Okanagan People have inherent rights and responsibilities to care for siwɬkʷ.

This strategy has been developed over the past decade and includes the unique perspectives and input of more than 100 community members from all 8 syilx Okanagan communities. It has brought together the voices of Elders, youth, knowledge holders, leaders, hunters, fishers, and harvesters to articulate the syilx Okanagan principles and practices associated with siwɬkʷ stewardship as well as to discuss concerns about the well-being of siwɬkʷ today and in the future.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY

Recognizing that the audience for this strategy is diverse and that readers will come with very different levels of understanding, the strategy has been organized in such a way that readers can consult the sections that address their existing knowledge and needs.

This strategy serves a number of purposes:

1. **Education**: Create broader awareness of Syilx Okanagan rights and share Syilx Okanagan knowledge.
2. **Stewardship**: Uphold the practice of Syilx Okanagan governance and exercise Syilx Okanagan rights and responsibilities to care for siwɬkʷ.
3. **Collaboration**: Promote increased unity and collaboration with non-Indigenous neighbors and partners in Syilx Okanagan Territory.

In the beginning, there was siwɬkʷ and darkness.
—Harry Robinson, Write It On Your Heart

The strategy begins with an introduction to the history of Syilx Okanagan People and key principles that shape our strong relationships with siwɬkʷ. It serves as a baseline introduction to create broader awareness of the rights and responsibilities of Syilx Okanagan People as well as to offer insights into our worldview, particularly as it pertains to siwɬkʷ. This section also includes an overview of stewardship activities that the Syilx Okanagan Nation has engaged in over the past decades to protect, manage, and sustain siwɬkʷ.[1] This section also outlines the ONA analysis of threats to the health of watersheds in the Canadian portion of Syilx Okanagan Territory. These threats fall into three main categories: lifestyle and livelihood, governance and leadership, and bio-physical and geo-climatic.

The strategy then outlines a detailed Action Plan that upholds the CEC's mandate to ensure accessible, clean and healthy water for generations to come. The Action Plan outlines approaches to protecting siwɬkʷ in Syilx Okanagan Territory, addresses the key threats, and aligns with the guiding principles shared by Nation members.

The Action Plan is organized according to the following six priority actions:

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

NEXT STEPS

One of the strongest points raised by the majority of Syilx Okanagan community members is that we need to act now and be true leaders in water protection and management. This strategy is a living document that will adapt to the ever-changing societal and environmental landscape. There will always be more work to be done and things to improve, learn and enhance upon.

Moving forward, work plans will be created in alignment with the priority actions identified in the Action Plan. All work will be community-led; planned and undertaken in close collaboration with Syilx Okanagan communities and community members.

[1] As articulated in the Syilx Nation siwɬkʷ Declaration.



siwɬkʷ

siwɬkʷ comes from siw and ɬkʷ

siw comes from the word for when a human drinks— siwɬkʷ: to sip

ɬkʷ comes from the word for when an animal drinks— ɬkʷitkw: to lap

Together, the two parts form siwɬkʷ—embedding within the word itself the syilx ethic that the right to water is equal for humans and animals.

Scan here to learn how to say siwɬkʷ

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Vision

Our relation siwɬkʷ, our most sacred medicine, must be kept healthy to restore and hold its relationship to tmixʷ to ensure the resiliency of our Mother for the good of all, for all time.
— Syilx Okanagan Natural Resources Committee, 2018

1.2 Purpose

Syilx Okanagan People have an intrinsic relationship with siwɬkʷ. Maintaining the integrity of siwɬkʷ and respecting its relationship to all life is essential to identity and is entrenched in our responsibility to our Territory. The Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Strategy is a call to action that outlines how the Syilx Okanagan Nation intends to steward and care for our Territory and to ensure that siwɬkʷ is properly respected and available for all living things. It is built on the understanding that the Syilx Okanagan People have inherent rights and responsibilities to care for siwɬkʷ.

Current western siwɬkʷ management regimes are missing the Syilx Okanagan worldview and siwɬkʷ is being disrespected. Extreme flooding, wildfires, and other environmental disasters are increasing in frequency and magnitude in Syilx Okanagan Territory. This underscores the need for a cohesive approach to management that emphasizes risk mitigation while continuing to strengthen preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities.

This strategy shares a Syilx Okanagan vision of our land, siwɬkʷ, and suxʷtxtem (caretaking) responsibilities that include protecting and respecting siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ (all life forms on Earth).

Just as we know from the Four Food Chiefs, we can only move forward together in a good way when all perspectives are considered.



This strategy serves a number of purposes:

EDUCATION: Many people are unaware of the long history of denial of Syilx Okanagan Title and Rights, including siwɬkʷ rights, and there is much work required to educate, inform, and build a greater understanding. Syilx Okanagan People have generations of knowledge that embody successful siwɬkʷ stewardship prior to colonization and remain important to this day. Syilx Okanagan perspectives on all living things look at the long term view and work forward, learning from the past experiences and knowledge still held by our members.

STEWARDSHIP: It is the responsibility of the Syilx Okanagan People to act as caretakers of the lands and siwɬkʷ within the Territory. The Action Plan in this strategy offers a unified path forward to proactively transform current societal and industrial siwɬkʷ management systems. It identifies actions the Syilx Okanagan Nation is working on undertaking to protect this most sacred gift.

COLLABORATION: We invite everyone who shares our remarkable Territory to recognize the essential role that siwɬkʷ plays in all of our lives. Non-Indigenous stakeholders and governments must build capacity to learn how to work respectfully with the Syilx Okanagan Nation and understand our own governance. This is essential work, as our approaches to fulfill our responsibilities to siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ have been denied for too long. In today's context, both the federal and provincial Crown have made commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This includes fully adopting and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including in British Columbia with Bill 41[2], as well as the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This strategy is a living document that will adapt and change in response to the current landscape. The ONA role is to support, provide technical expertise, produce results and discuss potential alternatives. The work will grow into what is needed to uphold our important responsibilities for the sake of siwɬkʷ and future generations.

[2] Bill 41: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIPA) was passed by the BC Legislature in 2019.

1.3 Methodology

Since 2011 the ONA NRC has been developing the Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ strategy as a call to action to protect and manage all siwɬkʷ within the Territory. The ONA has been working with Syilx Okanagan communities to create opportunities for sharing and gathering Syilx Okanagan knowledge about the tmxʷulaxʷ (the land) and siwɬkʷ. The voices of hundreds of Elders, youth, knowledge holders, leaders, hunters, fishers, and harvesters from across the Territory are all reflected in this strategy as they discussed concerns about the well-being of siwɬkʷ and articulated principles and practices associated with siwɬkʷ stewardship. In keeping with the Syilx Okanagan nʔawqnwixʷ (decision making through consensus building) process, the engagement with community members was designed to ensure that all voices contributed to the strategy.



For the Syilx Okanagan Nation, when you speak about siwɬkʷ, you speak about everything: the land, the animals, the plants —everything, all living things.





Community Engagement

Community engagement activities have included lengthy interviews with 12 Knowledge Keepers from 7 Syilx Okanagan bands and over 20 meetings, workshops, watershed tours, and forums including:

- Upper Nicola Band Meeting 2012 (Nov 29): on siwɬkʷ issues, management practices, value of siwɬkʷ, and strategies to conserve and protect siwɬkʷ in Syilx Okanagan Territory.
- NRC Meeting 2012 (Dec 10): Presentation on "Our syilx siwɬkʷ".
- Joint Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Meeting 2013 (Jan 24): En'owkin Centre TEK meeting on issues surrounding siwɬkʷ, responsibilities to, and how to move forward.
- Stephen Kakfwi Presentation 2013 (Feb 6): Presentation on water strategy in Northwest Territories by former NWT Premier and Dene Nation President.
- OKIB Workshop 2013 (June 24): Community engagement session on draft strategy.
- Youth Engagement Water Workshop 2013 (July 18): OIB Youth Centre session to inform youth on current siwɬkʷ issues and engage them on the "Our Syilx Water" project.
- Women's Workshop 2013 (July 30): En'owkin Centre gathering for Syilx Okanagan women interested in sharing their voice for the purpose of protecting our siwɬkʷ.
- Water Strategy Community Meeting 2015 (June 15-16): Special NRC meeting to create a vision and action plan for the Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Strategy.

nx̌ʷnt̓kʷitkʷ is a relationship. This relationship is to be rightly thought of as sacred - an ethic and a syilx law, rather than just 'water use...'

- lax̌lax̌tkʷ, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong





2. AN ORIENTATION TO SYILX PEOPLE AND SIWŁKʷ

The Syilx Okanagan people are a trans-boundary tribe separated at the 49th parallel by the border between Canada and the United States. Our Nation is comprised of seven member communities in the Southern Interior of British Columbia: Okanagan Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, Penticton Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Upper and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands, and Westbank First Nation; and in Norther Washington State, the Colville Confederated Tribes. Our members share the same land, nsyilxcən language, culture, and customs. We are a distinct and sovereign Nation.

Our territory is a diverse and beautiful place that encompasses desert and grassland, forests and mountains, rivers and lakes. It is one of the most ecologically diverse regions of Canada and hosts the highest number of threatened species in the country. siwɬkʷ is its lifeblood. Our homelands contain over 27 different watersheds, each with its own personality, needs, and ways of being.

The Syilx Okanagan people were wished here by k̓ʷuləncutn, the creator and arranger of the world. When we were created, a covenant was made that we would act as caretakers of nxʷəlxʷəltantət (that which gives us life); in return, we would be looked after. This bond of reciprocity has been handed down from our ancestors and will continue to be passed down to the generations to come. siwɬkʷ is the physical manifestation of the Creator. Our people are deeply rooted in the tmxʷulaxʷ and flow with the siwɬkʷ that we have lived with in harmony since time immemorial. Through the guidance of kʷuləncutn, we accept a sacred trust and fully express jurisdictional authority to protect and respect siwɬkʷ. Central to this practice, siwɬkʷ is held up as a living relative. For Syilx Okanagan People, this continues to be a fundamental guiding principle in our laws, practices, and governance. We have our own Syilx Okanagan laws and process for suxʷtxtem and respecting siwɬkʷ according to principles that are embedded in knowledge, stories, teachings, ceremonies, medicines, dances, and the arts.

