



2026

The siwłkʷ Water and Climate Forum

REPORT



[Signature]

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Executive Summary

The siw̓tkʷ Water and Climate Forum, held on March 23–24, 2026, and hosted by the Okanagan Nation Alliance, brought together over 320 participants from across the Okanagan - Similkameen watersheds and British Columbia. Grounded in Syilx teachings, the forum emphasized that siw̓tkʷ, water is a living relative and the foundation of all life, intrinsically connecting people to the land, ecosystems, and one another. Protecting the integrity of water is central to Syilx identity and responsibility, and the forum reinforced a shared commitment across communities to care for the watershed.

The gathering created space for knowledge sharing between Syilx and non-Syilx perspectives, highlighting both Indigenous and Western approaches to water governance while addressing the institutional barriers that limit collaboration. Participants explored water stewardship across time and place, from traditional Syilx practices to contemporary challenges, and from local realities to international examples such as Spain and the Haida Nation.

Through dialogue, panels, and collaborative sessions, the forum strengthened a collective understanding of the need for integrated, relational, and long-term approaches to water management. It resulted in a set of actions aimed at advancing siw̓tkʷ sovereignty, improving governance, and fostering cross-cultural collaboration. These outcomes support the ongoing work of the Collaborative Leadership Table and contribute to building a more resilient and sustainable future for the region's watersheds.

Key insights were shared over the two days, such as:

- Our own relationship with water needs to be a spiritual endeavor and include ceremony,
- We must shift from a rights-based perspective to a responsibility-based perspective on water,
- Indigenous laws are grounded in non-human centric decision making, and
- Syilx law, protocols, and governance frameworks should lead and inform water management.

Introduction

Since 2015, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) has hosted siw̓tkʷ Water Forums to celebrate United Nations World Water Day and bring people together around a shared responsibility for siw̓tkʷ.

Water Forum Goals

1. **Showcase Climate-Resilient Water Governance:** Highlight leading global, provincial, Syilx, and local innovations to demonstrate what is possible—and urgently needed—as the Okanagan–Similkameen faces drought, desertification, water scarcity and rising climate risks.
2. **Highlight the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table (CLT):** Elevate the CLT as a model for shared watershed governance, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between Syilx leadership and local governments to address water security and climate challenges.
3. **Launch a 250-Year Water Responsibility Vision:** Introduce the Watershed Responsibility Plan Framework, promoting a long-term, ecosystem-based approach to restoring watersheds, protecting water sources, and strengthening community resilience.
4. **Mobilize Coordinated Action:** Engage participants in defining shared priorities and solutions through dialogue, ceremony, and co-design—shifting from fragmented responses to coordinated, long-term action.

Audience

The siw̓tkʷ Water and Climate Forum was attended by diverse leaders and practitioners committed to watershed health and climate resilience in the Okanagan– Similkameen. Participants included Syilx and local government leaders, knowledge holders, youth and elders, CLT members, water practitioners, provincial partners, NGOs, researchers, technical experts, funders, and water users. While locally focused, the forum also served as a wider model for watershed governance across British Columbia. Complimenting the work of the CLT, the forum was Syilx-led and action- oriented, focused on advancing Indigenous food and siw̓tkʷ sovereignty, strengthening regional siw̓tkʷ governance, and responding to the urgent challenges in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds.

1.1 The Okanagan Nation Alliance

This forum was created, coordinated, and facilitated by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA), a modern tribal council established in 1981 that represents the collective interests of the Syilx Okanagan Nation across their traditional territory in southern British Columbia and northern Washington State. The ONA brings together seven member communities Okanagan Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, Penticton Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Upper and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands, and Westbank First Nation, while respecting their local governance. Guided by Syilx laws and teachings, including those of the Four Food Chiefs and the Okanagan *siw̓tkw* Declaration, the ONA advances shared priorities such as water governance, land stewardship, and cultural revitalization. Leadership is provided by the Chiefs Executive Council, composed of the elected Chiefs of each community, which sets strategic direction and ensures decisions reflect the collective will and responsibilities of the Syilx people.

Grounded in a deep relationship to water, these principles shaped the forum's presentations, discussions, and outcomes.

Forum Objectives:

- Increase shared **understanding** of desertification, drought, and water risks across Syilx Territory
- Showcase Syilx-led headwaters restoration and Indigenous food sovereignty **initiatives**
- Build practical **partnerships** and **commitments** through the CLT framework for regional water management
- Translate **learning into concrete action** plans and pilots aligned with the Responsibility Plan
- Foster **intergenerational engagement and cultural continuity** through storytelling, ceremony, and youth participation

1.2 The Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table

The Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table (CLT) was initiated and formed by ONA, along with the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (OCCP) and the Centre of Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)¹ who have decades of experience supporting Nation-led co-governance management processes. The Memorandum of Agreement that was signed in November 2024 unites over 130 elected leaders from Syilx communities and neighboring cities, towns, and regional districts, all committed to working together to protect and restore the *siw̓tkw*, water that sustains each community, including both the Similkameen and Okanagan watersheds.

The CLT is a government-to-government table to set strategic direction and address matters of common concern to protect and restore siwłk^w for now and future generations. The work of the CLT builds on the Syilx Nation's millennia of stewardship while respecting the autonomous jurisdiction of each government and creating a forum for collaborative decision-making.

Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table



From left to right: Councillor Tricia Brett, District of Lake Country; Councillor Tim Isaac, Okanagan Indian Band; Councillor Petra Veintimilla, City of Oliver; Chief Robert Louie, Westbank First Nation; Councillor Brian Guy, City of Vernon; Chief Clarence Louie, Osoyoos Indian Band; Mayor Victor Cumming, City of Vernon; Mayor Blair Ireland, District of Lake Country; Councillor Shirley Fowler, City of Armstrong; Councillor Tim Lezard, City of Penticton; Councillor Sammy Louie, Osoyoos Indian Band; Chief Keith Crow, Lower Similkameen Indian Band; Mayor Sue McKortoff, City of Osoyoos; Mayor Patrick Van Minsel, District of Peachland; Councillor Keith Thom, District of Peachland; Councillor Charlie Allison, Upper Similkameen Indian Band; Chair Mark Pendergraft, Regional District Okanagan Similkameen; Mayor Joe Cramer, City of Armstrong; Councillor Mike Allison, Upper Similkameen Indian Band; Director Amanda Shatzko, Electoral Area SilverStar, RDNO; Mayor Julius Bloomfield, City of Penticton; Councillor Janet Terbasket, Lower Similkameen Indian Band; Councillor Jordan Coble, Westbank First Nation; Chief Bonnie Jacobsen, Upper Similkameen Indian Band; Chief Greg Gabriel, Penticton Indian Band. Photo by Aaron Hemens

Areas of Common Concern:

- Protect and restore headwaters and riparian areas
- Maintain and enhance existing restoration work
- Manage water quality due to deterioration and pollutants
- Manage water quantity through flow regimes and standards
- Address systemic issues: cumulative impacts; climate change

CLT Guiding Principles:

- siwłk^w is the foundation of tmix^w- it is part of us and part of all life;
- siwłk^w is a family relation- not a resource or commodity;
- All forms of siwłk^w must be cared for: we must respect the path that siwłk^w chooses and its natural state and function;
- siwłk^w must be treated as our most sacred medicine- with respect and reciprocity;
- We must balance our needs against the needs of other life forms.

The 2-day forum held on Syilx territory, kiláwna?, Kelowna, was grounded by the CLT vision: **A thriving landscape based on healthy watersheds- for present and future generations²** and the pursuit of the creation of a 250-year Watershed Responsibility Plan for the Okanagan and Similkameen watersheds.

This report aims to summarize the knowledge shared throughout the two days from panelists, speakers, leaders, and participants. The authors have strived to share the knowledge as accurately as possible and with siwłk^w top of mind, and with siwłk^w headwaters as witness to the two-day forum, held in glass containers at the front of the room.

[1] <https://yourcier.org>

[2] <https://syilx.org/governance/okanagan-similkameen-collaborative-leadership-table/>

1.2.1 Strengthening siwłk^w Governance Through Collaboration

The first panel of the forum was focused on the work of the CLT. The panel was composed of Director Amanda Shatzko, the Director for Electoral Area C in the Regional District of North Okanagan; Chief simo, Robert Louie of Westbank First Nation; Chief sil-teekin, Greg Gabriel of Penticton Indian Band; and Mayor of Penticton Justin Bloomfield. The panel was moderated by CLT Co-Chair, Councillor Tricia Brett of the District of Lake Country. CLT members reflected on the potential of a collaborative, regional co-governance model, and the importance of planning for a 250-year period.



Collaborative Leadership Table members address the Water and Climate Forum in *ki?lawná?* on March 23. **From left:** CLT co-chair Tricia Brett, District of Lake Country councillor; Penticton Indian Band Chief *sil-teekin* Greg Gabriel; Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton; Regional District of North Okanagan director Amanda Shatzko; and CLT co-chair *simo* Robert Louie, Chief of Westbank First Nation. Photo by Aaron Hemens

A regional approach to management, as discussed by Mayor Bloomfield, allows for less pressure and domination by federal and provincial governments, allowing for 'freer' thinking. Mayor Bloomfield also spoke to the future growth of the table, as more regional leaders begin to recognize that they should be at the table. He also reflected on the way in which this model can be applied and taken up by other parts of the province, until it is being replicated across the country.

