

THE NORTH ABERDEEN PLATEAU GUIDANCE PLAN



August 2025

Developed by the Okanagan Indian Band,
the Regional District of North Okanagan,
and the District of Lake Country

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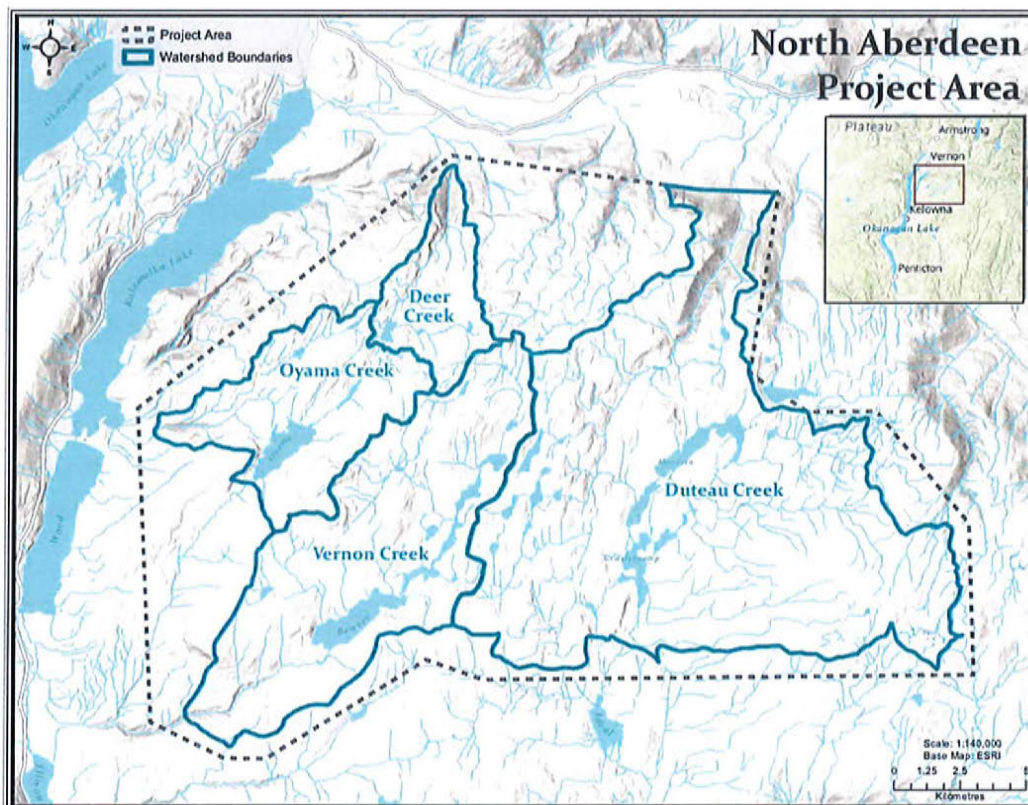
THE NORTH ABERDEEN PLATEAU

The North Aberdeen Plateau lies within *Syilx* territory, where the Okanagan Indian Band represents and upholds *Syilx* interests and values. The area holds significant cultural heritage importance for the *Syilx* People.

The Okanagan Indian Band people have maintained a deep, sacred connection to these lands and waters since time immemorial. Responsibilities include stewarding their lands, safeguarding water sources, protecting cultural sites, and ensuring the well-being of community members. This obligation is non-negotiable and intrinsic to their existence as *Syilx* people.

The plateau serves as a crucial water source for Lake Country and the Greater Vernon Area encompassing the Duteau Creek, Vernon Creek (Beaver Lake), King Edward and Oyama Watersheds. All told, many British Columbians rely on the water from this plateau for their sustenance, livelihoods and culture.

The North Aberdeen Plateau faces significant threats from climate change – including wildfire, drought, and extreme weather – as well as resource extraction and land development pressures. These risks could have catastrophic consequences for water sources, drinking and agricultural water supply, the regional economy and the overall way of life for residents.



This urgency drives the creation of the North Aberdeen Plateau Guidance Plan which outlines our vision, objectives for water security, stewardship and governance, and the necessary context for successfully integrating watershed and wildfire resilience efforts.

WHO WE ARE

We are a collaborative partnership that includes the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB), the Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO) and the District of Lake Country (DLC).