2.1 Interconnection with siwɬkʷ

The Syilx Okanagan People flow with siwɬkʷ as it connects us to one another and our ancestors. By going to siwɬkʷ, it knows who we are and creates the connection which reaches through generations. This ancient and inherent bond has sustained our People for countless generations and is a cornerstone of our material, cultural, and spiritual identity.

siwɬkʷ is central to our ceremonies and celebrations as a Nation. We pray to siwɬkʷ. We thank siwɬkʷ for being here for us and providing life to everything around us. We ask it to bring rains to the dry lands, to fill the rivers so our salmon can return, and to cleanse our bodies and minds. It is a place of reverence. The practice and perpetuation of our culture and language as we relate to one another are through siwɬkʷ and the revitalization of our salmon ceremonies and feasts, the siwɬkʷ ceremony, and the spiƛ̓əm (Bitter Root) feast, in the sweat lodge, through pregnancy and birth, through life and death, siwɬkʷ is there with us.

siwɬkʷ is one of our teachers. It is soft and gentle to the touch. Yet as soft as it is, it can wear away even the strongest material such as a solid rock wall. siwɬkʷ does not look to be the most powerful or to flow through the highest places, it is humble and it looks for the lowest places to flow through.

2.1.1 nsyilxcən Language

nsyilxcən is an integral part of Syilx Okanagan culture. Our common language holds and defines the moral standards, expectations, and teachings for individuals and for the collective. nsyilxcən is the medium for Syilx Okanagan accumulated knowledge, governance, care taking, teaching, and learning since the beginning of time. Having emerged from this land, nsyilxcən is expressive of the land and is a virtual storehouse of information about all living things, reflecting the web of life found in Syilx Okanagan ecology. Over thousands of generations, the nsyilxcən language has bound the Syilx Okanagan People to the Territory. We learned our Syilx Okanagan laws from the tmixʷ itself and nsyilxcən is the language that rose from this learning. Our language is embedded in the land and siwɬkʷ and carries thousands of years of deep knowledge.

2.1.2 captikʷɬ

captikʷɬ is the intergenerational history and oral record of the Syilx Okanagan People. These ancient stories contain a collection of laws, principles, and teachings that reveal truths about the meaning of being Syilx Okanagan. captikʷɬ share with the future generations how to survive in harmony with the tmixʷ. They tell the meaning of being Syilx Okanagan through stories that represent natural laws. These stories also hold teachings about living with siwɬkʷ. Taken together, the captikʷɬ define and inform our rights and responsibilities to the siwɬkʷ, to the land, and to one another.

The centrality of the Syilx Okanagan relationship to the land and the mediating role played by the nsyilxcən language and the captikwɬ stories has created an integrated culture and economy that perpetuates a unique system of governance. The captikʷɬ stories are connected to places, resources, and practices within the territory. Over thousands of years, the knowledge expressed through captikʷɬ in the nsyilxcən language has created a shared worldview and set of values. For Syilx Okanagan People, good governance means that all Syilx Okanagan carry the laws and responsibility to tmxʷulaxʷ inside themselves.



iʔ sqilxʷ x̌axʷtəl̓x t sksq̓mil̓tn̓.
iʔ n̓x̌aʔax̌ʔitkʷ t̓l̓ skw̓tim̓tkx ʔay̓l̓iʔ.
k̓ʷul̓s aʔ ctqip l̓ sn̓x̌ʷn̓tkʷitkʷ uɬ c̓anxcútm̓s iʔ n̓t̓y̓tyix uɬ nixʷ iʔ k̓ʷix̌t iʔ qaqxʷl̓x. tałt xʷaʔásq̓t swanx iʔ sqilxʷ uɬ sk̓ʕaʔn̓cútsəl̓x iʔ k̓l̓ qaqxʷl̓x.xʷʔit sk̓laxʷ st̓rqam̓səl̓x uɬ simn̓cʕátsəl̓x uɬ niʕáy̓p tm̓x̌iw̓təl̓x. wam̓ k̓ɬpaʔx̌n̓tísəl̓x caʔkʷ xkinm̓ mi ɬcp̓lak̓əl̓x iʔ qaqxʷl̓x
k̓aʔkín̓ iʔ sk̓wilxtn̓səl̓x. wam̓ k̓ʷl̓nusəl̓x ɬə kɬp̓lak̓səl̓x iʔ qaqxʷl̓x. áɬiʔ lut t̓a kɬsisyúsəl̓x ɬə ksmʕáʔiʔsəl̓x aʔ ctqip.

The people were dying from starvation.
The Monsters of the south had built a big dam that stopped the salmon coming up the Columbia. The people danced and prayed day after day, night after night. They wanted to find out how to bring the salmon back to the rivers again, back to the streams where they would spawn. They tried and failed to bring back the fish. No one had the power to break the dam.

-Excerpt from the captikʷɬ "How Coyote Broke the Salmon Dam"

2.1.3 The Four Food Chiefs.

The laws of our Syilx Okanagan Territory are defined by the captikʷɬ of the Four Food Chiefs to be continuously enacted in perpetuity. The captikʷɬ tells how the differing perspectives of the four chiefs were brought together to inform discussions, problem solving, decision making, and action planning. This captikʷɬ illustrates the nʕawqnwixʷ, which is a cultural practice that is used to include all views and perspectives in the discussions that lead to resolving conflicts, making decisions, and developing plans for taking action.

In the captikʷɬ "How Food was Given", kʷuləncutn visited the tmixʷ. kʷuləncutn sent sənk'lip (Coyote) to prepare for the future of the st'lsqilxʷ (people-to-be). kʷuləncutn told the tmixʷ that people were coming. The Four Food Chiefs: skmxist (Black Bear), siya (Saskatoon Berry),spiƛ'əm (Bitter Root), ntityix (King Salmon) then brought all of their voices together to make a plan for how to feed st'lsqilxʷ. Each of the Food Chiefs represents different perspectives and all must be included when making decisions.

Chief skmxist (Black Bear)

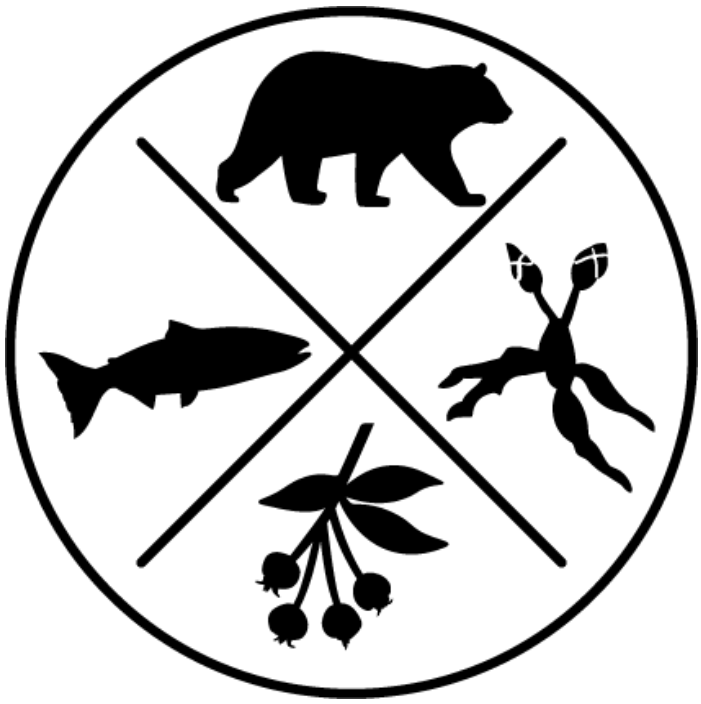
Represents the traditions, laws and cultural practices related to all life forms and our responsibility as sqilxʷ. Chief skmxist is related to ceremony, our Elders, upholding traditions and laws, and the concept of reflection and contemplation through ceremonies on "what is" as informed by an understanding of the past and how that is connected to the future.

Chief ntityix (King Salmon)

Represents the siwɬkʷ and all tmixw, the traditions and cultural practices related to all life forms and our responsibility as sqilxʷ. Chief ntityix is related to the duty to carry out actions, to protect, provide and preserve. This Chief exemplifies the process of preparing or readiness, determining the objective, and then taking action. Traits of this Chief are perseverance, logic, finding the tools needed to overcome obstacles, linearity, and directionality.

Chief spiƛ'əm (BitterRoot)

Represents relationships and the interconnectedness among tmixʷ including but not limited to the people, the animals, the plants, the land, the air, and the siwɬkʷ. Chief spiƛ'əm is related to emotions, nurturing, and community building. spiƛ'əm's roots create networks and reach out to gather the resources they need to create that flower on top.



Chief siya (Saskatoon Berry)

Embodies the spirit of creative energy, vision, and innovation that can be associated with youth or the future. Chief siya tells us about the youth, the children, the seeds of our future who—like a sweet Saskatoon berry—have to be protected and enclosed in sweetness, have to have a place to land, and have siwɬkʷ and sunshine to grow. With every seed there is potential for a forest,there is futureand there is possibility, just as there is in every youth.

Without our water, we are not protecting our land. Without our land, we are not protecting our water. Land and water are like the air that we breathe, and the energy it takes to take that breath. Hand in hand, drop on drop



2.1.4 Roles of tkɬmil'xʷ and speplal?

Syilx Okanagan tkɬmil'xʷ (women) play a vital role in honoring and taking care of siwɬkʷ. As life givers who carry siwɬkʷ in their wombs, women have a sacred relationship and connection with siwɬkʷ. They hold a deep understanding of siwɬkʷ that is reflected in the hearts and minds of all Syilx Okanagan tkɬmil'xʷ. This special relationship and understanding of siwɬkʷ plays a pivotal role in ensuring the protection of our siwɬkʷ. Through this unique bond, Syilx Okanagan tkɬmil'xʷ speak to and understand siwɬkʷ. They care for siwɬkʷ and teach others how to properly respect siwɬkʷ. Syilx Okanagan tkɬmil'xʷ have always informed decisions related to siwɬkʷ and led the selection and training of those individuals chosen to undertake specific cultural and technical tasks associated with siwɬkʷ.

It is Syilx Okanagan law to pass our knowledge on to the speplal? (youth) and teach them that they have rights and responsibilities to tmixʷ. Teaching our children is not a top-down approach but rather is about supporting their growth through training, engagement, and mentorship. We teach through success rather than through failure so that our children grow up without fear of failing and will have confidence to try new things. While it is important to teach youth, it is also important to listen and learn from them. We need to talk to them, not at them, and respect the knowledge they bring.

speplal? have gifts of innovation, creativity, and energy to contribute to siwɬkʷ management and many Syilx Okanagan youth are siwɬkʷ leaders. Our youth are leaders of the yil (coil) that continues into the future.