Chief *simo*, Robert Louie spoke to the importance of respect across parties and recognition of each other's jurisdiction. Additionally, Chief Louie reflected on the ways in which *Syilx* traditions and law-making processes can strengthen the CLTs approach. Chief *sil-teekin*, Greg Gabriel echoed the importance of leadership by the *Syilx* Nation with the table structure, and the importance of continuity. Strong, long-term governance is ensured when continuity is built into governance models.

"Honouring our respective jurisdictions is the foundation of our relationships." - Chief Robert Louie

To strengthen siwtk^w governance, Director Shatzko spoke to the importance of using knowledge from all sources, or 'cross-boundary' learning. This includes knowledge sharing across Syilx and non-Syilx peoples, but also addressing governmental and regional siloes that can prevent knowledge sharing across systems. Director Shatzko also noted that long term planning is critical, and that we need to move away from short term decision making. She recognizes that these short-term decisions were often based on the 'best available' data at the time, but that this is no longer the case. We have the data, including knowledge and lived experience from Syilx Nation members, and are better equipped for longer term planning.

1.2.2 The Importance of Long-Term Planning

Panelists were also asked to reflect on the importance of long-term planning in relation to the proposed 250-Year Responsibility Plan. Chief sil-teekin, Greg Gabriel stated that we are just borrowing these lands from our children and our future generations. Therefore, it is our responsibility to plan with these long-time frames in mind. Mayor Bloomfield spoke about time in relation to the life of siwtk^w - 250 years is just the blink of an eye to a river.

"The water, the rivers, tell us what kind of people we are. Whatever we do, the rain comes along and washes the land, and it washes whatever we use down into the river. The people down river, can judge us on what they see." - Mayor Bloomfield

Overall, there was general consensus that the protection of siwtk^w is the centralizing force behind this work; the CLT brings together leaders that have recognized time is of the essence, and that change is needed to protect water from continued impacts of climate change and development. There is shared recognition of the need for long-term planning that is informed and led by Syilx peoples, laws, and principles.

1.2.3 Starting with Success in Mind

With long-term planning in mind, we need to begin to understand where it is we want to go, what does success look like?

When asked to reflect on that question and on what success looks like in 250 years, forum participants responses can be mapped onto the four food chiefs: innovation, relationships, tradition, and action, as shown in Figure 1 (Right) below. All four of these areas must be met for the 250-Year Plan to be considered a success.

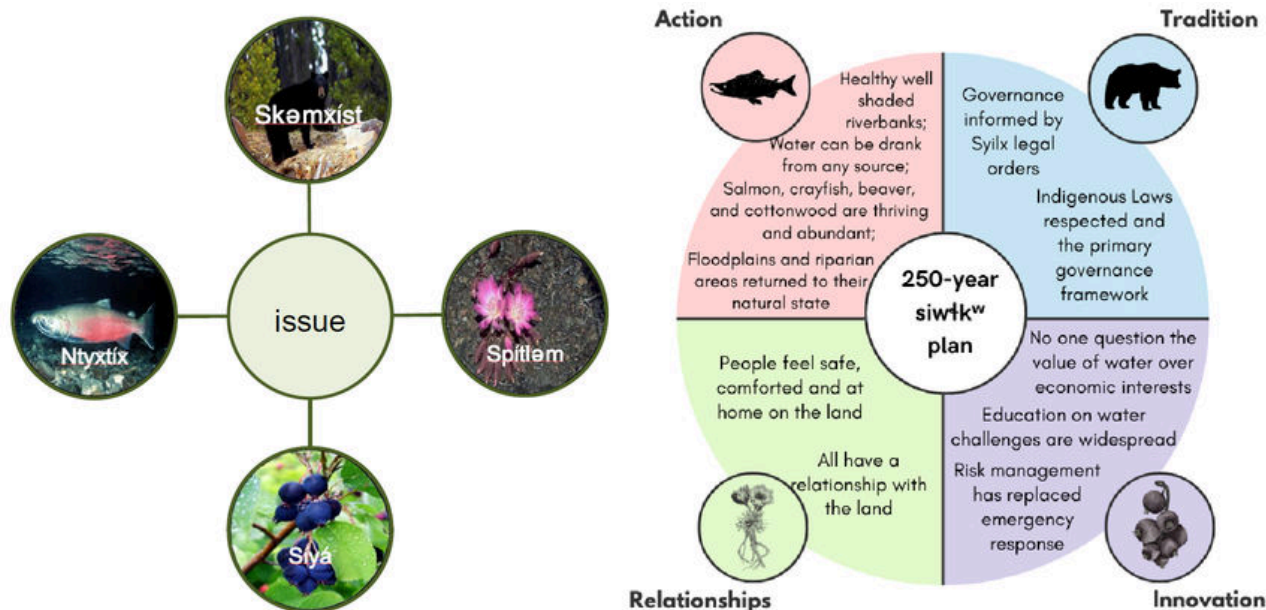


Figure 1. Left: Differing perspectives that have a defined place: Innovators, Traditional, Action, and Relationships (4FC Enowkinwixw Process, Syilx) ; Right: Theoretical framework reflecting participant's answers at the forum.

*"We cannot succeed until the majority of those who call this land home have a mindset that better aligns with **Indigenous knowledge** that every human, animal, plant and water is connected to you and to each other." - Participant*

The following sections present an overview of the discussions, presentations, and panels held across the 2-day forum, culminating in an overview of the various actions that can be taken across different scales in the region in order to meet these measures of success.

Day 1: Understanding the Past and the Present to Begin to Plan for the Future

Day 1 of the forum began with a prayer by Councillor Jordan Coble, CLT member and councillor for Westbank First Nation, and drum song from Elliot Terbasket, to ground participants in the tmix^w, all living things and siwtkw^w of the Syilx Nation. The opening included a moment of silence in remembrance of Leon Louis, a beloved elder and community member, reminding all participants of the important and ongoing work of the Syilx Nation in stewarding the tmix^w and siwtkw^w of this area for generations.

Following this introduction, forum participants were introduced to the CLT Co-Chairs Chief Robert Louie of Westbank First Nation, and Councillor Tricia Brett from the District of Lake Country. The Co-Chairs introduced the CLT, and the intention of the forum to strengthen and inform future directions of the CLT and its 250-year action plan.

"Together we deepen collective strength." - Jordan Coble

MC Aaron Derickson then introduced himself as a proud Syilx scholar based at the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO). Aaron grounded participants with the concept of enowkinwix^w (figure 1), and with the visual of siw^{tk}^w dripping into our heads, that represents the patient, immersive process of informing each other in the best way possible before decisions are made. He stated, "you are heard, and you are seen, if you are here". Day 1 held two keynote sessions, two panel discussions, and a collaborative dialogue session.

2.1 Water as Life: Past, Present and Future

The first keynote speaker, lax^{taxtk}^w, Dr. Jeanette Armstrong, Ph.D. and UBCO professor as well as language and knowledge holder, helped ground the participants in the past, reflect on the present, and consider what we can do in the future. Dr. Armstrong's presentation provides insight into the importance of siw^{tk}^w across time, highlighting the historic and ongoing stewardship of water by the Syilx Nation, and presenting the need for a new water ethic that is grounded in a spiritual shift.

2.1.1 Past: Peace is Sustainability

In her discussion of the past, Dr. Armstrong highlighted the historic and ongoing importance of the Fraser and Columbia River waterways to Syilx peoples. Nation members identify themselves by the waters or rivers that they come from, and the nsyilxcən language serves as the boundary of Syilx territories. Dr. Armstrong highlighted the traditional governance structures that existed in the region, that were informed by agreements, protocols, and laws. Chiefs were hereditary and multiple marriages across communities helped to form complex kinship relationships that supported shared management responsibility across Nations. Chiefs maintained laws concerning who could hunt or fish where, and how resources were to be sustained so that there would always be plenty. Trade relationships and protocols of reciprocity defined inter- and intra- group dynamics.

*"Peace is
Sustainability"*

Dr. Armstrong indicates that this period was marked by peace. This means that there wasn't need to fight over resources or struggle over ownership, because laws and practices of sustainability were in place to ensure everyone had enough. These laws were maintained through ceremonial imperatives. Dr. Armstrong indicates that this is the foundation of ethics, posing the question: What is it ethically that binds us to protect lands, even at risk of violence? Dr. Armstrong continued with a reflection on the present day.

2.1.2 Present: Protocols of Reciprocity

The present day is marked by the impacts of colonization and the imposition of settler capitalist economics. These systems have disrupted Syilx reciprocal and sustainable relationships. Dr. Armstrong highlighted the specific impacts of issues such as the damming of rivers, over allocation of water to non-Syilx users, the destruction of cottonwood and river systems, and the impacts of microplastics and pharmaceuticals on water quality and people. Dr. Armstrong also spent time discussing the work currently being done by ONA and the En'owkin Centre to restore cottonwood, salmon and river systems.

2.1.3 Future: A New Ethic and Spiritual Shift

Looking to the future, Dr. Armstrong discussed a spiritual shift that is needed. She stressed that our work in the future is dependent on changes beyond the legal or political, reliant on a spiritual shift, and governance that recognizes water injustices. Dr. Armstrong points to the traditional practices of the Syilx as important in informing future governance directions that are more collaborative and based in reciprocity.



laḥlaḥtkw Jeannette Armstrong — Syilx knowledge keeper, professor and poet — opens the Okanagan Nation Alliance's Water and Climate Forum with a keynote address in kiḥlawnaw on March 23. Photo by Aaron Hemens

"The salmon themselves will tell us if we are successful; they will tell us and our relatives into the future when the waters have been restored."