The RDNO owns and operates the Greater Vernon Water Utility, the third largest water supplier in British Columbia by volume. The Greater Vernon Water Utility provides domestic water to approximately 71,000 people and agricultural water to approximately 3,000 hectares of serviced land. The DLC provides domestic water to 12,000 people and agricultural water to approximately 1,200 hectares of serviced land. The North Aberdeen Plateau hosts much of the source water and infrastructure for these essential services.

As water purveyors, the RDNO and DLC are legally accountable for the provision of safe drinking water under the *Drinking Water Protection Act*; and yet RDNO and DLC do not have any legal authority to address activities on the land base that would affect that accountability.

The North Aberdeen Plateau is central to Indigenous rights, title and the cultural heritage¹ of the *Syilx People* and as such, the Okanagan Indian Band community has deep connections and responsibility for the stewardship of this area. The *Syilx People* have never ceded their indigenous rights and title and the time has come to take up their inherent authority to steward the lands and waters. The *Syilx People* are the Okanagan Nation with seven member communities in British Columbia - the Okanagan Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, Penticton Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Upper and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands, and Westbank First Nation. Members share common land, *nsyilxcən* language, culture, and customs, all of which honor the natural laws of the *tmixʷ* – *that which gives us life*.

Our alignment in ensuring water security for present and future generations is strong. Over the years, we have collaborated on watershed assessments, wildfire risk assessments, and recommendations to protect source water, drinking water, agricultural water and cultural heritage values.

While we each hold distinct accountabilities – OKIB for stewardship, RDNO and DLC for safe water provision – our shared goal is to protect water security and cultural heritage for future generations. This collaboration positions us to influence provincial decisions addressing the threats we face.

There is a palpable tension between acting immediately to reduce climate change risks and the need to gather data and build trust for effective decision making.

¹ Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe of the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. Source: OKIB Website

Our work cannot be completed effectively without the cooperation of provincial decision makers. That is why our partnership (OKIB, RDNO, DLC) has developed this Guidance Plan. The Plan will inform our conduct, invite collaboration and guide us toward shared decision-making with the Province.

OUR VISION

We come together with a profound sense of responsibility and urgency. The North Aberdeen Plateau faces threats that endanger cultural identity, water access, food security, livelihoods, and recreational opportunities.

Climate change, drought, extreme weather events and wildfire risks jeopardize our water, land, and cultural heritage values. That's why we believe that the current management regime must shift. Our vision is to deliver:

- **Water Security:** Our water sources, water infrastructure, and cultural identity are under threat. Water security means that we recognize that ***"without water, there is no life"***. We must ensure that future generations have access to clean, abundant water.
- **Stewardship and Governance:** We will develop a governance approach that prioritizes local knowledge and influence. We will establish mechanisms for a collective approach to stewardship and governance that reflects our values and respects our rights. ***"We take care of the land - the land takes care of us."***

We are dedicated to a sustainable future for all natural resources in the North Aberdeen Plateau. By focusing on water security, stewardship and governance, we safeguard the broader ecosystem, the cultural identity of Syilx people and the communities we serve.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our work for the North Aberdeen Plateau is guided by the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table Memorandum of Agreement signed November 2024 and associated Terms of Reference dated April 24, 2025.

These documents reflect a broad arrangement between the Syilx Nation and Local Governments *"to protect and restore siwlk" in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds, now and for future generations*".

The following principles are intended to guide us in the work.

1. **LOCAL LENS – A PLACE-BASED APPROACH:** We aim to collaborate with the Province to implement shared decision-making processes that situate us, engage us, value us, and inspire us to be involved so we can effectively meet our accountabilities to community members. We aim to build an equitable relationship among all partners, ensuring that *Syilx People's* voices and perspectives are amplified and central in all decisions.
2. **ECOSYSTEM HEALTH FOCUS:** Adopt a perspective that prioritizes the overall health and resilience of the ecosystem, recognizing the interconnectedness of the land, the waters, the plants, the animals, and people that contribute to community resilience. As part of this work, we aim to implement restoration activities that remediate high-risk impacts on water and integrate restoration activities as an integral part of stewardship.
3. **7 GENERATIONS PRINCIPLE:** The 7 generations principle urges us to make decisions with the long-term impact on future generations in mind. It encourages sustainable living, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility, ensuring our choices today do not harm future generations' ability to thrive. That is why we will evaluate our success using a quadruple bottom line – ecological, cultural, social and economic measures.
4. **BALANCE:** Approach issues from a collaborative perspective. We strive to find solutions that espouse shared land use with multiple benefits (e.g. a wildfire mitigation treatment could improve forage for ungulates, protect water, and support human land use).
5. **RESPECT FOR ALL KNOWLEDGE:** Utilize both Indigenous knowledge and western science to guide our actions. This includes revising management practices based on past learnings and current and future needs.
6. **EDUCATION AND TRAINING:** Focus on education and training to foster a deeper understanding of holistic stewardship and to pass on knowledge to current and future generations.
7. **INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:** Regularly assess and adapt our strategies based on new information, experiences, and changing conditions. Remain open to innovative solutions and adjust our actions to effectively address the context we're in.