2.1.5 Inherent Right to Care for siwɬkʷ

stɬatɬ (Aboriginal title and rights) has governed the Syilx Okanagan people since we were brought into being. These responsibilities were given to us by kʷuləncutn and they have been upheld since the beginning of time by our ancestors. Our sovereign, unceded right to self-governance and self- determination is affirmed within Syilx Okanagan laws and customs as dictated by captikʷɬ.

stɬatɬ is an unchanging truth.

Syilx Okanagan practices, customs, and traditions are directly tied to the responsibility to care for siwɬkʷ. This responsibility cannot be given away; it is the foundation of Syilx Okanagan People and of our continued existence on this land. These natural laws are the truth and cannot be overturned or diminished by contemporary governments. They have been and continue to be followed by the Syilx Okanagan people. Any external process for proposed uses of siwɬkʷ or tmxʷulaxʷ within our homelands must be premised on unextinguished Aboriginal title and rights, which includes the right to decide how siwɬkʷ and tmxʷulaxʷ will be managed.

nxʷelxʷeltantet translates as "that which gives us life." It is a sacred responsibility to take care of tmxʷulaxʷ, siwɬkʷ,and tmixʷ throughout Syilx Okanagan territory. This responsibility and jurisdiction was given by kʷuləncutn during the time of xatma? sqilxʷ which means "the humans who came in front of us" and were the first thinking people who learned the natural law in order to survive.

During the time of xatma? sqilxʷ, our tmxʷulaxʷ, siwɬkʷ, and tmixʷ taught us how to live as one with the natural world. All tmixʷ, including humans, have a purpose and role to play. The role of the Syilx Okanagan People is to act as care takers of all tmxʷulaxʷ and tmixʷ within the territory, to hold and maintain the delicate balance. This is an important and vital role which facilitates the harmonious cycle of life and is essential for ongoing survival and prosperity. The needs of tmixʷ and tmxʷulaxʷ can be fulfilled when people work together to directly participate in protecting and restoring the environment. Syilx Okanagan people recognize that we can't protect and restore siwɬkʷ on our own; it is going to require all of us to learn the Syilx Okanagan perspective of responsibility to the siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ.

2.2 Principles for siwɬkʷ

1. siwɬkʷ is the lifeblood of our tmxʷulaxʷ and our tmixʷ and we as syilx Okanagan People must exercise our connection to siwɬkʷ through our practices, spiritual teachings, and ceremonies that honour the siwɬkʷ spirits and connect us to all life.

2. siwɬkʷ is a part of us and a part of all life as it is the foundation of tmixʷ. We must balance our needs against the needs of other life forms and adhere to natural laws.

3. siwɬkʷ comes in many forms and all must be cared for as fundamental for the health of tmxʷulaxʷ and for the tmixʷ for future generations and for all time.

4. siwɬkʷ comes from the sky and the highest places; it is the most powerful element, yet it will always take the lowest path in its humility. We must respect the path that siwɬkʷ chooses and its natural state and function.

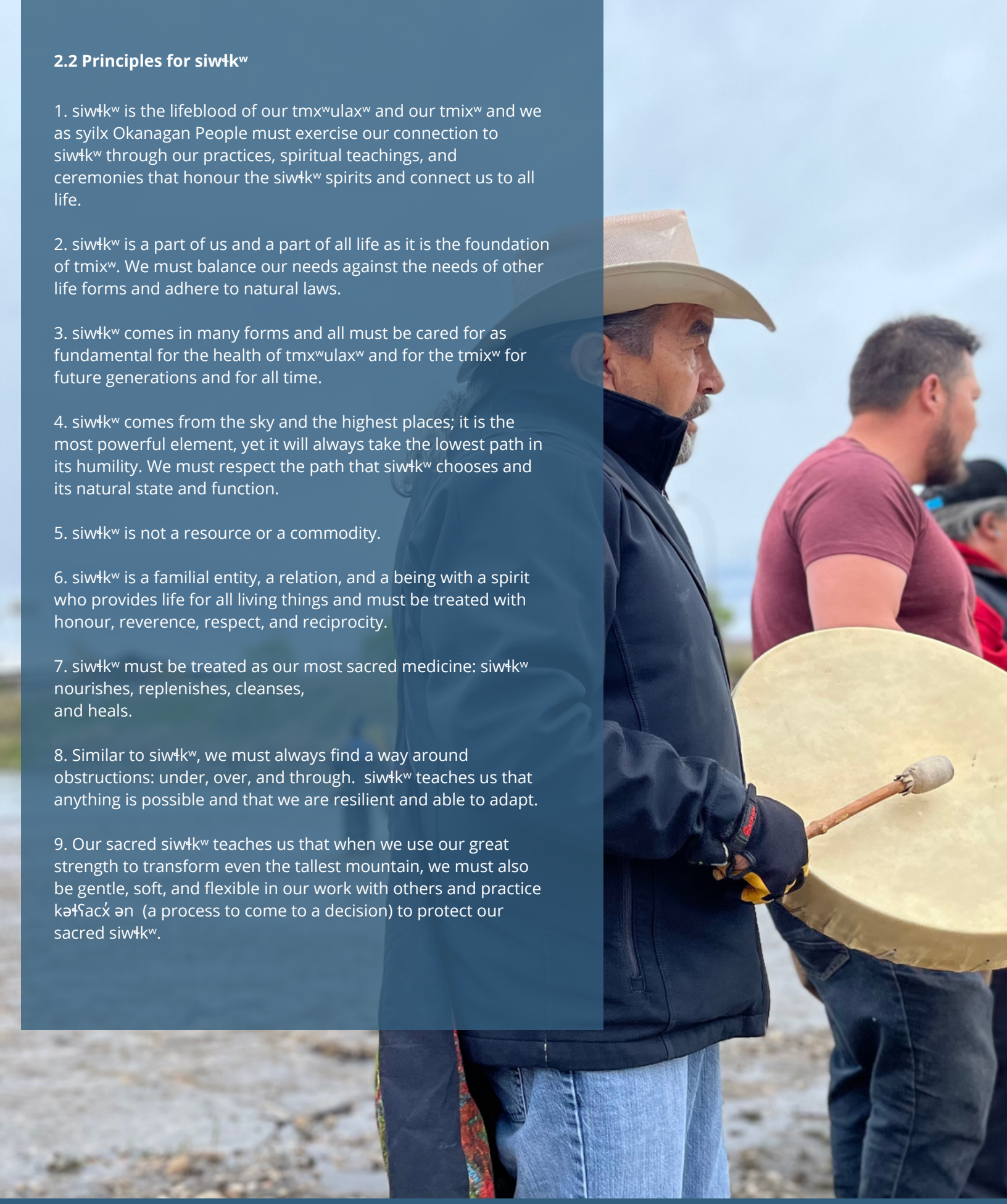
5. siwɬkʷ is not a resource or a commodity.

6. siwɬkʷ is a familial entity, a relation, and a being with a spirit who provides life for all living things and must be treated with honour, reverence, respect, and reciprocity.

7. siwɬkʷ must be treated as our most sacred medicine: siwɬkʷ nourishes, replenishes, cleanses,
and heals.

8. Similar to siwɬkʷ, we must always find a way around obstructions: under, over, and through. siwɬkʷ teaches us that anything is possible and that we are resilient and able to adapt.

9. Our sacred siwɬkʷ teaches us that when we use our great strength to transform even the tallest mountain, we must also be gentle, soft, and flexible in our work with others and practice kəɬʕacx̓ ən (a process to come to a decision) to protect our sacred siwɬkʷ.



2.3 Syilx Okanagan Work to Protect, Manage, and Sustain siwɬkʷ

The ONA has been actively engaged in the protection and remediation of siwɬkʷ for over a decade since the establishment of the Natural Resources Department. Numerous significant initiatives have been undertaken during this time and these efforts are highlighted in this section.

- Syilx Nation siwɬkʷ Declaration (endorsed in July 2014)
- Syilx siwɬkʷ Responsibility and Planning Methodology (endorsed in March 2018)
- nsiwɬkwcn – the Language of the Water booklet (March 2018).

Reconciliation between the Crown and Syilx Okanagan People remains outstanding. Both the federal and provincial governments have made commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, including adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Calls to Action of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). More recently, the provincial government in BC passed Bill 41, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) to implement UNDRIP and create a path forward that respects the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. UNDRIP has outlined a clear distinction on the importance of connecting to place. UNDRIP Articles 25 and 26 outline the right of Indigenous Peoples to maintain connection to lands, siwɬkʷ, and territories along with the right to uphold responsibilities deriving from the lands, territories, and resources.

2.3.1 Overview of siwɬkʷ in syilx Okanagan Territory

The Syilx Okanagan People are responsible for the care and respect of siwɬkʷ within numerous trans- boundary siwɬkʷ systems through the more than 69,000 square kilometers of syilx Okanagan Territory. These siwɬkʷ systems are extremely diverse from high alpine ecosystems to low, dry deserts.

These systems include: saʔsaʔtitkʷ (rivers), npəspislaʔxʷ (wetlands), tukʷtɬkʷat (lakes),təɣtəɣap (streams), nixʷtulaʔxʷ tə siwɬkʷ (aquifers), sʔacəcqʔitkʷ (springs), nʔaʕxʷaʕxʷt (swamps), cnxaʔcnitkʷs təl tqalqaltikn (headwaters), atc tɬklaʔxʷ (floodplains), groundwater, atmospheric water, and what have now become reservoirs. A significant amount of siwɬkʷ within Syilx Okanagan Territory is controlled by dams that are predominantly used for the production of hydroelectricity and flood control. In Syilx Okanagan Territory it is hard to find a river system that has not been dammed or subjected to a control structure.

There are over 21 watersheds, 1,403 saʔsaʔtitkʷ (rivers), 13,065 npəspislaʔxʷ (wetlands), 14,158 tukʷtɬkʷat (lakes), and hundreds of sub-basins within Syilx Okanagan Territory, each with their own personality, needs, and ways of being (Figure 1. Watershed Map). The Syilx Okanagan People recognize the personalities and needs of each of their siwɬkʷ relatives within the various landscapes that are under Syilx Okanagan responsibility. A place-based approach has been utilized for many thousands of years to ensure that those with the most knowledge and understanding of siwɬkʷ within a specific region of the territory or watershed are responsible for ensuring that proper measures of respect and ceremony are employed if any requests are made of our siwɬkʷ.