- Dr. Jeanette Armstrong

In sum, Dr. Armstrong highlighted the importance of developing a new relationship with siwtḥkw across both Syilx and non-Syilx peoples, that includes a spiritual shift that recognizes siwtḥkw as a relative, and focuses on reciprocal relationships with tmixw and siwtḥkw.

2.2. From Experiences to Insight: What Climate Risks Have Taught Us

Following the grounding work by Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, focus was shifted to understanding current climate concerns, and actions that have been taken to address these concerns. To discuss climate risks on *siw̓kʷ*, a panel of experts shared 10-minute presentations each, then answered questions from the audience. Each panelist presented the climate issues at play in their field, then highlighted how Syilx knowledge can inform new management approaches.

2.2.1. Fisheries Management

Richard Bussanich, an ONA Fisheries and Water Biologist, opened the panel. Richard highlights the impacts of temperature increase and drought on salmon populations but really focused his discussion on the need to change how we manage fish, particularly in reframing management as a practice of honouring relationships.

Richard began with highlighting the importance of water as the lifeblood of the land and stating that salmon are not a resource. Rather, salmon gift themselves to us, with expectations that in turn we will treat them honourably in respect of this reciprocal relationship.

*"Abundance depends on **how** we receive what we are given."*

Richard indicates that this spiritual shift has changed the ONAs approach to managing salmon. They have built humility into their approach and plan with greater uncertainty built into modeling as a form of respect and gratitude. He stresses that salmon haven't disappeared because we lack data, they disappear when our decisions become fragmented. Therefore, we need greater connectivity across entire networks, ensuring the health of all streams and water ways. Ultimately, Richard reminded attendees that Syilx practices and principles should be informing our approach to management.

*"Water isn't something we manage last; it's a **relationship** we maintain first."*

2.2.2 Fresh Water Management

Samantha Pham, a Limnologist with ONA, focused her talk on the management of fresh water and nursery lakes in the Okanagan. Samantha focused specifically on Osoyoos Lake as an important nursery lake for young salmon. Samantha presented an overview of how increased water temperatures contribute to decreased dissolved

oxygen in freshwater systems. This results in a 'temperature-oxygen squeeze', where only a very small portion of the lake is cool and oxygenated enough to support salmon fry. This squeeze makes it difficult for salmon to find food, resulting in starvation. As climate change continues, the length of this squeeze is expected to increase in duration. Decreased lake levels also contribute to the length and severity of the squeeze, and the cleanliness of waters.

She finished her presentation with some good news: ONA has developed a fish water management tool that is intended to support the return of salmon. It allows for the management of water flows through real time data collection. She indicates that since the tool has been implemented, fish returns past dams have seen an increase.

2.2.3 Hydrological Monitoring

George Wang, ONA Hydrologist, presented next on hydrological monitoring. George focused his presentation on the hydrometric stations in the water basin that monitor water flows. George indicated that good hydrometric data supports the protection of fish, flood preparedness, enforcement of water licenses in periods of scarcity, Syilx water rights, cultural practices, and equitable allocation.

George provided an overview of the history of water monitoring in the region. Historically there were 156 hydrometric sites; presently there are around 47 stations in the region. George stresses that ONA is leading the way in hydrometric data collection and mobilization. In conclusion, George's presentation highlighted the need for continued monitoring to support governance decision making, so that decisions can be in the best interest of fish, and Syilx and non-Syilx communities.

2.2.4 Wildfire Management

Kelly Johnston, the Operations Director of the Community Wildfire Planning Centre, began with an overview of the history of fire management in Canada since settlement. Following WWI, the federal government began in earnest to frame fire as 'bad', with a focus on preventing fires. This approach shifted in the 1970s, with Parks Canada beginning to understand the importance of fire on landscapes and the ways in which Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island were managing fires for thousands of years. While this shift is occurring, the impact of these historical fire-suppression practices means that we have permanently changed ecosystems. Instead of 'low burn severity fires' with

higher frequency, that keep aspects of biodiversity intact, we are having 'high burn severity fires' and increased fire intensity. Kelly finished his talk with a reflection on what this increased fire severity means for water. He indicates that high-severity fires cause changes in soil structure resulting in decreased soil saturation or retention of water, impacting the hydrological cycle. There is an increase in debris flow into water ways, that carries sediment into water systems, including increases pathogens, algal toxins, organics, urban contaminants, and turbidity of waters. Therefore, management of water also needs to consider impacts of high-severity forest fires.

2.2.5 Economic Impacts

John Janmaat, an Economics Professor at the University of British Columbia, focused on how we understand the value water. He began with an introduction of his work, and inquiry around how we get 'buy in' from different water users to follow water plans if there is no financial value attached to water. John reflected on opportunity costs related to water, as we are always making a trade-off when we allocate water. For example, more water for instream flows means less water for irrigation. These decisions don't always have a monetary value, and it may not be appropriate to even attach a monetary value. However, this makes their intrinsic value harder for governments to weigh in decision making scenarios.

He did not necessarily provide answers for how we quantify this value, but had forum attendees thinking about how we compare impacts that have a money cost with those that don't, and values that are too important to weigh with dollars.

John finished his presentation with a reflection on the impacts of climate change, and the need to adapt to impacts while keeping in mind the trade-offs we make, and how these trade-offs are valued. Therefore, we will need to begin understanding how governance decisions, including under the CLT, require trade-offs and opportunity costs, and how we attach value outside of monetary quantification in our decision-making approach.



From left: Dr. Aaron Derickson, professor of Indigenous Studies at UBC Okanagan; Richard Bussanich, ONA Fisheries and Water Biologist; John Janmaat, University of British Columbia, Economics Professor; Kelly Johnston, Community Wildfire Planning Centre, Operations Director; Samantha Pham, ONA Limnologist; George Wang, ONA Hydrologist. Photo by Eva Antonijevic

2.3. Responsibilities for Indigenous and Regional Collaboration and Governance

The second keynote speaker for Day 1 was Gwen Bridge, a member of Saddle Lake Cree Nation and CEO of Gwen Bridge Consulting. Gwen shared with forum attendees three key messages within her presentation: understanding and respecting Indigenous law and knowledge, how to utilize the ethical space framework, and reframing to regional governance.

"To respect Indigenous knowledge means to align and behave within the directives of Indigenous law. It includes understanding non-human centric decision making."

2.3.1 Respecting Indigenous Law Through Non-Human Centricity



Indigenous-consultant Gwen Bridge, who is from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, speaks at the Okanagan Nation Alliance's two-day Water and Climate Forum in ki?láwna? on March 23. Photo by Aaron Hemens

Gwen opened with a profound question to the audience: "How do you understand what it truly means to respect Indigenous knowledge?" Gwen began with looking at non-human centric approaches to decision making. In many Indigenous society's humans are not the law givers, they are not the ones with decision-making authority over how things should be. These laws come from the Creator and Nature (see Figure 3 below). This is non-human centric decision making. To better understand, Gwen reflected on water, and shared that Water says, "I must remain clean." If this is an understanding from Indigenous knowledge and law, to put it into practice requires reframing of laws, policies, and actions toward this directive.

*"You don't need to know all Indigenous knowledge, you just need to **follow the rules.**"*

2.3.2 Ethical Space: Coming Together to Create Something New

Gwen then introduced the idea of ethical space. The Ethical Space Framework was developed by Willie Ermine and Reg Crowshoe, and shared to us by Gwen. The Ethical Space is the space where Indigenous oral culture and Western written culture overlap (see Figure 2). To be in this middle space, each party must bring forward what is important to be understood, in a format that can be understood by the other party. Another component of this space is that when we come together, we don't try to look for things that are the same, we try to create something that is new based on our collective understanding.

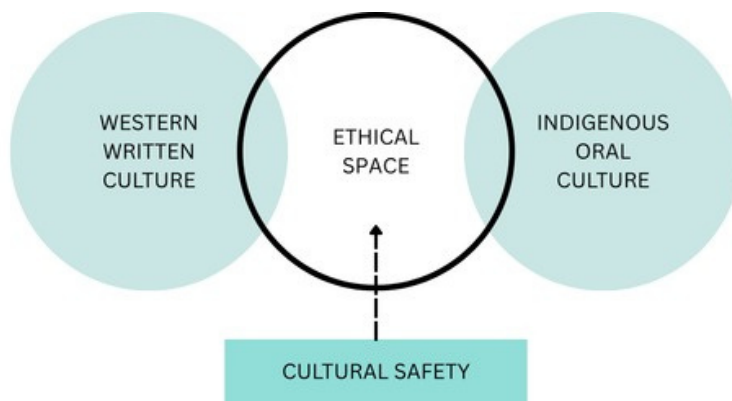


Figure 2: From Ethical Space frameworks, Reg Crowshoe. Adapted by Gwen Bridge.

To move further into the Ethical Space, we must understand Western and Indigenous culture more completely. Gwen took us on a journey through the parallel stories, and shared that the root of many conflicts comes from our differences of understanding and worldviews. The image below provides further insights.