WATER SECURITY, STEWARDSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

To realize our vision of water security, stewardship and governance, we embrace the guiding principles above and will act deliberately to shift focus from resource development and extraction to protecting water, water infrastructure and cultural heritage values.

For historical context, we draw from the 2001 Okanagan–Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan.

“

“Within these watersheds, water quality, water quantity, and timing of flows are recognized as principal values. Resource development and extraction activities are permitted provided community water supply objectives are achieved.

The overall goal is to ensure that the surface and ground water resource will continue to provide a healthy, safe and affordable supply of drinking water in the future.”

— Okanagan Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan

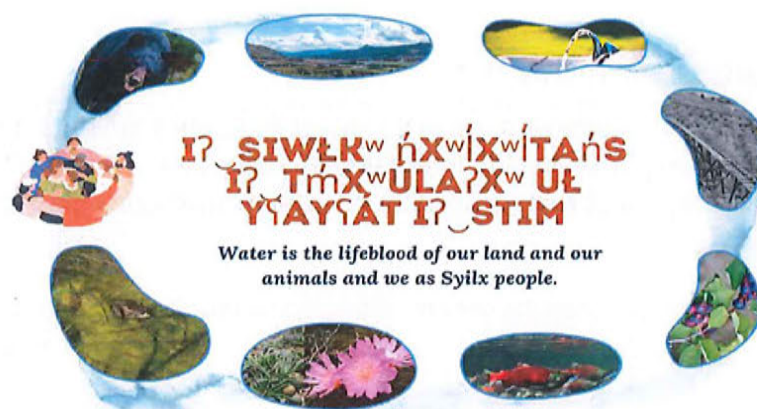
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These historic statements did not deliver the intended results. In light of climate change threats, our work must be bold and centralize *Syilx* title, rights and cultural values, as well as local-government statutory obligations in provincial decision-making.

Community and ecosystem resilience is central to our work as we deliver positive results for future generations.

WATER SECURITY

Water is Life. This statement reflects a fundamental truth that water is essential for all living things. One only needs to reflect on what would happen without water to recognize its value. Without it, the interconnectedness of life would not exist. We recognize that we can rebuild homes, but we can't rebuild natural water sources and systems.



To begin, we will seek funding partners to support the development of a Watershed Resilience Plan. A terms-of-reference for the Watershed Resilience Plan will be developed by the OKIB, RDNO and DLC to establish a budget, timelines and include the following components:

- purpose of the project,
- geographic scope,
- project lead, governing body, and engagement structures to align with this Guidance Plan,
- timelines,
- collection of agreed upon and available information,
- studies or research required to drive informed decision-making,
- identification of place names and stories reflective of *Syilx* Nation culture,
- threat analysis and risk assessments to inform priority restoration activities,
- linkages to the Wildfire Resilience Plan noted in the next section,
- development of methods and best practices that guide resource use reflecting the principles and priorities set out in this document
- project partners including academia, funding partners, and relevant provincial and Federal agencies,
- interest holders that will require engagement in the development and implementation process.

The completed Watershed Resilience Plan would examine water quality and quantity, hydrologic function, ecosystem and community resilience, *Syilx* cultural values, flood and drought resistance, as well as land use elements including sustainable forestry, recreation, agriculture, and land development. The results of this work will complement the Wildfire Resilience Plan and inform a broad range of provincial decisions that affect water security in the North Aberdeen Plateau.

Integral to this Guidance Plan is an Action Plan that outlines tasks, timelines, and accountabilities to deliver results. The Action Plan contains tasks to be completed between 2025 - 2027 and will be monitored by the Operations Team. The Operations Team will report out to the Leadership Team on an annual basis with progress reports, requests for direction, and task planning for subsequent years.

STEWARDSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Okanagan Similkameen Leadership Table Terms of Reference sets out a stewardship goal and governance framework to delineate membership roles and responsibilities, operational protocols, decision-making processes, consensus building methodologies, and the code of conduct.