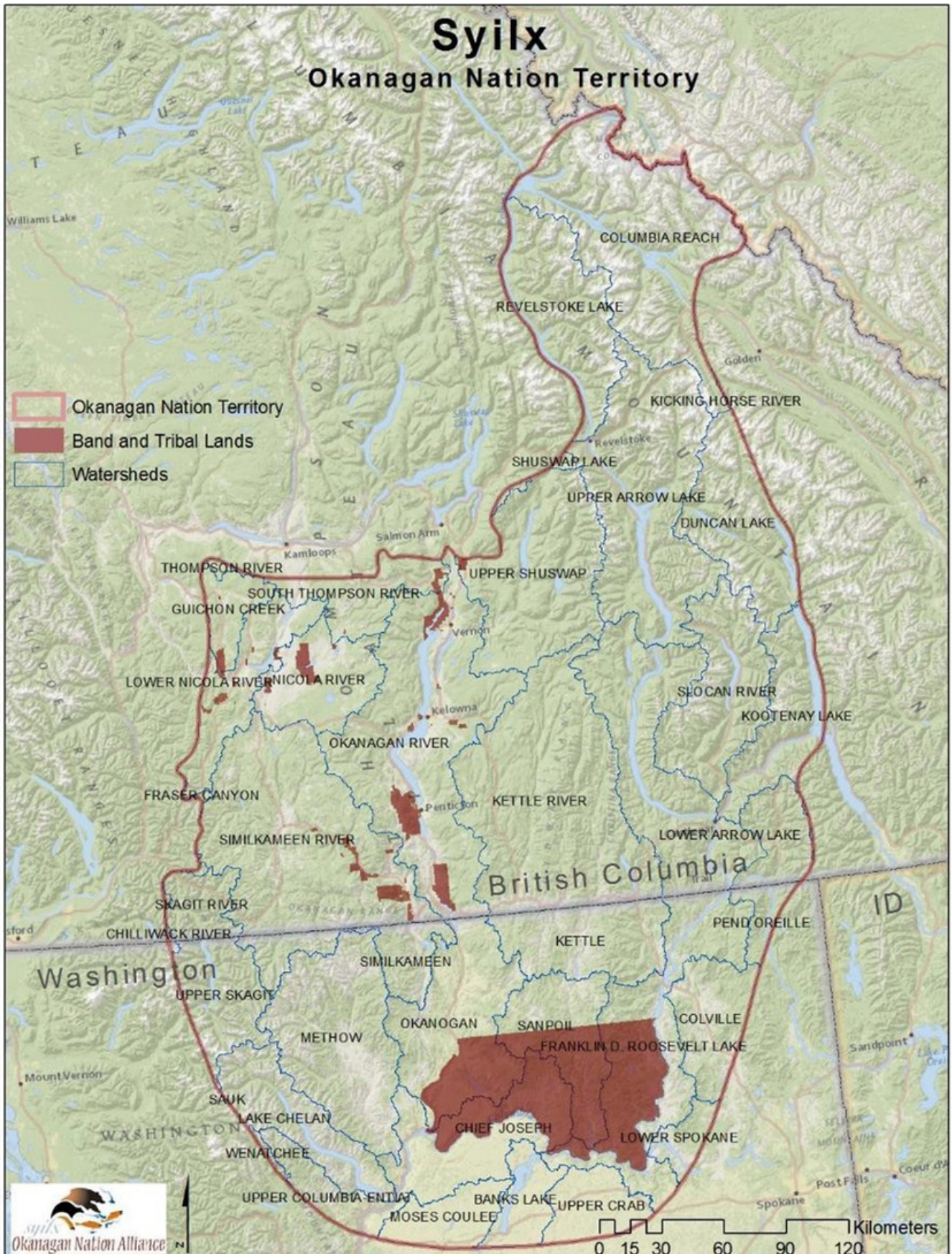


Figure 1: Watersheds within the Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory



2.3.2 Overview of siwɬkʷ in Syilx Okanagan Territory

The Syilx Okanagan Nation Declarations speak to the importance of our connection and relationship to siwɬkʷ. The ONA is dedicated to upholding our inherent rights and responsibilities to care for siwɬkʷ. In 2014, the Chiefs signed the Syilx Okanagan Nation siwɬkʷ Declaration, which is a reflection of the collective voices of the Syilx Okanagan People. The Declaration is a living document that affirms the commitment that we must safeguard siwɬkʷ for everyone in the Okanagan.

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is committed to implement Syilx Okanagan knowledge, laws, customs, and self-determination to protect, preserve, and enhance siwɬkʷ. The Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Declaration serves as a living document on Syilx Okanagan relations and values towards siwɬkʷ. This declaration communicates the importance of siwɬkʷ and the responsibilities of Syilx Okanagan people.

For Syilx Okanagan people, the ways of knowing siwɬkʷ are embedded in our language and bequeathed to us by our ancestors. The Syilx Okanagan Language Declaration speaks to the importance of our connection, relationship and responsibilities.

EXCERPT FROM SYILX OKANAGAN LANGUAGE DECLARATION

Article 11: Our high nsyilxcən language words provide connection to the spiritual order and gives life to our human purpose as tmixʷ, directing our proper conduct and responsibility to the rest of creation.

Article 12: The nsyilxcən language defines and expresses our relationship, responsibilities, and practice in our homelands, our spiritual and ceremonial places, with each other, and with the tmixʷ.

2.3.3 Overview of siwɬkʷ in Syilx Okanagan Territory

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is building capacity and resources to articulate our siwɬkʷ vision, issues, core governance needs, and desired path forward. Throughout the Territory, Syilx Okanagan People and communities are developing strategies, initiatives, methodologies, and partnerships to better protect, monitor, and restore siwɬkʷ. Some of the key actions that the Nation has undertaken to protect siwɬkʷ include:

- **Ceremony:** Since the beginning of time, Syilx Okanagan have practiced seasonal celebrations and ceremonies. These continue today and include: siwɬkʷ ceremonies, Syilx Okanagan Water Forums, salmon ceremonies, salmon fry releases, and the salmon feasts that bring together Syilx Okanagan People and others to collaborate, share, and learn from each other.

- **Multi-Decade Salmon Restoration:** The work of bringing back ntytyix (Chief Salmon) from the brink of extinction was achieved over a 20-year process that included working closely across the international border with the Colville Confederated Tribes, building partnerships with governments on both sides of the border, actively restoring habitat, maintaining ceremonial practices, and opening kɬ cp̓əl̓k stiḿ Hatchery. **https://www.syilx.org/fisheries/hatchery/**

- **Habitat Restoration:** Okanagan River Restoration Initiative regained 8 kms of prime salmon spawning river habitat that had been lost to channelization in the 1950s as well as other habitat restoration projects that have contributed to increased habitat for species at risk.
  https://www.syilx.org/projects/okanagan-river-restoration-initiative-re-meander-reconnection/

- **Water Management:** The Fish Water Management Tool (FWMT) program was developed to support more fish-friendly siwɬkʷ release decisions, avoid increases in property damage due to flooding or disruptions to irrigation, and manage recreational opportunities for the dam at Okanagan Lake. Determined Environmental Flow Needs (EFN) – target and minimum flows – to determine sustainable allocation of siwɬkʷ flows for salmon and humans in Okanagan streams.
  https://www.syilx.org/projects/environmental-flow-needs-efn/

- **Including Traditional Knowledge:** The Syilx Okanagan Water Responsibility and Planning Methodology provides a framework for incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into watershed planning. Planning work is being completed in the following sub-water sheds: Kettle, Arrow Reservoirs, Shingle Creek/June Creek, Ashnola, Inkameep, and Okanagan Lake.

- **Flood Risk:** The Syilx Okanagan Flood Risk Assessment provided the foundation for mitigating risk and increasing resiliency to climate change through partnership work, community engagement, and technical analysis that focused on documenting flood and debris flows in the Okanagan and Similkameen basins.
  https://www.syilx.org/projects/syilx- t%cc%93ik%cc%93t-flood-adaptation-project/

- **Nation-to-Nation:** Relationship building with all Columbia Tribes will be critical to ensure the full restoration and protection of future salmon runs and the water they require.

- **Emerging Leaders:** Syilx Okanagan Youth Water Leaders program delivered leadership training and engaged youth on siwɬkʷ issues and innovation to support awareness and advocacy skills among our next generation of leaders and siwɬkʷ protectors.

2.4 Key Threats to siwɬkʷ

ONA analyzed each watershed throughout the Canadian portion of the Territory and identified threats to the health of siwɬkʷ that are shown in Figure 2 below. Key threats were then organized into three main categories that are described in the following sections. Actions to mitigate these key threats are addressed in the Action Plan portion of the syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Strategy. The three main areas of threats are:

- Lifestyle and Livelihood
- Governance and Leadership
- Bio-physical and Geo-climatic

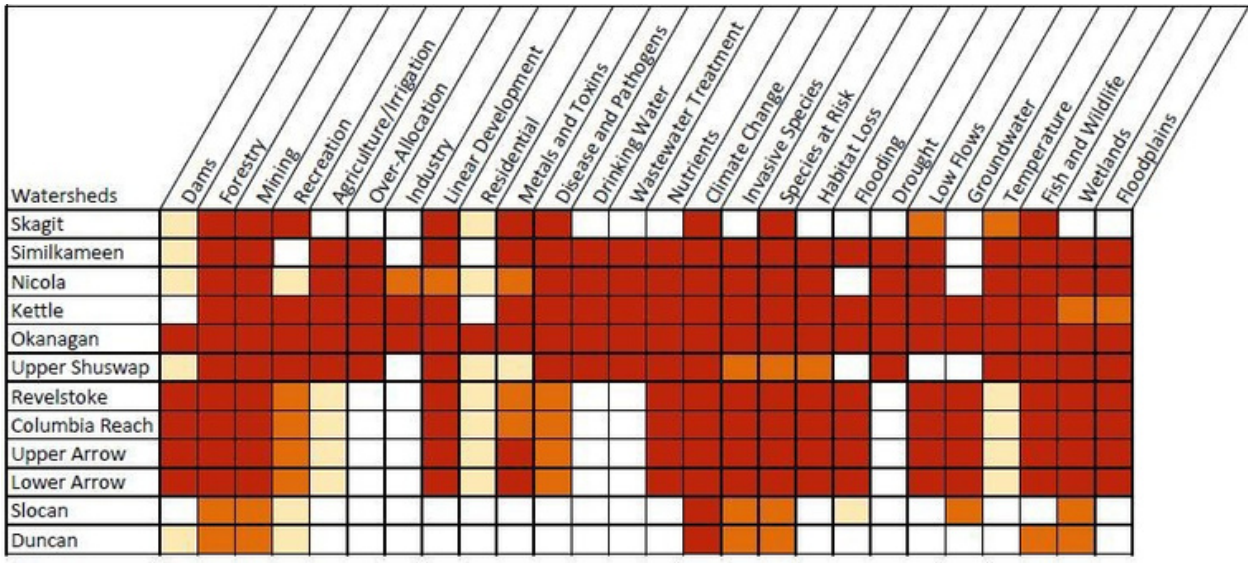


Figure 2: Watersheds Threat

2.4.1 Threat #1: Lifestyle and Livelihood

Ongoing colonization and denial of Syilx Okanagan rights and responsibilities has led to harmful impacts on siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ. Many Syilx Okanagan Elders recount the past when they could drink water straight from the creeks and even kɬusxənitkʷ (Okanagan Lake). The ever increasing appetite for siwɬkʷ is based on the "myth of siwɬkʷ abundance."[3] British Columbians waste siwɬkʷ at rates far higher than the Canadian average and the Canadian average is multiples higher than the world average.