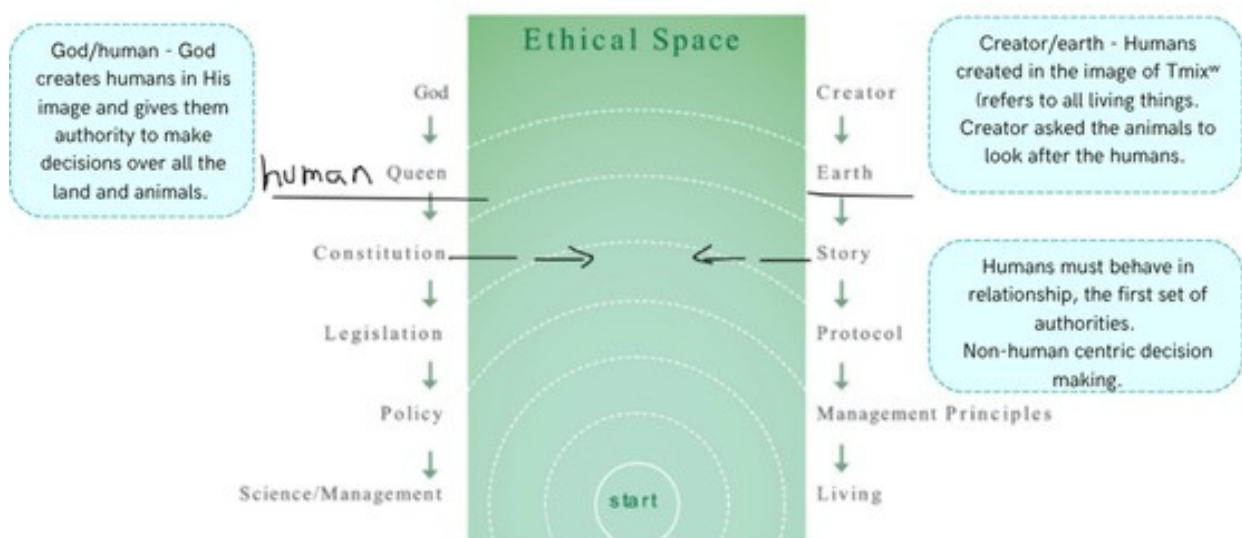


Figure 3: From Ethical Space frameworks, Reg Crowshoe. Voices of Understanding, Alberta Energy Regulator. Adapted by Gwen Bridge.

In both Western and Indigenous spaces, Scientists are the truth tellers of the earth. They observe through human methodology, looking to the environment, drawing on data, analyzing, drawing conclusions, and making recommendations. Both are truth tellers. However, the problem in Western spaces is that conclusions and recommendations from science do not have inherent authority to change the ways we behave. They only have authority when validated through policy and legal decision; meaning the science can be compromised by humans.

*"We need to trust the
[Indigenous] knowledge of
First Nations partners as truth."*

In many Indigenous communities this approach differs, the law of reciprocity and agreements to be on the earth were given at the time of decision making and inform all decisions. Ultimately, the living systems and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) inform policy. When trying to integrate Indigenous science and elevate it within a Western framework, Syilx laws become subjugated to policy makers. To have attendees critically engage with this idea, Gwen asked: "Why would any Indigenous person agree to the subjugation of their highest forms of law within Western processes?" All of this led us to the understanding that commitments to the respect of knowledge are critical. Structural and organizational commitments to Indigenous knowledge require understanding the underlying system.

*"If you truly listen to us,
you can't help but be
transformed."*

Understanding the importance of non-human-centric law making, and the differences in worldview and use of science across Western and Indigenous peoples, Gwen moved into an overview of how Indigenous Knowledge and worldviews can inform governance without being subjugated.

2.3.3 Reframing a Reciprocal Economy through Regional Governance

Gwen stated that governance needs to be regional in scale, informed by Western and Indigenous knowledge, built on respect and understanding, and focused with government-to-government agreements. We are in a time where things are shifting, and governance structures that respect Indigenous knowledge need to be different from business as usual. The CLT is an example of how to approach and build this governance transformation.

"If you have decision empowered regional bodies, the provincial government is prevented from making top-down resource decision making."

2.4 Understanding Our Place in this Work

Across Day 1, we heard from Jeanette Armstrong, six CLT members, five ONA technical experts, and Gwen Bridge. All these individuals collectively built our understanding from the past to the present, from Western to Indigenous worldviews, from scientific metrics to relational ways of being. This foundational information had participants reflecting deeply before Day 2, the main reflections can be seen below.

Water as a Sacred Relative

Participants universally rejected the framing of water as a resource for extraction. Instead, participants identified water as a living relative with its own rights. Governance and decision-making must be rooted in this relationship, not in a resource extraction logic.

"Water is sacred and its not a resource but a living relative"

Salmon as a Measure of Success

Salmon health was identified as a critical ecological indicator of collective wellbeing. The phrase "the salmon will tell us when we are successful" by Dr. Jeanette Armstrong resonated across participants.

"The Salmon will tell us when we are successfull"

Peace = Sustainability

Participants identified the link between relational/social peace and ecological health, framing conflict and competition as unsustainable ways of governing water.

"Peace is sustainability"

Reciprocity Over Extraction

Reciprocity- in all aspects of life- was identified as one of the foundational aspects of sustainable governance. Syilx practices of economic reciprocity were highlighted as a model of collective strength.

"Reciprocity is central to governance"

Bridging Two Worldviews

Participants reflected on the tension between Indigenous laws/IK and Western science. There was a call to bridge these two worldviews, and avoid replacement of one with the other. Ethical space and two-eyed seeing were identified as frameworks to move this work forward.

"Two worlds need communication or will never bridge"

All-of-Society Responsibility

Individual action and systemic change were identified as necessary to long-term change; neither is sufficient alone. Participants called for moving from individualism to collectivism, resisting complacency, and accepting short-term inconvenience to prevent long-term ecological loss.

"It is an all of society responsibility to listen, learn and be prepared to do our part"

Day 2: Learning from Others to Formulate Action

Day 2 of the Forum began with a *siw̓kʷ* ceremony at *k̓tusxnitkʷ*, Okanagan Lake, led by *xʷayluxalqs* Trish Manuel, a Syilx Knowledge Holder from Upper Nicola Band, and Elliot Terbasket. This ceremony was open to all forum attendees and served as an opportunity to learn from Syilx knowledge and ceremony holders, as well as a chance to connect with the *siw̓kʷ* that we are discussing in the forum.



Syilx Nation members join a drum song after a water ceremony at $\text{k}^{\text{w}}\text{ú}\text{s}\text{x}\text{n}\text{i}\text{k}^{\text{w}}$ | Okanagan Lake. Photo by Aaron Hemens

Back in the conference space, Councillor Jordan Coble opened with prayer again, reminding participants of the importance of emotion within this work. MC Aaron Derickson reminded attendees that $\text{siw}^{\text{t}}\text{k}^{\text{w}}$ is witnessing our learning journey, and that the work we are doing is relational at its core. A video was presented highlighting the connection of Syilx people to $\text{siw}^{\text{t}}\text{k}^{\text{w}}$, stating:

"Water is life. Water is sick. We all need to be part of taking care of the land. Taking care of the water. Looking after the water so its sustainable for **future** generations".

Building on the presentations of the previous day, Day 2 of the forum is focused on tangible action creation and learning from examples. Day 2 had two keynote speakers providing insight from an international context, Spain, and different Nation context, the Haida. Following these presentations, an Action Lab occurred, where all participants gathered to begin to brainstorm next steps.

3.1 Learning from Global Communities How to Live with Less Water

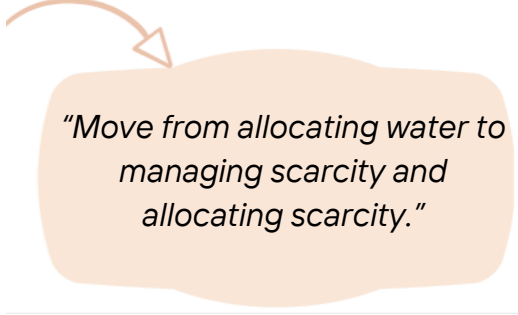
The first keynote of Day 2 was Dr. Nuria Hernández-Mora, a Senior Policy Expert and Consultant with Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua / Fresh Thoughts Consulting, based in Madrid, Spain. Dr. Nuria spoke to the ways in which drought is being managed in the Spanish context and helped bring further insight into what a new water ethic might entail.



Dr. Nuria Hernández-Mora, a Senior Policy Expert and Consultant with Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua / Fresh Thoughts Consulting, based in Madrid, Spain. Photo by Aaron Hemens

3.1.1 Changing our Understanding of Drought: From Reactive to Proactive Management

Dr. Nuria began by introducing herself and the waters to which she is connected. Following this introduction, Dr. Nuria began to speak about drought. The central theme of her presentation was that we must change how we deal with water scarcity and droughts. This means shifting from dealing with drought as an emergency, which requires acceptance of droughts as a standard part of life moving forward. It also means understanding water scarcity as being a socially constructed idea, that can be changed with education and community buy in. Together, this shift requires a move from reactive management to proactive management of droughts.



"Move from allocating water to managing scarcity and allocating scarcity."

Dr. Nuria presented a Venn diagram identifying the three aspects of a drought risk framework. First is hazard, which includes the frequency, duration, severity and spatial extent of a drought. This is largely outside of our control, but we can make these impacts less severe. Second is exposure, this include the people, activities, ecosystems, and assets that depend on water and therefore can be impacted by drought. Third is vulnerability, this is the ability to react, or what management systems are in place to cope with and respond to water shortages. Dr. Nuria makes that argument that we have more control over exposure and vulnerability, and reducing risk in these areas through stronger management can help reduce the severity of drought related impacts.