This governance framework includes the tenets of the *Enowkinwixw* process: the *Syilx* discipline that describes how to plan, solve problems, make decisions, resolve conflicts and/or develop an action plan.

Enowkinwixw is a consensus-based practice developed on the principles of respect, trust and inclusion. The process includes Consensus, Establishment of Common Ground, Protocols for Discussion, Full Participation, Commitment, and Differing Perspectives. The process is complete when an action and implementation plan incorporating all views is in place.

We selected *Enowkinwixw* because it is based on the *Syilx* way of knowing and is consistent with our guiding principles. Using this process would mean that we value differing perspectives, make robust, defensible and transparent decisions, and generate certainty by collectively respecting and upholding the decisions made.

GOVERNANCE

OKIB, RDNO and DLC will emulate the applicable components of the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table governance framework for the North Aberdeen Plateau.

Our group is organized as follows:

Leadership representation: Each organization will appoint one leadership representative and one alternate. Recognizing that each organization has its own structure and processes in place, leadership representatives will be responsible for disseminating information, making recommendations, and seeking authority from their respective organizations according to organization specific processes and legal requirements.

Operations Team: OKIB, RDNO and DLC each have one staff member appointed to deliver on the activities set out in the 2025 – 2027 Action Plan. The operations team will take guidance from the leadership team.

DECISION-MAKING

To foster a governance approach that prioritizes local knowledge and influence, we are committed to developing a shared decision-making with relevant provincial agencies over time.

We will start by working with the Ministry of Forests to build efficacy into the current activities and decision-making processes that contribute to catastrophic wildfire risk (eg. forestry, recreation, access, natural disturbance, and wildfire mitigation projects).

We will collaborate with the Ministry of Forests and BC Wildfire Service to build trust and develop a collaborative, local and inclusive stewardship approach.

In the immediate term, this means that we will focus on mitigating risk to water security, implementing wildfire resilience projects, and providing the BC Wildfire Service with our priorities, to support wildfire fighting decisions.

The Operations Team has established a table with the Ministry of Forests (based on the historic Integrated Watershed Management Planning tables) to:

- Develop annual plans for activities on the land base, including an assessment of how the cumulative impact of those activities contribute to wildfire risk;
- Understand existing legal orders and permits affecting the North Aberdeen Plateau;
- Identify and review plans and permit applications;
- Develop efficient, collaborative processes to review permit applications and land use plans through the lens of water and cultural heritage preservation and enhancement;
- Engage various tenure and permit holders in the area;
- Develop, track, and maintain fire mitigation prescriptions;
- Disseminate the successes and failures with a focus on continual improvement; and
- Provide capacity funding for the OKIB to represent our partnership in day-to-day activities.

This forum is led by the Ministry of Forests and engages the partnership on the matters noted above.

Our efforts to address catastrophic wildfire threats will directly inform our vision of achieving water security. The decision-making structure established with the Ministry of Forests includes our mutual commitment to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and will advance our stewardship and governance goals for the North Aberdeen Plateau in line with our vision and guiding principles.

As we evolve our relationships with the Province and develop the Watershed Resilience Plan, we seek shared decision-making over a broader range of decisions that affect the water security of the North Aberdeen Plateau. This could manifest in a number of different ways – strategic, land or water use orders, tactical decisions or agreements. We will work collaboratively with the Province to review, identify and share decisions to define and propel our interests.