At the same time, there are over 100 Indigenous communities in Canada with boil siwɬkʷ advisories, including some of our communities.[4] From 2000-2005, in the Okanagan 35 percent of groundwater observation wells showed declining siwɬkʷ levels primarily due to increasing use for irrigation and urban development.[5] By 2003, approximately 85 percent of wetlands in the Okanagan and Similkameen had destroyed or filled in, with 38 percent being lost between 1988 and 2010.[6] Cities have been built on flood plains. Roads and railways have created high levels of habitat fragmentation. Pollution from sewage, agriculture, forestry, invasive species, and mining—among other municipal and industrial sources—has reduced the quality of siwɬkʷ.

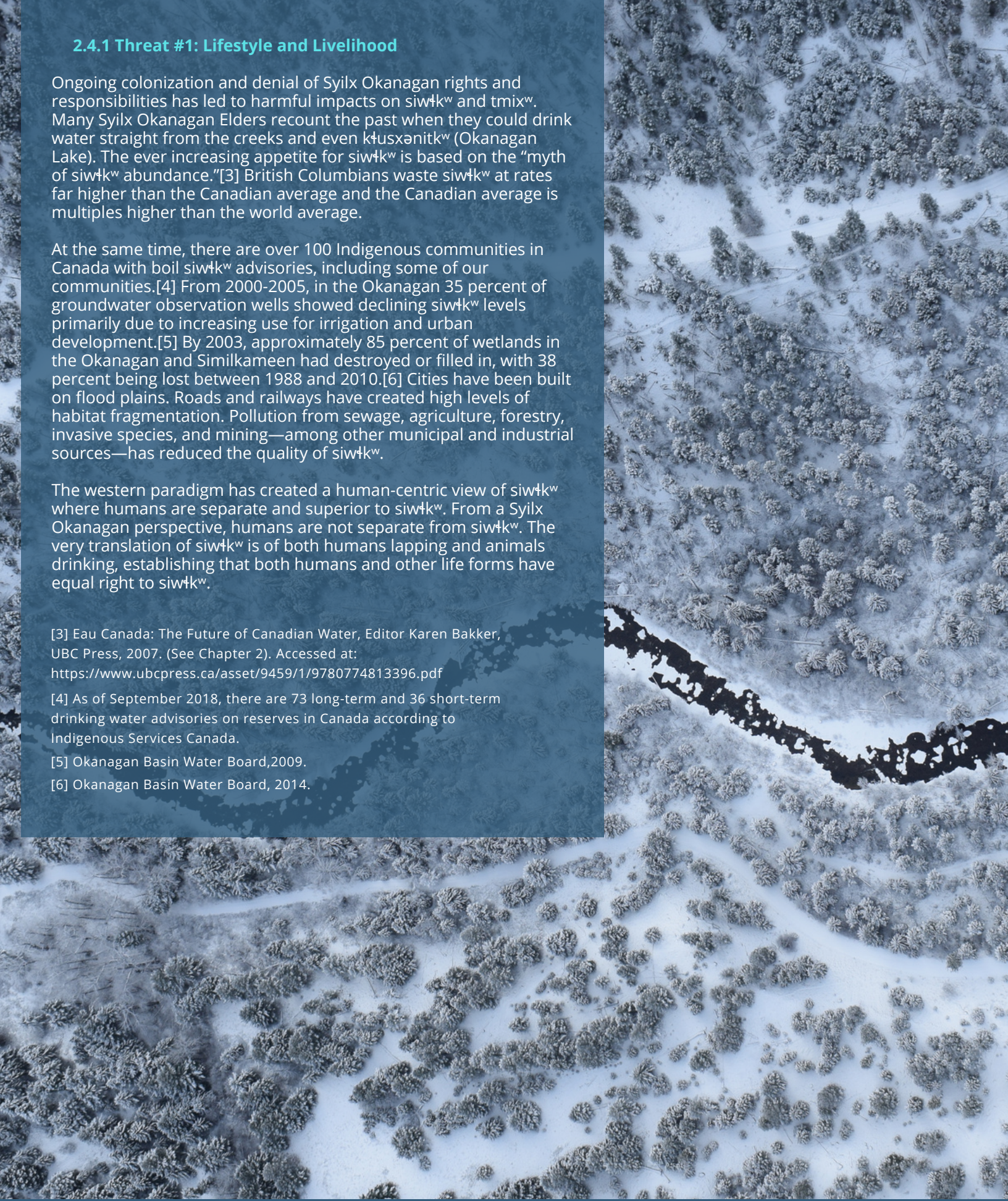
The western paradigm has created a human-centric view of siwɬkʷ where humans are separate and superior to siwɬkʷ. From a Syilx Okanagan perspective, humans are not separate from siwɬkʷ. The very translation of siwɬkʷ is of both humans lapping and animals drinking, establishing that both humans and other life forms have equal right to siwɬkʷ.

[3] Eau Canada: The Future of Canadian Water, Editor Karen Bakker, UBC Press, 2007. (See Chapter 2). Accessed at: https://www.ubcpress.ca/asset/9459/1/9780774813396.pdf

[4] As of September 2018, there are 73 long-term and 36 short-term drinking water advisories on reserves in Canada according to Indigenous Services Canada.

[5] Okanagan Basin Water Board,2009.

[6] Okanagan Basin Water Board, 2014.







AGRICULTURE: Agricultural and extractive industries continue to pollute our siwɬkʷ with numerous toxins and waste products that violate and damage our waterways. As the increased level in fecal coliforms, phosphorous, and chloride indicates, agriculture and waterfowl contribute to siwɬkʷ contamination. As well, agricultural practices require an immense amount of siwɬkʷ for irrigation and livestock purposes.

FLOW CONTROL: Dams have been built for flood control, irrigation, and power generation, and this has changed the seasonal ebb and flow of the siwɬkʷ cycle. Upper Columbia anadromous salmon, lamprey and migratory sturgeon populations were extirpated by hydroelectric and reservoir dams. The Grand Coulee and Chief Joe dams on the Columbia River west of Spokane, Washington, blocked five salmon runs from accessing 2,250 km of spawning habitat in the Upper Columbia watershed.[1] The damming of the rivers also resulted in the critical losses of sacred, spiritual, ceremonial and burial sites. Syilx Okanagan are "salmon people" and the negative impact of the loss of this identity cannot be over stated.

FORESTRY: The forestry sector is causing some of the most detrimental impacts to siwɬkʷ in Syilx Okanagan Territory. There are 31 different forestry companies with 64 different forestry licenses operating in Syilx Okanagan Territory[2] and they range from major to small independent companies. Approximately 6,613,547m3 of trees can be harvested per year within the territory. Severe deforestation has completed altered ecosystems to the point where they are not functioning naturally or properly. Without trees there is significant loss of habitat for key species. Without trees there are no roots to stabilize the land, making it prone to erosion and allowing siwɬkʷ to flow wildly through the land. Our Syilx Okanagan Elders know that water is in the wrong place at the wrong time now with no trees to hold the siwɬkʷ, resulting in drought, and flowing too quickly to the floodplains, resulting in significant flooding. We have been witness to this in recent years, especially with climate change. Aquatic ecosystems have been severely impacted by all these factors and more.

2.4.2 Threat #2: Governance and Leadership

Historical and ongoing mismanagement of siwɬkʷ by external entities has resulted in many threats to siwɬkʷ. siwɬkʷ management methodologies and siwɬkʷ conflict enforced under the western paradigm have proven to be ineffective, as evidenced by the declining quality and quantity of siwɬkʷ. Mismanagement of siwɬkʷ by external entities is largely driven by competition between uses of water (e.g., irrigation vs wildlife), lack of coordination between levels of decision-makers (e.g., irrigation districts vs municipalities), mismatch between boundaries for water processes and jurisdictional boundaries, and different scales and interests of water users.

OVERALLOCATION: Regulatory systems, legislation, laws, and international agreements have over- allocated siwɬkʷ availability. In Syilx Okanagan Territory, the current siwɬkʷ license process[9] managed by the provincial government has over-allocated the amount of siwɬkʷ available in the streams. Too many siwɬkʷ licenses are granted, severely impacting flow rates, natural function, sediment regimes, and temperature so that now numerous creeks are impaired and some are beyond repair.

[7] See Upper Columbia United Tribes web narrative: https://ucut.org/fish/restoring-salmon-upper-columbia-river-basin/
[8] BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, 2018.
[9] A water license can have one or several associated points of diversion. A point of diversion is an area where structures such as wells, dams, dugouts, culverts, and pump sites change the natural path of surface water.





COMPARTMENTALIZED: Western ideologies fail to account for the holistic reality of siwɬkw and instead manage siwɬkʷ in discreet fields such as siwɬkʷ quality, siwɬkʷ distribution, ground water, water licensing, flooding, drought, and storm water management. This compartmentalized approach to water is reflected in the multiple jurisdictions, legislation, regulations, and policies that have been created to manage it. siwɬkʷ is managed at several different jurisdictional scales which presents issues that are difficult to resolve (Norman, 2010), including:

- competition between users of water resources;
- coordination between the multiple scales at which water is used and managed;
- a mismatch between geopolitical and administrative boundaries—on the one hand—and hydrological boundaries on the other; and
- multiple sets of users operating at different scales and with different interests.