3.1.2 Lessons from the EU: Guiding Principles of Management Directives

Next, Dr. Nuria shared about EU legislation and management directives. Spain, like other countries in the European Union (EU), takes environmental direction from EU management directives. The EU legislates through documents such as treaties, regulations, and directives. Once a directive is adopted at the EU level, countries in the EU have 2-3 years to adapt and adopt these standards. The EUs directives, regulations and treaties are guided by the following four principles:

- Subsidiarity principle: policies must be implemented at the lowest level of government possible
- Precautionary principle: if you don't know enough, don't do anything
- No deterioration principle: you should not act if there will be negative impacts on the environment
- Polluter pays principle: if you deteriorate, you are responsible for fixing the problem

These principles guide the Water Framework Directive (WFD), which sets requirements for watershed planning and governance in each EU country. The WFD and the approach of the EU more broadly demonstrates a potential way to have multiple governments meet shared standards, even across different legal and cultural systems. Dr. Nuria also recognizes the limitations of this approach. Progress remains slow, there are serious coordination gaps, conflicts persist between water users economic and environmental goals, and more recently, a push for an energy transition may open up Europe for increased mining of rare minerals, overstepping the no-deterioration principle.

6-Step WFD Planning Cycle:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Define geographical boundaries | 4. Identify main management issues |
| 2. Characterize river basins — drivers, pressures, and impacts | 5. Review of basin characterization |
| 3. Implement monitoring programs and networks | 6. Develop a river basin management plan to deal with those issues |

3.1.3 Lessons from Spain: Watershed Planning

More specifically, Dr. Nuria reflected on the context of Spain, her home country. While the management of water and creation of around 1200 dams has meant clean drinking water, food security and electricity for everyone in Spain, it has also caused extreme damage to surface waters, and all waters in the country are considered to be in 'bad condition'.

Dr. Nuria argues that the WFD and the implementation of 6-year planning cycles has greatly improved drought resiliency in Spain. All water in Spain is publicly owned, and there is clearly defined hierarchy of water users in situations of drought. All river basin districts of a certain size of inhabitants are required to draft and approve drought management plans. This system works through the following approach:

- **Allocating scarcity**

- At the beginning of each water cycle, a council convenes to determine how to distribute water and allocate scarcity. Dr. Nuria indicates these decisions are generally widely accepted by community members.

- **Monitoring**

- Monitoring systems track key indicators for each drought management unit, including rainfall, storage, streamflow, and groundwater. Monthly reports are developed and shared publicly.

- **Thresholds and triggers**

- Monitoring indicators include thresholds and triggers, across four phases: normality, pre-alert, alert, and emergency. Each phase triggers predefined measures to delay progression into the next phase for as long as possible.

- **Proactive instead of reactive**

- Decisions are taken early, before impacts escalate. Limits decision making when pressures are at their highest.

- **Community buy-in**

- These systems work because everyone knows what to expect, and what to do next.

3.2 Learning from Longstanding Government-to-Government Agreements

The last keynote speaker of the forum was Terri-Lynn William-Davidson, Gid7ahl-Gudslaaay Lalaxaaygans Gaadal-dyas, Principal and Senior Legal Counsel at White Raven Law, and General Counsel of the Council of the Haida Nation. To begin, Terri-Lynn started with song, and introduced the waters and lands she is connected to. Terri-Lynn's presentation shared Haida worldviews and legal tools, as a potential model for the development of siwtłkw Law.

3.2.1 The Haida Experience: "Just Do It"

Participants heard a brief history of the governance of Haida lands, beginning in 1974 with the development of the Council of the Haida Nation (CHN). The CHN sits outside Indian Act band requirements, and is founded in Haida Law, with the responsibility to protect the land and sea, and work toward the complete sovereignty of the Haida Nation.

The creation of the CHN outside of Canadian or Provincial State regulations is indicative of the approach that the Haida have taken, and continue to take, to “just do it”, and let the State catch up when/if they can.



Terri-Lynn William-Davidson, Gid7ahl-Gudslaay Lalaxaaygans Gaadal-dyas, Principal and Senior Legal Counsel at White Raven Law, and General Counsel of the Council of the Haida Nation. Photo by Aaron Hemens

Some of the early actions of the CHN included the delineating of 14 protected areas across Haida Gwaii, that would be protected from logging and other industrial development. There was success in protecting Athlii Gwaay, Lyell Island, following prolonged protest and land defense. This movement brought together all Haida, but Terri-Lynn notes it also was a turning point in recognizing the need to work with non-Haida community members. There was a realization that loggers were part of the community of Haida Gwaii as well, therefore, solutions needed to be found in working together.

The relationships across Haida and settlers have become so strong that Terri-Lynn notes that settler populations have become more confident about the Haida's governance and management of lands than the State. The Haida have worked closely with regional governments to develop protocol agreements, so that relationships are established, and there is mutual respect and understanding across parties. This strengthens regional level governance and creates more buy-in and support from settler regional governments.

"Like the forests, the roots of our people are intertwined such that the greatest troubles cannot overcome us."



3.2.2 A Two-Pronged Approach: Negotiation and Litigation

Next, Terri-Lynn highlighted the Haida two-pronged approach to secure jurisdictional authority over their lands: negotiation and litigation. For the Haida, negotiation has taken the form of several agreements with both federal and provincial levels of government.

Litigation is marked by several court cases, including most prominently the 2004 decision that identified the States duty to consult and accommodate. Terri-Lynn highlighted the litigation win in September 2025 that recognized Haida title to lands. Now, the Haida are shifting focus to recognition of title to waters and oceans.

3.2.3 Incorporating Legal Orders, Stories, Dreams, and Supernatural Beings

*"Under Haida oral narratives we were born from the **oceans**... we literally came from the ocean. Therefore, the idea of how oceans work is really important for understanding our framing of **Indigenous laws**."*

The rest of the presentation began to reflect on the implementation of Haida Laws in Governance. Haida laws are reflected in eco-system-based management principles. Terri-Lynn quoted John Borrows, Indigenous "laws may be regarded as literally being written on the earth", extending this understanding to waters as well. She further highlighted additional sources of Indigenous law include ceremony, art, dreams, songs, speeches, forests, and oceans. She highlighted how supernatural beings can support evidence of occupation, helping to prove title across landscapes; and to find the laws, they go back to the ocean to understand what needs to be done.

As indicated by Terri-Lynn in her concluding thoughts, the Haida have demonstrated that the protection of lands can be done while working together in respectful relationships, upholding Haida legal traditions. She stated that the implementation of Indigenous law in environmental management is the future of Canada, there is just a need for leaders who are willing to take on this work that often seems impossible.

*"We need to shift from a rights perspective to a responsibilities perspective. Not what you have to do, but doing things out of **love**. Responsibilities are felt in your **heart**."*

3.3 Moving from Vision to Action in Syilx Territories

At the beginning of Day 1, participants were brought from the past to the future with Dr. Jeanette Armstrong, and asked to view our relationship with siw̓tkw as a spiritual endeavor. This was reinforced at the end of Day 1 with Gwen Bridge sharing about the ethical space framework and how ceremony needs to be included in our work. Throughout the day panelists shared their expertise on collaboration, leadership, climate and water to build our collective understanding.



From left: Dr. Aaron Derickson, professor of Indigenous Studies at UBC Okanagan; Mayor Julius Bloomfield, City of Penticton; Deborah Curran, Professor, University of Victoria, Faculty of Law & School of Environmental Studies, Executive Director, Environmental Law Centre, Researcher in Water Law, Governance & Indigenous Law; Terry-Lynn Williams-Davidson, Gid7ahl-Gudslaay Lalaxaaygans Gaadal-dyas, Principal and Senior Legal Counsel at White Raven Law, and General Counsel of the Council of the Haida Nation; Gwen Bridge, a member of Saddle Lake Cree Nation and CEO of Gwen Bridge Consulting ; Dr. Nuria Hernandez-Mora, a Senior Policy Expert and Consultant with Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua / Fresh Thoughts Consulting, based in Madrid, Spain. Photo by Aaron Hemens

On Day 2 we learned from a global to a local context, about Spain allocating water scarcity through policy, to Haida Nation and their laws being sourced from the land, ocean, and ecosystems. With all of this learning, knowledge sharing, and reflection, this report now moves into the next steps for the CLT. Participants reflected in groups to discuss their ideas and actions from the two days, and how their perspectives have shifted. The below visual summarizes what was shared, and guides us towards next steps for the CLT.

Shifting Perspective on Water

In addition to seeing water as a sacred relative, participants called for a fundamental shift in the management of water from a rights-based framework to a responsibility-based one. Participants spoke of the potential of legal rights for water bodies.

"Shift from a rights perspective to responsibility"

Indicator Species as Guides

Species-led watershed planning was identified as a management solution, letting indicator species like salmon, cray fish, and cottonwood tell us what the water needs. Listening to and monitoring what the water and its species are communicating can strengthen management of water.

"The fish will tell us"

Education and Communication

Education was identified as a critical level, helping non-Indigenous communities understand the objectives and roles of all parties in the 250-year plan. Also, transparent and publically available data, and on the land teaching were identified as important aspects of strengthening community education on water.

"Communication and information sharing is vital for planning and success"

Proactive Planning

Participants called for a shift from reactive emergency management to proactive, long-term planning. Drought should be managed as a risk, not an emergency. Participants identified the 250-year Action Plan as a good place to begin to incorporate proactive risk management.

"Shift from crisis management to proactive planning"

Syilx Law and Governance

Syilx laws, protocols and governance frameworks should lead and inform water management, beyond just consultation. Participants called for governance structures that respect and exercise Indigenous law; bridging Indigenous and Western law as complementary, not competing.