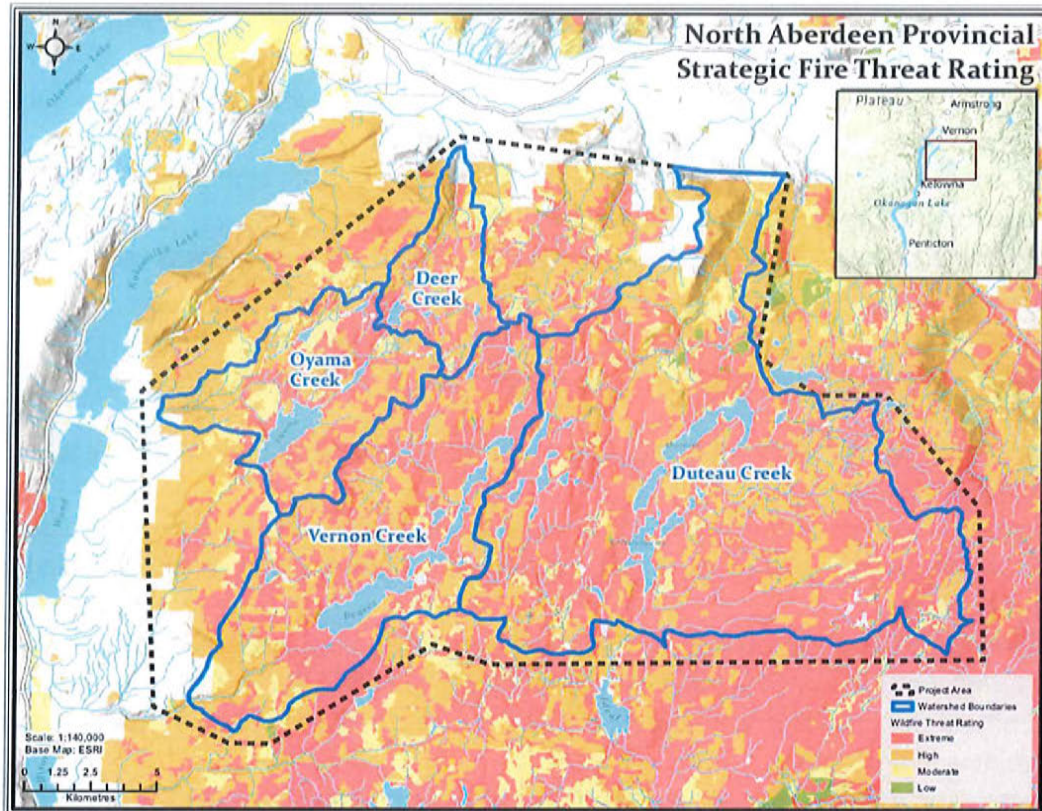
CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRE – THE IMMINENT THREAT

As we strive for water security, stewardship and governance, we must address the imminent threat of catastrophic wildfire. Severe wildfire presents the most immediate threat to water with potentially disastrous social, environmental and economic consequences for our communities.

In May 2024, the Ministry of Forests announced² a \$15 million investment to collaborate with the OKIB, RDNO and DLC to protect water, water infrastructure and cultural values from catastrophic wildfire impacts.

The map below depicts the wildfire risk rating for the North Aberdeen Plateau.

² Government of British Columbia. (2024, April 24). Wildfire-prevention project will keep Okanagan communities safe, protect water supply. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024FOR0022-000682>



We must act collaboratively and responsibly to mitigate wildfire impacts in the North Aberdeen Plateau. Wildfire mitigation and resilience work must be done so that trust is built and actions align with our vision of protecting water and fostering a resilient landscape.

This work is about learning and adapting to live with wildfire so we will implement treatments at the landscape level that emphasize community and ecosystem resilience. We embrace natural disturbances, prescribed fire, and forestry activities such as select harvest and commercial thinning as part of the solution. We recognize that as the environment and climate continue to change, the work we do today must enable future generations to continue the work of mitigation and adaptation.

WILDFIRE RESILIENCE

The OKIB, DLC, RDNO, the Ministry of Forests, including the BC Wildfire Service will develop a Wildfire Resilience Plan to guide effective planning and prioritization of wildfire mitigation treatments. This plan will incorporate Indigenous knowledge, prioritize water security and cultural heritage, and highlight the activities on the land base that are consistent with our objectives.

With support from the Ministry of Forests and the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS), our activities will include:

- Planning and implementing works to protect water, water infrastructure and cultural heritage values,
- Looking to images of the historic landscape (pre-modern wildfire fighting) to guide timber and fuel management treatments,
- Learning lessons from catastrophic wildfires in the region including, but not limited to, the MacDougall Creek Fire and White Rock Lake Fires,
- Modelling catastrophic wildfire impacts on water and prioritizing wildfire mitigation treatments accordingly,
- Developing plans to rehabilitate old roads / developments that contribute to risk of sedimentation and landslides, while maintaining appropriate access for BCWS to fight wildfires,
- Communicating with BCWS incident commanders to support their decisions when fighting wildfire in the area,
- Reducing wildfire intensity through annual fuel management, including the proactive use of traditional and prescribed burns, ladder fuel reduction, commercial thinning, pruning and mulching,
- Updating current practices to enhance wildfire resilience (eg. stocking standards, retention harvest methods, Allowable Annual Cut determinations, silviculture treatments, etc.),
- Creating opportunities and capacity building in fire mitigation works by planning multiple projects in advance,
- Increasing opportunities for the economic utilization of fibre removed through treatments,
- Evaluating treatment effectiveness and improving future decision making,
- Fostering awareness that prescribed traditional burning is one of many necessary tools to mitigate the risks of catastrophic wildfires,
- Reporting progress and successes to communities and interest holders.