WATER SUSTAINABILITY ACT: In 1909 and again in 2016, the provincial government passed into legislation the Water Sustainability Act (WSA) without a clearly defined and adequate consultation process with Syilx Okanagan People. The WSA does not recognize Syilx Okanagan water rights and laws. Instead the provincial government substitutes recognition as a form of shared decision-making that reduces Indigenous interest in lands, water, and resources to that of a stakeholder and de-prioritizes Indigenous Title and Rights. The engagement that the province has taken to date on WSA and water rights does not meet Syilx Okanagan standards on meaningful engagement or consent, including a joint approach to caring for water in the Syilx Okanagan Territory.

2.4.3 Threat #3: Bio-physical and Geo-climatic

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) classifies watersheds in the territory as highly threatened. [10] In the Syilx Okanagan Territory, due to western modern water management practices over the last 60 years, we now face the challenge of extremes: far too much water at some times and places, far too little water at other times and places. We need to consider where our water comes from, how we use it, and how we dispose of it as being all one entity.

Climate change presents a complex problem and reality—in its nature and in what it asks of us by way of response. Climate models show a strong warming trend for the Syilx Okanagan Territory, particularly in the summer. Precipitation is expected to decrease in the summer, and increase in the winter, with a marked decrease in the amount falling as snow.[11] Changes to temperature, precipitation and wind patterns will:

- affect runoff, groundwater recharge, and river systems, resulting in less predictability and increased variability in the timing and volume of water flows;
- result in more frequent and more severe extreme weather events such as flooding, drought, increased runoff, erosion, and uncontrolled wildfire;
- change and increase pest populations (insects, diseases, weeds, and invasive species);
- contribute to seasonal and long term changes in both water quality and quantity; and ·result in higher rates of evapotranspiration that will increase demand for irrigation and put pressure on water storage. [12]
- result in higher rates of evapotranspiration that will increase demand for irrigation and put pressure on water storage. [12]

[10] See http://watershedreports.wwf.ca/#intro
[11] See https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/nrs-climate-change/applied- science/2a_va_bc-climate-change-final-aug30.pdf
[12] See https://soscp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OK_Climate_Projections_Report_Final.pdf

Extreme flooding and other environmental disasters are increasing in frequency and magnitude in Syilx Okanagan Territory, underscoring the need for a cohesive approach to emergency management that emphasizes risk mitigation while continuing to strengthen preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities. In the Okanagan Basin for example, the population is largely in the valley bottom with the most expensive real estate adjacent to water. Based on current climate change research, the magnitude of extreme peak flows is projected to increase and conditions similar to those experienced in 2017 are expected to become the norm. Furthermore, there is limited understanding of how these hazards interact with exposed communities and other assets, nor is there a consistent basin-wide approach.

An increase in demand for water resources across agriculture, energy, and municipal sectors will likely accentuate water supply problems and contribute to an increase demand for water that exceeds the available amount during a certain period or when poor quality restricts its use.



3. ACTION PLAN: APPROACHES TO PROTECTING SIWɬKʷ IN THE SYILX OKANAGAN TERRITORY

The main goal of this strategy is to uphold the Chiefs Executive Council mandate of ensuring there is accessible, clean, and healthy water for our generations to come. This Action Plan provides approaches to protect siwɬkʷ in relation to each of the key threats identified in the previous section.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles came out of community engagement and have informed the priorities and the approaches adopted in this Action Plan.

1. Recognize and treat siwɬkʷ as a relative.
2. Work to revitalize Syilx Okanagan culture, language, and ceremonial practices in all of our work.
3. Prioritize Syilx Okanagan Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Lead with TEK and leadership. Maintain integrity of all Syilx research, content, and data.
4. Utilize Western Science in conjunction with Syilx Okanagan-based processes.
5. Continue land-based gatherings and research to build relationships with each other and the tmixʷ.
6. Improve partnerships and collaborations across all projects and initiatives.
7. Be future looking by creating space to connect youth to Elders and siwɬkʷ water

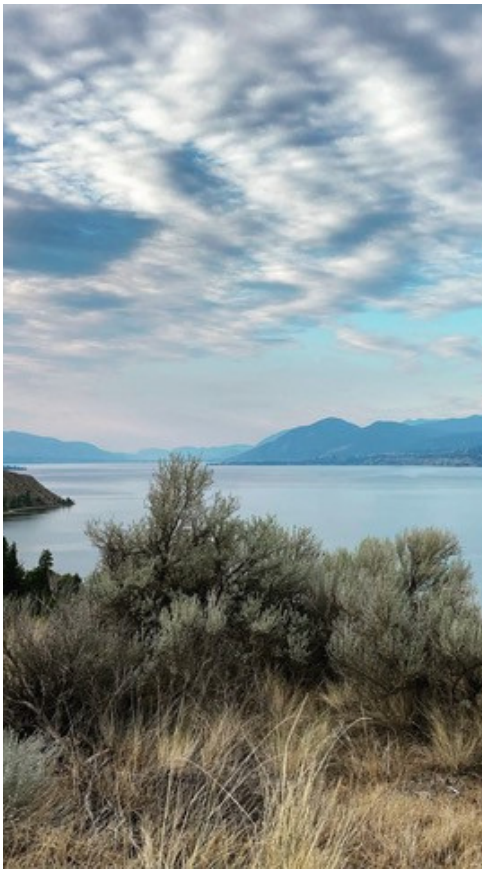
Each watershed and sub-basin has different needs in terms of the reduction of threats to our relative siwɬkʷ. Within some watersheds, scarcity is an issue, while in others our siwɬkʷ is impacted by logging and industrial use. Often impacts to our siwɬkʷ are a combination of many issues.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

This Action Plan outlines approaches in the following priority areas:

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

Our nsyilxcən language and our captikwɬ connect us to our land and territory. They let us know what our roles and responsibilities are to the land.









3.1 Priority #1: Develop siwɬkʷ Laws in Alignment with siwɬkʷ Declaration

The Syilx Okanagan are committed to upholding our rights and responsibilities, and to addressing the continued infringements on Aboriginal Title and Rights. Consistent with UNDRIP Article 25, the Crown must acknowledge Syilx Okanagan jurisdiction and commit to working with the Nation to implement Syilx Okanagan legal and governance mechanisms. The Nation must uphold its water laws and re-establish governance structures both internally and externally.

3.1.1 Develop Syilx Framework for siwɬkʷ Management and Governance

- Research and document existing Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ water laws that are embedded in Syilx Okanagan governance.
- Hold space for community-led process within Syilx Okanagan watershed governance planning.
- Consider comprehensive analysis of water policy in the region, internally and externally.
- Initiate process of developing a Syilx Okanagan governance framework with policies that ground Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ water laws as fundamental to water management regimes.
- Develop policy, language, and templates for all (existing and new) water licenses issued in the Territory that clearly identifies that allocations are subject to Syilx Okanagan Title and Rights.

3.2 Priority #2: Assert Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Authority

Community-based water monitoring and state of watershed reports are both tools with potential to diplomatically bridge Syilx Okanagan traditional ecological knowledge and western knowledge systems, and offer opportunities for relationship-building and collaboration. Through state-of-the-watershed reports, we can create a baseline of information that can be used in planning, evaluating current management actions, guiding future work, and decision making. Through monitoring, we can increase awareness of watershed issues in our communities, maintain up-to-date information, and use it as a training and learning opportunity for our community members

3.2.1 Establish Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Caucus

- Equip the Syilx Okanagan Nation to address the many water issues we face by establishing a siwɬkʷ Caucus of Syilx Okanagan TEK, water experts, grassroots activists, scholars, and ecosystem champions to come together to discuss and recommend ideas to the NRC and CEC, and to provide insights to ONA projects and priority water initiatives.
- Establish a work plan with a feasible process in which ecosystem topics can be brought forward, addressed, worked through, and recommended for leadership.
- Direct siwɬkʷ caucus to prioritize and develop a collective approach to actions within this plan.

3.2.2 siwɬkʷ Responsibility Plans

A strong foundation of Syilx Okanagan knowledge is needed for shaping actions and activities to protect and restore siwɬkʷ throughout the Territory. The Nation has developed a living TEK methodology for water responsibility planning. This methodology will help frame the information gathering process for watershed inventories in alignment with social and ecological needs.

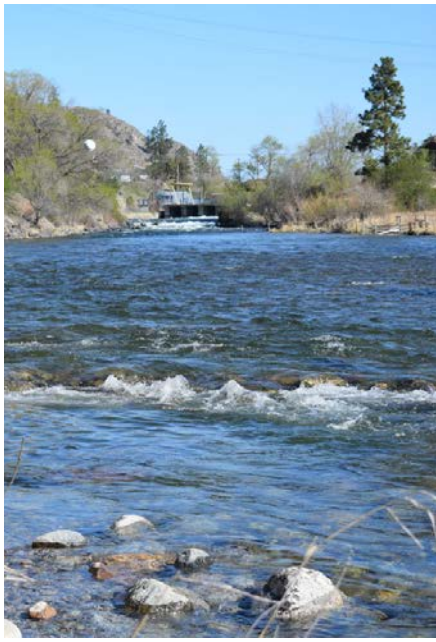
- Seek Crown support to develop siwɬkʷ Responsibility Plans consistent with our laws.
- Continue to update and implement the Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Responsibility and Planning Methodology and integrate into Crown regulations and legally enforceable standards.
- Continue priority areas of the Syilx Okanagan Nation contributing to the design and review of water use plans (WUPs) and development recommendations.
- Continue revising and reviewing water action plans under the Fish and Wildlife compensation program.
- Prioritize the Okanagan Lake Water Responsibility Planning Initiative and find new ways to protect Okanagan Lake. Work with local governments and province on protection of Okanagan Lake from further pollution, development of foreshore, and invasive zebra mussels.



3.2.3 siwɬkʷ License Referral System

The referral system is a major process in which the Syilx Nation and communities are having to work within and address new and upcoming referrals. This includes establishing a collective approach to actively discussing, developing, and challenging the current water norm.

- Build a water license referrals system for Syilx Okanagan communities.
- Reform the Syilx Nation Referral Working Group to help assist in the manner and process referrals are addressed.
- Challenge the issuances of new water licenses in the Syilx Okanagan Territory as most watercourses are over-subscribed and several have cultural and sacred significance .