"Support recognition of and exercise of Syilx water law in Syilx territory"

Relationships as the Foundation

Building relationships between communities, peoples, and water was identified as the overarching theme of the forum by participants. Relationship building is a precondition for planning and action. We must move away from traditional, individualized, and siloed governance systems.

"Connection drives responsibility. People who feel connected to water and land take care of it"

Next Steps for the CLT

Based on the presentations, discussions, and panels, **several key next steps have emerged**. The following table highlight these actions, categorizing them under overarching themes and related timelines.

Theme	Action	Timeline (short/medium/long)
Strengthening Collaborative Governance	Incorporate an ethical space/two-eyed seeing approach to support non-human centric decision making.	
	Support working together across Syilx and non-Syilx communities, understanding everyone as a part of a shared community.	
	Build additional regional-governance level relationships and management processes, including transboundary relationships.	
	Build continuity into governance structures.	

Continued on the next page

	Include work hours for staff/employees to spend time on the land to build deeper relations with each other and with place.	
	Reduce jurisdictional and institutional siloes by building connectivity across governance bodies and partners.	
	Focus initial action on 5 – 10 issues that are agreed upon across the CLT.	
	Extend invitation to CLT to NGO's, and neighbourhood associations, such as Waterkeeper organizations and the Society for the Protection of Kalamalka Lake	
	Ensure partners of CLT are educated and support recognition of and exercise of Syilx law in Syilx territory.	
	Ask municipal candidates whether they will sign onto the Syilx water declaration.	
Policy Advocacy	Take regional level data and attach it to action and policy reform, advocating to the province.	
	Advocate for provincial level change to water licensing policy and legislation.	
	Advocate to provincial and federal government the impacts of new developments on water policy.	
	Advocacy for restoration and/or redress of past wrongs, including impacts of pesticides such as DDT, and damming of waterways.	
	Advocacy to industries on issues such as forest fire prevention and protection of headwaters/snowpack.	
	Advocacy for individual/ community level practices of permaculture, rain harvesting, and composting to support drought resilience.	
Learning from Non-human Kin	Give animals, fish, riparian zones and water personhood and legal rights.	

	Develop monitoring approaches that listen to indicator species- like crayfish- to understand flows, temperature, and water quality i.e. What does crayfish tell us about flows, temperature etc., how can we listen to crayfish?	
	Thought exercise: Water says I must remain clean. If that is an understanding from Indigenous knowledge and law, what would it mean to take these directives, and reform those internal policies to meet those directives?	
Incorporating Syilx Law	Bring in Syilx language to inform processes and procedures.	
	Inform management practices and governance of the CLT through Syilx lands, waters, laws, ceremony, art, dreams, songs, etc. I.e. grounded in the governance of the location.	
	Bring back gathering/governance structures traditionally used by Syilx in modern format i.e. powwow	
	Centre the understanding that our work with water is spiritual work, grounded in relationship.	
	Practice reciprocity, listening and learning from each other, requiring mutual responsibility.	
Whole-of-Watershed Planning	Develop resilient drought management plans for all communities of a pre-determined size (i.e., over 20,000 members)	
	Include within the watershed planning process sub-watershed committees.	
	Include within the planning process general membership meetings for Nations for information gathering and research.	
	Establish shared watershed goals with set timelines.	

	Review the EU Clean Drinking Water directive and identify how it can be translated into this watershed context.	
	Develop or review emergency management plans for communities, including flood and fire management plans. Ensure these processes are proactive, not reactive.	
	Develop and identify community action items that can be implemented at the community and/or individual level.	
	Ensure whole-of-watershed planning includes all water bodies (headwaters, springs, lakes, rivers, snowpack, high waters etc.).	
	Develop and strengthen public consultation processes for watershed planning.	
	Ensure watershed planning takes a species-led approach, planning through the lens of keystone species like salmon.	
Monitoring, Data & Research	Develop indicators that monitor health by the success of keystone species like salmon, crayfish, cottonwood.	
	Attach thresholds and triggers to species indicators.	
	Monitor the source of impact, including what is being put into the water and the impacts of forestry and mining	
	Develop or adopt community-level apps that collect community-based monitoring data	
	Increase monitoring of ground water and wells.	
	Improve fresh water and spawning water monitoring programs for both water quality and quantity.	
	Increase meteorological monitoring.	

	Make monitoring specific to regions as determined in management plans.	
Land, Water & Ecological Restoration	Support community food sovereignty initiatives through understanding of seasonal patterns, restoration of salmon populations, permaculture and composting practices.	
	Create a program to restore cottonwood and river systems together, ensure restoration work uses native plants.	
	Construct & implement fish ladders for a natural means for the salmon to return to spawn.	
Relationship to Land & Water	Foster a shared sense of responsibility for the land among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.	
	Rebuild Indigenous Knowledge within ourselves to transform our own thinking.	
	Connect and build relationships personally to the land and water i.e. physically, through stories, time spent together and, on the land.	
	Learn the river where you come from as a means of building connection beyond your immediate family.	
	Establish culture camps to support land-based connection and knowledge transmission.	
	Revitalize Syilx fishing culture and ceremonies.	
	Partner organizations can include work hours for staff/employees to spend more time on the land to rebuild relationships.	
Education & Knowledge Sharing	Work with school districts (high school and colleges) to develop water curriculum. This could include water scarcity planning, importance of responsibility, reciprocity, and building ethical space.	
	Develop education on fires relationship with	

	the land and how it supports water.	
	Develop education for communities on the importance of water, "Once People Know they can't unknow." This could include the hydrological cycle, role of wetlands, need for cool/clean waters, keystone species, and scarcity planning.	
	Develop education for communities on drought plans, thresholds, triggers, etc. to get community buy in, and ensure the community knows what to expect and what to do next in case of drought.	
	Suggest Indigenous workshops for municipal administrators / city clerks.	
	Develop education on the impacts of lawns and benefits of transitioning to native plants.	
	Develop education through visibility, like video live streams of rivers and animals.	
Communication & Outreach	Develop a clear process for communicating data collected to communities.	
	Ensure communication of the 250 year plan is about everyone and affects everyone, that it isn't just for the salmon or the First Nations.	
	Communicate with the broader community on what the CLT does.	
	Support public outreach campaigns annually to ensure we listen to people, to inform water management and stewardship.	
	Support community engagement to understand how can we better incorporate Syilx knowledge	
	Build a circular communication structure with technical staff, nurses, gatherers, children and elders all informing the message that leaders can convey to decision-makers.	
Arts & Culture for	Tell stories and complex ideas in interesting	

Storytelling	and accessible ways through the arts i.e. use buildings to spread message, billboards, Penticton Arts Council, colouring pages, Siwlkween Arts	
Other	Develop financial grants for youth to recognize their efforts regarding our watershed	
	For Syilx People: Understand the process of how Indigenous Knowledge was acquired and pass on this process component (as well as the IK), so IK does not stay stagnant.	
	Build trust in IK as true regardless of western corroboration	

Appendix

5.1 Appendix 1: Participant Reflections

This information was gathered from Slido responses on the Post Forum Survey.

What was your favourite part of the siwłk^w Water & Climate Forum?

- I was so impressed with the quality of speakers, it was exciting to see how many women are taking the stage with quality presentations
- I liked learning about the spiritual connection with water and seeing people from different organizations and backgrounds. I'm new to this and there is so much I have to learn. I liked when we had time to discuss amongst our table(s). Also, Elliot was awesome, and Jordan too.
- Elder prayers
- The cultural and relational elements – prayers, drumming, water ceremony, plants and trees in the room then gifted at the end, which all fostered creating a deeply relational environment.
- The keynote from Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson was the most engaging. I also really liked the opportunities to chat about topics within groups/tables.
- The energy and overall commitment of all attendees, presenters and knowledge holders to continue moving forward with renewed focus and a clear path for collaboration. We need to work across diverse ways of knowing and being.
- Presentations of Dr. Nuria Hernández-Mora (Spain) – since 1952 the hard work to maintain safe drinking water for 27 countries in the European Management

Resource (1982–1986), maintaining quality using micro-organisms under very strict measures over quantity, with 6-year cycles to harmonize all countries... very impressive and knowledgeable speaker within the time frame given.

- Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson, K.C. (White Raven) opening with song emotionally touching. Historical information on how they became their own government since 1974 and protectors of Haida Gwaii, specifically of the water systems – both fresh and ocean waters. Took 25 years for Haida and government to agree on joint management (1993–2025), and by 2021 Haida Gwaii had their government status
- The presentations were excellent and within a short time frame – very knowledgeable presenters... so thankful to be in attendance (learning curve!).
- Connecting and taking time to consider *siwłk^w* in the mind-space created by the forum. Learning from new entities and perspectives.
- Learning from the experiences and knowledge shared by the speakers from Spain and Haida Gwaii. It's really great to be able to see what can be accomplished and learn from successes so as to avoid reinventing the wheel.
- I loved the integration of cultural practices and ceremony with the sessions and the mixture of panels with keynote speakers.
- Learning about the collaboration between the local Nation leaders and local governments.
- The water ceremony!
- I liked that it was a blend of urgency, humour, and humility. I left feeling empowered despite the depressing nature of many of the studies and research.
- Amazing depth of speakers!! Loved the morning prayer on Tuesday.
- It's hard to identify just one favourite part as each session offered something meaningful and unique. I especially appreciated the final session, the panel's closing reflections were thoughtful, grounding, and brought the themes of the forum together in a powerful way. I do regret that I wasn't able to attend the Water Ceremony. I heard wonderful feedback from others about how moving and impactful the experience was, and I would have valued being part of it.
- My favourite part was the keynote speakers by Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson and Gwen Bridge. Their presentation on Indigenous governance perspective was very informative and needed! And of course, Jeannette Armstrong – her *syilx* perspectives are deep and inspiring with a wealth of knowledge!
- The MC. Aaron was engaging and kept us on track. He did an amazing job of framing the guests and chats with such energy and enthusiasm.
- Ample time for networking and connection was wonderful! I enjoyed the Action Lab as it allowed for renewed energy and reflection time before leaving the conference setting. Both Gwen & Terri-Lynn's keynotes were fantastic. Gwen spoke with such power and rationality.
- I really enjoyed the afternoon panel session on day 1 that featured short

presentations from Samantha Pham, John Janmaat, Kelly Johnston and Richard Bussanich. I appreciated them sharing their knowledge and in particular I thought Kelly was an excellent speaker.