3.2.4 Community-Based Monitoring

We need to be out on the land, checking up on our relative siwɬkʷ. We need to get our youth out on the land with us and enrich them with the proper protocols and practices that have been passed down through generations before and from our ancestors. This includes actively monitoring drinking water quality, creek qualities and quantities.

- Establish a baseline of information, historic conditions, and qualities of water, and conduct a supply-demand study looking at physical, biological, economic, and cultural aspects of siwɬkʷ.
- Identify a series of TEK indicators to monitor environmental changes over time through interviews with Knowledge Keepers and Elders.
- Work with partners to develop methods and parameters for monitoring the TEK indicators.
- Secure access to specialists and experts, equipment, and training to ensure data is useable, consistent, and sustainably available for the long-term.
- Maintain and advocate for a guardian program to train community members to gather and record data and work towards compliance with and enforcement of Syilx Okanagan laws.
- Communicate the motivation, process, and results of community monitoring with community members, leadership, and partners.



3.2.5 Establish Water Sustainability Act (WSA) siwɬkʷ Use Plans

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is working towards asserting the unextinguished title and rights for water within the Territory. This includes upholding and maintaining siwɬkʷ ethics in guiding the decision making through the Water Sustainability Act (WSA) Water Use Plans.

- Research, map and understand historical, current and aspiration uses of siwɬkʷ, especially groundwater and wells.
- Translate Syilx Okanagan water laws into regulations, policies, and plans that can be enforced by the WSA and implemented throughout the Territory.
- Work with the Crown to develop a governance model where the Nation takes responsibility for and provides consent to decisions about siwɬkʷ in the Territory.
    - For example, this can be completed through delegation of water management to the Nation under the "alterative governance approaches" under the WSA.
- Ensure there are sufficient environmental flow needs (EFN) or critical environmental flow protections to protect tmixʷ (plants, fish and wildlife) in a manner consistent with Syilx Okanagan water laws and have these recognized under the WSA throughout the Territory.
- Implement and designate EFN standards that align with Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ resiliency in Watershed Management Plans for all watersheds within the Territory.
- Lead the development of Okanagan Lake Responsibility Strategy and a Wetland Strategy for the Territory that embodies Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ laws and protocols.
- Support local and community-based actions that make efforts to partner with member Bands.

3.3 Priority #3: Protect and Restore siwɬkʷ

There is an urgent need to address the loss of natural waterways, access to siwɬkʷ for wildlife, loss of siwɬkʷ quality, and loss/degradation of aquatic habitat associated with land development and resource extraction. It is necessary to understand and look at siwɬkʷ through the holistic ecosystem approach. The importance of the highland watershed plays an integral role to the midlands and lowlands—each having a distinctive interconnectivity to ecosystem health and wellbeing. Through resource extraction, damming, and development in the last few decades, wetlands have been infilled, siwɬkʷ quality has decreased significantly, and the natural functions of siwɬkʷ have been disrupted. Restoring the functions of siwɬkʷ specifically through wetlands and headwaters is imperative.

3.3.1 Headwaters: Wetland Protection Strategy

Wetlands act like organs and slow and filter siwɬkʷ, and the creeks act as the veins, carrying siwɬkʷ to where it is needed. Wetlands benefit river quality incrementally by filtering run-off, capturing sediment, sequestering carbon, increasing siwɬkʷ residency time, and cooling adjacent instream habitat. Wetlands are also key habitat for federally- listed bird and amphibian species, act as off-channel rearing habitat, and are a food source for Syilx Okanagan people. Intact natural are essential for protecting tmixʷ. The Nation will work to conserve and protect our aquatic ecosystems for the vitality and social and economic well-being of the Nation and future generations.



- Lead the development of a Wetland Strategy for the Territory that embodies Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ laws and protocols.
- Encourage inter-agency partnerships and collaboration to build upon previous efforts to assess watershed health and protect healthy watersheds.
- Build Syilx Okanagan wetland inventories, including baseline mapping for the Territory.
- Pilot a headwater wetland restoration project guided by Syilx Okanagan Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

3.3.2 Headwaters: Syilx Okanagan Forestry Strategy

Forests in the Syilx Okanagan Territory have been heavily harvested which has altered the flows of siwɬkʷ. Healthy forests are vital for taking care of the ecosystem at large and are a key priority for the Nation. To do this work, the Nation needs to come together and speak with one voice on how forests in the Territory should be managed in order to protect what forests we have left and work towards improved forests for all.

- Conduct on-the-land tours with Syilx Okanagan Elders and Knowledge Keepers to identify areas of priority and to assess and document impacts.
- Implement land-based Syilx Okanagan assessment of forest health and identify what a healthy forest should look like.
- De-commission forestry roads and culverts to protect and return naturals siwɬkʷ flows.
- Develop Syilx Okanagan forestry standards for all forestry industry to follow and uphold.
- Develop a Syilx Okanagan Forestry Declaration to assert syilx Okanagan title and rights.
- Build relationships with the forestry industry and improve communication to ensure Syilx Okanagan inclusion in future work and decision making.
- Develop specialized forestry strategy.

3.3.3 Headwaters: Mountain Beaver Restoration Plan

- Historically, Syilx Okanagan People relied on beaver and their role in siwɬkʷ management. For example, mountain beavers built their dams in the high mountains and created wetlands, ponds, lakes and sloughs that acted as natural filters for the siwɬkʷ. Unfortunately, many natural resource managers and land owners today see beavers as a nuisance and their dams are often destroyed. To start the process of restoring the role of siwɬkʷ, the Syilx Okanagan Nation will address key knowledge gaps, mitigate threats, restore, and protect Mountain Beaver in the Territory.
- Conduct a Syilx TEK study on Mountain Beaver (Aplodontia rufa) to understand current populations, threats, and recovery potential.
- Develop and implement a monitoring plan throughout the Territory where beavers still function properly to model the dams.
- Complete habitat suitability modelling/mapping for Mountain Beaver within the Territory.
- Develop a Mountain Beaver habitat restoration and relocation plan, identify and acquire funding, and move forward with implementation.
- ·Develop Syilx Okanagan practices and protocols for timber-harvesting and silvicultural operations in areas occupied by Mountain Beavers.
- Host workshops and build awareness on role of beaver for maintaining ecosystems. Work with different users of headwaters (e.g., Forestry, Range, Recreation, etc.).
- Develop a communications strategy to educate land owners and resource managers about the positive benefits of beavers and how to reduce the threats to their recovery.

3.3.4 Headwaters: Valley Bottom: Wetland Strategy

Through resource extraction, damming, and development in the last few decades, wetlands have been infilled, siwɬkʷ quality has decreased significantly, and the natural functions of siwɬkʷ have been disrupted.

- Collaborate with Okanagan Basin Water Board, local governments and stewardships groups on collaboration projects to protect and restore wetlands.
- Develop a plan to conduct research on specific intact wetlands in the valley bottom for protection, restoration, and enhancement.
- Lead the development of an Okanagan Lake Responsibility Strategy for the territory that embodies Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ laws and protocols.
- Conduct Elder and youth wetland tours to capture inventories and harvesting.
- Support habitat restoration projects with Syilx Okanagan communities.

3.3.5 Protect Through Acquisition

Returning and acquiring land is a matter of justice for historical wrong-doings to the Syilx Nation. It is also assertion of Syilx Okanagan jurisdiction of land and water and it will help mitigate the loss of biodiversity and the impacts of climate change.

- Engage with communities, Elders, and species-at-risk specialists to prioritize significant places and/or ecosystems that must be protected.
- Hold meetings in Syilx Okanagan communities to identify TEK about ecosystems and the laws and protocols that those systems require.
- Undertake a technical analysis to identify key intact habitats to be protected.
- Develop an acquisition plan and seek partnership opportunities to return lands to the Nation's authority and responsibility.
- Develop a management/responsibility plan and governance structure for the protection of acquired and secured lands.
- Develop management/responsibility plans that target species at risk under SARA.

3.4 Priority #4: Take the Lead on Syilx Research Related to siwɬkʷ

Syilx-led research driven by our Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and communities empowers the Nation in our advances, decision-making, and archiving knowledge for future generations. This work references and buildsupon the Syilx Research Strategy (2007), recognizing that data quality is important and there is a need to ensure we have indicators or measures of quality data.

3.4.1 Facilitate siwɬkʷ-Related Knowledge Gatherings

This works includes ecosystem health indicators, habitat and ecosystem plans, siwɬkʷ data and research, and adaptation strategies.

·Conduct elder interviews around siwɬkʷ. Their life histories will be important to maintain intergenerational knowledge transfer for future generations.

- Continue to build Syilx Okanagan inventories for the Territory: plants, animals, water values, place names, archaeological sites, coyote sites, captikʷɬ stories, songs, travel routes, etc.
- Host captikʷɬ discussion sessions with Elders and language speakers on disseminating key principles, laws, and lessons towards living in balance with the natural world.
- Engage with Syilx Okanagan Knowledge Keepers, Syilx Okanagan siwɬkʷ Caucus, and NRC to develop priority areas of focus for water research and data-gathering.

3.4.2 Implement syilx Okanagan Research Ethics

Information about Syilx Okanagan culture and way of life is essential to protecting, defending, and advancing our Title and Rights, and such information is our property. Information must be gathered in a way that respectful and controlled by the Nation and communities.

- Support Nation members with research training and capacity building: i.e., land-based work, interview process, academic writing, mapping, etc.
- Work with our communities, En'owkin Centre and researchers to apply similar and complimentary research methodologies. Make it a priority to develop and support Syilx- specific research methodologies.
- Implement priority CEC-designated research priorities.
- Continue to keep apprised of new research technologies.
- Support development of intellectual property rights.



3.4.3 Interface with Academia

Returning and acquiring land is a matter of justice for historical wrong-doings to the Syilx Nation. It is also assertion of Syilx Okanagan jurisdiction of land and water and it will help mitigate the loss of biodiversity and the impacts of climate change.

- Identify protections needed to support the development of sound reciprocal arrangements.
- Work with researchers to co-develop a research project from concept that supports the Syilx Okanagan Nation siwɬkʷ research priorities.
- Invite and engage academia, where appropriate, in our events, workshops, and meetings.
- Engage students and academia on how to best support their advocacy and work on campus. Invite Syilx Okanagan students to support research and the development of research methodologies.