- The speakers were excellent. I appreciated the wide range of topics and backgrounds and the way everything was tied together. I also appreciated the presentations on Haida Gwaii and Spain's approach to scarcity.
- I enjoyed the collaboration between many different stakeholders including educators, FN, municipalities, and so many more. It was so inspiring to see how many people care about our climate and our water. I really enjoyed the water ceremony at the lake. It felt like we were all a part of something bigger that morning.

Please share your reflections on the entire 2-day forum. What, if anything, feels different for you now?

- I think the complexity of water management has made me realize how much initiative people must have on their own to do better. Again, I am new to this and I am having a hard time seeing or understanding how change can be made at a high level with all the moving parts and players in water management.
- I now have a better understanding of my responsibility for water and the need to educate others on their responsibilities.
- I feel cautiously hopeful and also excited upon hearing about the formation of the CLT and from some of the speakers on very specific topics such as dealing with water scarcity and the Haida Gwaii advancements for governance and self-determination. As a settler, the cautious part is re: the settler governments continuing working on the 250-year plan. The no deterioration principal resonated with me (and with those around me), and discussion arose on that, which I found inspiring. Youth being present was critical. As Amanda Shatzko reflected, younger generations are willing to be active and involved. Responsibility is a word she keeps hearing. The younger generations are where I feel the most hopeful, because they are not learning the lies that older generations did and they are energized to do good.
- It felt like a good beginning... learning that the CLT is in place, the knowledge shared, and having discussion on where people feel called to connect to support the work. I am very keen to attend the next forum to hear updates on progress and how we are all supporting the work. I really enjoyed that there was lots of time to network and really listen to people and have meaningful conversations, not just pleasantries.
- What feels different... with the 250-year water plan being a focus, it goes beyond the usual timeline boundaries that are forced on leaders with election cycles and thus can gain and maintain momentum in a good way. The energy and vibe in the

room was positive and I got the feeling that the majority of attendants are invested in the plan working.

- The clear sense that there is a real commitment from key individuals in both the Indigenous and settler communities to truly work together, side by side, to ensure water security for all. Plants, animals and humans.
- Renewed hope in our ability to make a difference. That no one is alone, there is a strong community of support that is progressive and open to applying cumulative knowledge and the principle of reciprocity to get to where we need to be. The shift from emphasis on Rights to a Responsibility provides needed clarity when collaborating with others.
- Yes – the prayers and songs to open and close the day, prayers for the meals. My hands go up to young women and team to organize this forum, always great to hear Chief Robert Louie, very clear messages and honoring everyone!
- I am inspired to challenge myself to do more for conservation and *siwtk^w* in new ways and with new perspectives.
- I appreciated seeing many elected officials participating. It is important to move beyond “preaching to the converted” and instead encourage those to attend who don’t normally think about water.
- I have a clearer sense that right relations and responsibility are the principles that should guide my work be it related to reconciliation, climate change, etc.
- Enjoyed that many of the speakers were educated women and that some were Indigenous women who are leaders in their fields.
- I think there was a lot of information and opportunity to network, but I would have liked to see *sylix* biologists/microbiologists/scientists present.
- The flow of the days were balanced and well-timed. MC Aaron did a great job of leading throughout. The Slido app was engaging and it was satisfying that many people were participating.
- That was my first time at a *sylix*-led and Indigenous-led forum and the difference I noticed compared to a non-Indigenous forum is that it truly led with the heart. Time and care was taken with speaking and with stories. In response, the energy of the attendees was palpable.
- I better understand my role in the work, even when things feel too big to tackle. My connection with all living beings feels stronger.
- I’m leaving the forum with a renewed and expanded understanding of the value of water.
- The discussions helped me see even more clearly how essential it is to approach water policy with an awareness of scarcity and long-term sustainability. Rather than focusing only on present-day needs, and/or reactionary actions it feels increasingly important to shape decisions that honour water as a precious and finite resource, one that will be seen as healthy and available to future generations (250 years and beyond).

- I also want to acknowledge how engaged the participants were throughout the conference. The level of curiosity, openness, and thoughtful dialogue created a genuinely meaningful learning environment. The welcoming tone set by the organizers, reinforced by everyone in the room, made it easy to participate, reflect, and learn from one another particularly in the breakout forums where diverse perspectives were shared with respect, and where the commitment to collective learning was truly felt. (PS: loved the living stage setting, and the plant swag)
- It is good to see that there is an 'Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table' at the regional level. I hope to see great action coming from this leadership table in protecting water and make some regulation influence at the provincial and federal level. I enjoyed their riverside chat. It is good to see relationships develop to move forward in a good way. The difference, there is hope for water!
- Deeper appreciation of how important water is. Always respected the lands, water, sky. Happy to hear we are getting closer to working together on this journey. It's always great to link and share stories with others who feel similar pride and passion in what they do. It can be easy to get stuck in your own cycle with what your job directly relates to, and it's great to bring that broader perspective through things like this.
- As I already believed and championed, I have a renewed sense of belief that Indigenous knowledge and law needs to lead the way.
- Wonderful to have so many people from different backgrounds and professions in attendance to share ideas and collaborate. Very well organized.
- This was an excellent forum, which was run beautifully. It was excellent to learn about the Collaborative Leadership Table and the great work that is happening with the siwtkw Water team.
- It was really inspiring to find out information I didn't know. I really liked that some presenter provided reading material to further our knowledge on these topics. I left feeling more of a sense of purpose in what I do as an environmental consultant.

5.2 Appendix 2: Emerging and Unanswered Questions

This information has been gathered from slido and sticky notes, and covers both days of the conference.

5.2.1 *Is there anything specific you would like to learn more about? (Slido)*

- I would like to learn more and be involved in promoting public education on this very important topic
- I have so much to learn. I would like to hear more of the successes (big and small) of water protection/restoration.
- Ethical space, Indigenous history and beliefs
- I saw the list of signatories to the agreement. Is there one or more representatives from all 19 Syilx Nation and Local Government signatories actively engaged or just the people that were in the Waterside Chat panel? Is the work of encouraging more signatories to stay within the CLT, working groups and coordinating team?
- It would have been great to have some form of outdoor teaching component (other than wonderful lakeside ceremony) – like a keynote that shows the fish, rivers, impact etc.
- Forestry Standards for Protecting Riparian Zones and water channels – currently using Ktunaxa Standards in our work – do Syilx Okanagan have standards available?
- Would like more information on Nuria H. Mora, on the micro-organisms used to clean water?
- How the Collaborative Leadership Table will move these ideas forward. The governance processes that will be established to help support bringing ideas to the members of the CLT and then how we can action those ideas via the members.
- I would love to learn more about ethical space creation – how to host conversations to develop principles that are shared and that would guide our work.
- There was many brief mention of forestry but would like to see how this will fit into Forest Landscape Plans (FLPs) being developed in Syilx territory and some of the cumulative effects of the different industries working within Syilx territory.
- Syilx-specific water knowledge / water management strategies
- Influencing municipalities to make changes that support siwɬk
- How to better educate the public
- Small actions
- Keeping up on regional research
- What the next step for the 250-year plan is and looks like
- I would like to increase my understanding of the key learnings shared by the panel members, especially around how communities are successfully integrating traditional knowledge into their water and climate strategies. I'm particularly interested in where these approaches continue to show success over time, what's working well, how those practices are being sustained, and what lessons might be transferable to other regions
- I was really inspired with Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson's presentation on the

longstanding government-to-government agreements and how the Haida Nation have been developing these from their Indigenous governance perspective. I would really appreciate her PowerPoint if it is available. I would like to have Gwen Bridge's PowerPoint too. This would be most appreciated!

- What part does provincial government play in working together. I am a 27-year Provincial Government employee who has worked in Water for WLRS for over 6 years. I respect my employer and feel like we have a part to share to the audience as well.
- As with the Without Water symposium hosted last June in the Elk Valley, this Forum allowed people to spark ideas and discuss new ways of working. I always struggle with how to translate that momentum into actionable outcomes that people can take away. I'd love to learn how you take learnings on board and incorporate them into work in the coming months!
- In general, I would say that I like to learn from the water practitioners who are involved in monitoring, restoration, modelling, and education/behaviour change. It is too bad that Adrian Arts couldn't be part of the panel on day 1 as I would have really liked to hear a perspective on water from the agriculture sector.
- I think the riverside chats could have benefited from a provincial representative given the collaborative work currently undertaken with Syilx communities and regional governments. Perhaps including industry in these discussions would also have been useful (or more time for questions/answers).
- Economics of drought and fire
- Fire effects on water quality and quantity within watershed
- Are there ways for citizens to volunteer to help programs such as these?
- How can we help protect our watershed?
- Monitoring programs, etc.
- If the whole environmental community could raise up a single, unified message to crown government, what would you like to hear?

5.2.2 From Experience to Insight Panelist Questions (Slido)

- Hydrometric stations are good but flow records are what we are really after. What can you tell us about the length of the data record for the stations?
- What policy changes on water licenses are required to support this work?
- How are you all or local organizations communicating drought and flood events and risk to the public? I have heard lots of dismissal of drought concerns due to lake levels being controlled by dams.
- How many stations (or % of stations) are dedicated groundwater monitoring nodes?
- What does a drought level index mean to you? Is it a warning or a discussion point?

- What are some ways for non-Indigenous citizens to be good allies on these issues?
What is Salmon's job throughout the Columbia River system including the Okanagan?
- What steps are these collaboration groups working on to help make effective change for examples such as forest practices codes, water licensing and improved water quality for watershed approaches?
How can private land owners go about working with Syilx knowledge keepers to better manage the forests and natural areas?
- What are the general trends historically overtime that you see in terms of salmon abundance, water level, and surface temperature in Okanagan waterways (or perhaps in the nursery lakes)?
If we cannot plant native cottonwood trees on the channel, can we please help to cool the water in the channel for the salmon between Skaha and Okanagan lakes by installing shade awnings over unshaded areas?
- Have salmon adapted to the warmer temperatures at all? Or are climate changes happening too fast?
- What would be some best practices to support salmon conservation from private land owners?
- Beyond awareness of the consequences of warming water temperatures, what can citizens do as part of their daily lives to be part of solution?
- What are the current policy asks folks are bringing to crown government that we can amplify as an environmental community?
- How do we best control water temperatures during heat cycles?
- Why are there no Syilx biologists on this panel?
- What public educational materials can be shared out by the various governments?
- We need to consider what water justice/injustice looks like. How do we look at water law beyond extraction?
-

5.2.3 Climate Risk Panelist Questions (Slido)

- Why aren't fire keepers more active in the Okanagan?
- What's being put forward this year as what are some actions locally we can do now for fire & water mitigation?
- Ontario has bought houses along waterways to create greenways, giving space for rivers to move so riparian habitat to absorb water fluctuations and trap sediment. How can we facilitate purchase of riparian areas in BC?
- Has there been any advances in the contents of retardant materials dumped? Such that they are not only planning to reduce fire impact but also consider the after effect of the chemicals dumped and vegetation restoration. For example

has there been consideration for supplementing chemical retardant with mushroom and their spores in addition to other native specie vegetative seeds to help successive regrowth.

- Is there any carbon monitoring work happening pre and post wildfire in the Okanagan? Wetland or forest
- George talked about the importance of a robust hydrometric network to ensure good data for equitable water allocation. Currently there is no regulatory requirement for monitoring consumption of existing water licences. How can the hydrometric studies influence equitable water allocation when there is no control of the water actually being consumed? My question should be how can forums like this direct/ influence the Province to implement meaningful change?
- Is the climate risk panel involved in the Forest Landscape Planning (FLP) to help with implementing information on watershed management with regards to forestry

5.2.4 Gwen Bridge Questions (Slido)

- How do private companies approach reconciliation on their own rather than depending on regional and provincial governments?
- Is there a way to convert our medicines, foods, plants, resources into natural capital? For example, to show how much we as indigenous people are suffering from bad decisions made
- What does ethical space look like in the context of water stewardship?

5.2.5 Riverside Panelist Questions (Slido)

- What action will you take to stop outside developers from taking up more land base which increases demands on freshwater in our areas?
- Take the OSCLT on the road meeting the greater community via town hall meetings.
- In order to learn and make informed decisions youth and all generations need to be learning with us how will this be implemented in this 250 year plan? This will ensure knowledge sharing and transfer over multiple generations.
- The 4 year election cycle has negative impacts on both continuity and long-term thinking (short term pain for long term gain is hard when it means someone else will get elected and change policy). Without resorting to dictators how do you think we can promote long-term thinking and continuity?
- What are the top three priorities of this leadership table in the next 5 years, and how can we as a water community support these priorities?
- What is the biggest challenge you are facing at the table and how is this being addressed?
- What's next? What specific actions we can undertake this year?

- How are we going to have the government of today to truly look at the forest and retention zones that have been destroyed from logging these plateau areas that are so important to these systems we are trying to protect?
- What expectations should be placed on private agricultural producers, and how can they realistically contribute to this water vision?
- What qualities will you look for in a candidate to replace you when your term(s) are up? To carry on the 250 year plan
- Is the 250-year plan being used in current decision-making? For example, are there any stories of how regional and municipal policy includes and considers the plan created by the Collaborative Leadership Table?
- Are any local currently operating mine industry representatives included in local short and/or long term discussions about our sacred siw^hk^w?
- How do we profoundly change our governance model from growth, development and profit to building out from our need to protect and maintain our Watersheds, basins, courses and wetlands.
- When and how will the Table engage with the Province and Federal governments.
- Water is taken for granted and over allocated by the B.C. Government largely for increasing economic development. How do we ensure that provincial decision makers are involved in inclusive reforms for sustainable water governance?
- What is being done to get city of Kelowna and west kelowna to join this table?
- How can we work together on a technical level to share data, observations and environmental insights? With so many communities doing their own independent work, can the collaborative table work as a catchment for broader data management?
- How do we educate newer politicians to the need to protect and collaborate forever?

5.2.6 Nuria Questions (Slido)

- Can you share more about how the Water Framework directive maintains strong citizen involvement?
- Here in BC tax payers more often than not foot the bill for the environmental degradation resulting from industrial activities such as mining because bonds are rarely sufficient. Under the shared principals of the EU how was the "polluter pays" principal implemented?
- For people don't see water scarcity as a social construct, how can we help them unlearn and relearn this way of understanding it?
- Can you provide some colour to the discussion about trade-offs between measuring and maintaining water levels for environmental flows and water used for human consumptive and non-consumptive uses.
- I would like to know more about how scarcity is allocated and distributed?

- What happens in drought conditions
- Need data on water use in ok/similkameen over years & increase of population & development of more housing!! How. Much water is taken out by water bottle businesses as well!
- Is there a strategy for holding politicians accountable to the directive?
- Is water bottled & allowed to be exported under water license usage?
- Curious if there is any data that can show the reasoning for the groundwater quality being surprisingly better than surface water? Are there natural biological filters assisting with this process that can prove natural water ways are crucial to ground water quality as opposed to human imposed, possibly synthetic filtering options?
- Tell us what they do for/under "water scarcity " actions?
- Who regulates drinking water quality?
- Is storage of water considered a means to reduce water scarcity?
- Can you share about how drought is natural and recurrent.
- In order to supply water to cities, is irrigation of agriculture shut down? Is the loss of production sustainable or are growers shutting down?
- Can you talk to the process of developing and approving drought plans? How are EFs considered? Who authors the plans? How are conflicts among users managed?
- How is the allocation of scarcity during a drought actually enforced and monitored? Does it rely on individual water licence holders complying or is these government oversight to ensure compliance? Is there real time data on flows and extractions to support this?
- Waste water treatment and the transport and application of biosolids are becoming a real threat due to the high concentration of PFAS and PFOAs. Particularly on Similkameen ALR and via mine restoration work. How is Spain and/or the EU dealing with their waste in an effort to ensure healthy drinking water for all?
- Can you please speak to how water is allocated in Spain, especially if there is an effort to address scarcity by re-allocating water access based on sustainability principles? In B.C. there is a historic 1st in time 1st in right colonial legal principle that has prevented the government from taking back water allocations or re-allocating to more important uses.
- Is there a way to allow for critical mineral development without throwing out the EU law around non-degradation?
- The status of water slide shows so much change 2021-2027. Is this due to climate change?
- What kind of funding model exists to support the framework and the work that needs to be done to comply with the directive? What happens if a country cannot or does not comply?

- When you say Spain can't use fish as health indicator for water bodies, are you saying no fish would survive in those lakes and streams?
- What are the fish of concern in your part of Spain? Are fish or ecology part of the measures there?
- When you speak about the cost of water and equitable cost share, how is the risk of water being considered a commodity or cost of doing business managed?

5.2.7 Other Questions Throughout Conference

- For non-Indigenous peoples, Is our work helping Silk communities heal relationships to lands and waters?
- What are new forms of silk law and new relationships that can inform water management.
- What does crayfish tell us about flows, temperature etc., how can we listen to crayfish?
- What does responsibility to water mean to each of us? What would do no harm, or taking care of principle and laws as taught by the food chiefs mean in the Okanagan watersheds?
- What does respect, restraint and reciprocity look like?
- Have talked about different locations and work being done, how can we understand what needs to be done under different conditions, and create new management approaches that direct our actions into the future?



Westbank First Nation Coun. ċris Jordan Coble offers a closing drum song at the Water and Climate Forum in ki?lawnā? (Kelowna) on March 24. Among those pictured are fellow signatories of a regional water agreement — including Okanagan Indian Band Coun. Tim Isaac, Vernon Coun. Brian Guy, Penticton Mayor Julius Bloomfield, Lake Country Mayor Blair Ireland, and Sue McKortoff, Mayor of Osoyoos. **Photo by Aaron Hemens**

End of Report

July, 2026