3.5 Priority #5: Engage in syilx Okanagan Adaptation Planning for siwɬkʷ

Devastating wildfires, floods and debris slides directly impacted the Syilx Okanagan Nation communities, in some cases requiring emergency evacuations. These impacts also caused significant loss and damage to traditional lands used for ceremony, agriculture, ranching, food harvesting and security, as well as commercial activities such as logging and mining. Further, these emergencies adversely affected the holistic wellness, including mental health, of individuals, families, communities, and the Syilx Okanagan Nation, resulting in significant mental health concerns and further compounding multigenerational trauma and grief. The current COVID-19 Pandemic, and the potential for co-emergencies, further compounds the need to address this issue urgently as, each year, we head back into flooding and wildfire seasons.

3.5.1 Continue Flood Adaptation Initiative

Having a better understanding of the potential risks of increased flooding and the associated impacts is imperative to protecting tmixʷ, improving safety, and reducing and mitigating the negative effects of flood events. By reminding ourselves and teaching others about how siwɬkʷ moves through the Territory, the Nation can be proactive, make risk-based decisions, and determine what priority measures can be taken. By respecting the pathways of siwɬkʷ, we can be more resilient in the face of climate change and other irreversible impacts to siwɬkʷ.

- Establish a Syilx Okanagan steering committee/working group to collaborate with local governments and stakeholders on flooding.
- Collect and collate previously conducted research on hazards, likelihoods, exposures, vulnerabilities, and risks by qualified professionals using appropriate best practices.
- Identify gaps in data and mapping including identification of flood-prone streams in the Territory and undertake preliminary high-level assessments to fill gaps.
- Develop a flood mitigation plan and work with the federal government and other stakeholders to implement the plan.
- Expand flood resiliency process to respect the path of siwɬkʷ throughout the Territory.

The Nation is working with key stakeholders to complete a flood risk assessment in the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys focused on flood and debris flows.

3.5.2 Develop Nation-Level Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management Plans

It is important to develop a comprehensive Emergency Management Plan for the ONA that incorporates all potential emergencies such as flooding, community wildfire protection (on and off reserve), pandemics, rock slides, etc. The plan must include a gap analysis and also incorporate strategies for collaboration and mutual support to the member bands and include mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and evaluation components. The planning must be at the Nation level, supporting communities during a crisis.

- Engage with communities and leadership on Nation-level emergency planning.
- Develop an ONA Nation-based Emergency Preparedness Plan.
- Develop a Nation-based Emergency Management Plan.

3.5.3 Develop Climate Adaptation Plans

Syilx Okanagan knowledge can inform how to adapt and respond to the climate crisis. We are living in a changing ecosystem and it is essential that TEK guides how we adapt and evolve to live in resiliency. With adaptation strategies rooted in TEK, we can learn how to change with our environment in a way that respects the tmixʷ.

- Determine and define what TEK adaptation strategies are with direction from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, and community.
- Develop working watershed inventories and archives of information regarding climate change, such as historical flows, snowpack, surface siwɬkʷ, ground siwɬkʷ, invasive species, bio- indicators, flooding, drought, and fires in order to better inform adaptation strategies.
- Determine and target highly vulnerable areas where the need for change, conservation, or protection is needed most such as wetlands and human-caused siwɬkʷ issues.
- Promote preventative behaviour and projects such as risk assessments.







3.6 Priority #6: Build Collective siwɬkʷ Consciousness

Significant pressures are being exerted on the siwɬkʷ resources in Syilx Okanagan Territory due to rapid population growth, drought conditions, climate change, and the overall increased demand for siwɬkʷ. The Syilx Okanagan Nation is committed to continued efforts of building relationships and collaborative initiatives to ensure the health of siwɬkʷ and aquatic ecosystems. This includes engaging syilx communities and non-syilx partners and involves activities including keeping apprised of on-going environmental matters and natural resource impacts and developing a communication plan and strategy to support Natural Resources.

3.6.1 Continue to Host the siwɬkʷ Water Forum

Significant pressures are being exerted on the siwɬkʷ resources in Syilx Okanagan Territory due to rapid population growth, drought conditions, climate change, and the overall increased demand for siwɬkʷ. The Syilx Okanagan Nation is committed to continued efforts of building relationships and collaborative initiatives to ensure the health of siwɬkʷ and aquatic ecosystems. This includes engaging Syilx communities and non-Syilx partners and involves activities including keeping apprised of on-going environmental matters and natural resource impacts and developing a communication plan and strategy to support Natural Resources.

- Seek funding and resources each year to host the annual Water Forum and other water-related events as needed.
- Continue to include elders and youth to ensure knowledge transfer between generations.
- Continue to build and develop working relationships with governments, industry, NGOs, and other Indigenous Nations on siwɬkʷ related issues. Strive to find new ways to build meaningful relationships to make change.
- Collaborate with Nation departments, communities, organizations, and allies to set out a specific online platform to discuss siwɬkʷ (i.e., siwɬkʷ webinars, podcast series, mimicking siwɬkʷ innovation labs).

3.6.2 Hold On-the-Land siwɬkʷ Ceremonies and Gatherings

The Nation holds many initiatives each year that bring people together on the land to explore ways to protect and revitalize siwɬkʷ and aquatic ecosystems. Working with youth programs provides opportunities for land-based learning and transmission of knowledge for Elders and youth. This work is important to support the Nation, leadership and Syilx Okanagan citizens to fulfill their caretaker responsibilities and make informed decisions for siwɬkʷ management in the Territory.

- Work with Syilx Okanagan Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and youth to identify priority areas and areas of opportunity for collaboration.
- Secure funding to host on-the-land workshops, tours, and learning opportunities.
- Conduct more meetings on the land and in cultural spaces, such as longhouses.
- Continue with and seek funding for annual ONA on-the-land events, such as Salmon Feast, Salmon Ceremonies, and the Elders and Youth Gathering.
- Create a portal for resources that people can use.
- Support and hold up Syilx Okanagan ceremonial leaders. Support their knowledge and role transfer to youth.



3.6.3 Create and Share Resources to Increase Awareness and Understanding of siwɬkʷ and tmixʷ

- Distribute the Water Booklet: Share with community members and with non-Syilx partners.
- Create a portalfor resources that people can use.
- Create and support workshops and training materials for syilx cultural awareness, starting with Indigenous 101, Syilx 101, and then Syilx water values and history 101.

3.6.4 Encourage Personal Responsibility for siwɬkʷ Consumption

Every person has a responsibility to care for siwɬkʷ. The well-being of everyone living in Syilx Okanagan Territory is fundamentally tied to the health of our siwɬkʷ. We each have a responsibility to reduce our consumption and lessen the strain on our already fragile watersheds. There are a number of initiatives in place to encourage responsible siwɬkʷ use and raise awareness of the roles of everyone to conserve siwɬkʷ resources in the Territory.

- Hold meetings with Syilx Okanagan members to talk about siwɬkʷ use and develop best practices for individuals to follow to reduce siwɬkʷ consumption.
- Develop and share educational outreach materials on siwɬkʷ use and consumption.
- Raise awareness on consumption habits and how to mitigate these impacts via social media platforms, within ONA events, and meetings

4. NEXT STEPS

This syilx siwɬkw Strategy is a living document that will adapt to the ever-changing societal and environmental landscape. There will always be more work to be done and things to improve and enhance upon.

The ONA role is to support, provide technical expertise, produce results and discuss potential—and at times obvious and needed—alternatives to uphold these important responsibilities for the sake of siwɬkʷ and our future generations ahead.

Moving forward, work plans will be developed in alignment with the priority actions identified in the previous section with all work being planned and undertaken in close collaboration with Syilx communities and community members.

The captikʷɬ are markers on the land, and they show us where our tmxʷulaxʷ is ... Our responsibilities to the tmixʷ and tmxʷulaxʷ, is a way of life. We need to revive this way of life.

5. NSYILXCƏN GLOSSARY

captikwɬ	Sacred texts; stories and oral traditions; creation stories that hold the laws
iʔ kʷu_syilx iʔ siwɬkʷtət	Our Syilx water
iʔ nunxʷinaʔtntət	Spirituality
kʷuləncutn	Creator
əɬʕacx̓ən	A process Syilx Okanagan follow to come to decisions about resources. One meaning is "look underneath" our actions and how they are connected to the future, to our grandchildren, to the continuation of all creation, and to the tracks that they make on the land. Also the process of tracking an animal and the need to look beyond the immediate to get underneath our own tracks to see where the footprints will lead
naʔkʷlʼməntət	Way of life
nkʼʕaməntət	Prayer
nsyilxcən	The language of the Syilx Okanagan People
nxʷəlxʷəltantət	Translates to "that which gives us life" and exemplifies the Okanagan People's relationship to this territory
nʕawqnwixʷ	Also spelled as enowkinwixw; knowledge filling participants' heads like drops of water; decision making through consensus building
siwɬkʷ	Water. The word comes from siw (when a human drinks or sips) and ɬkʷ(when an animal drinks)
skcx̓ ʷipla?	The discipline given to the Syilx People by Creator that sets out the way that all of creation relates to each other and teaches people how to live in relation to all other life
smimáy	Historical accounts of real events
stɬtaɬt	A translation for Aboriginal Title and Rights; the straight or exact line between two points. Used in the context of the Syilx relationship with the land, stɬtaɬt refers to the kind of truth that connects the Syilx to our skcx̓ ʷipla?
suxʷtxtem	Caretaking
syilx	Original people who learned to live together on the land in peace; dreaming ones; bound together; of the land
tmixʷ	The nsyilxcən word that most closely translates as "ecology." tmixʷ includes everything alive—the land, water, insects, people, animals, plants, and medicines
tmxʷulaxʷ	Underneath all of the tmixʷ is tmxʷulaxʷ, the core spirit from which all of creation arises and which unites everything. tmxʷulaxʷ is nsyilxcən for the land
xatmaʔ sqilxʷ	In front of us sqilxʷ; first thinking people who learned to survive from the natural laws
yilmixem	One-who-coils-as-one-strand; Chiefs; leaders within the community who received specialized training in Okanagan Traditional Knowledge (TEK), language and ceremony. Responsible to ensure the coil continues.[16]

[16] Note that the spellings and definitions of the nsyilxcən terms in this glossary were reviewed and by syilx Okanagan Knowledge Keeper Richard Armstrong.



ksəkəɬqayxʷntimiʔ siwɬkʷ

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