PARTNERSHIPS, COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

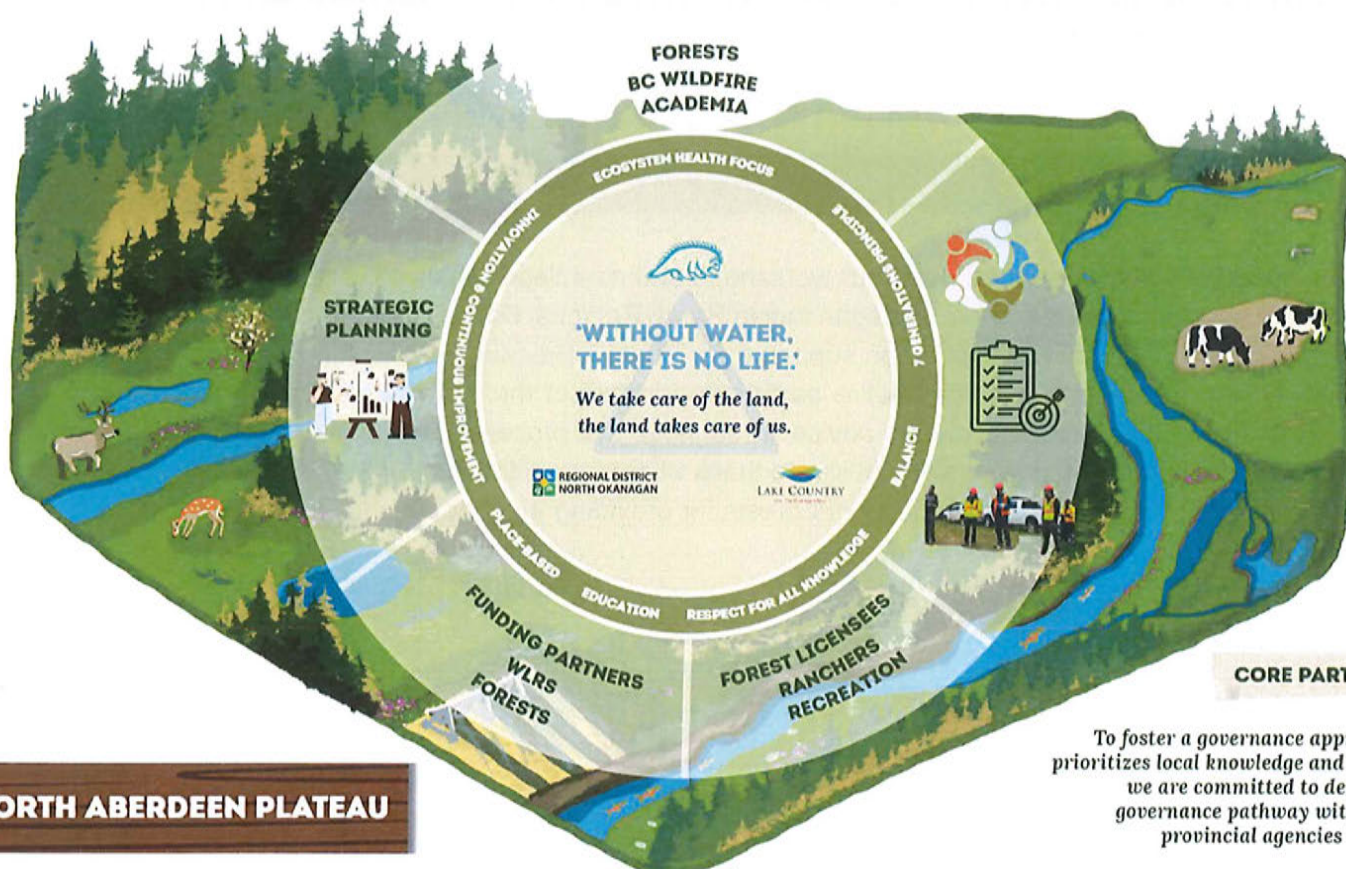
We are developing a new engagement model that prioritizes water security and local influence in light of the climate change threats. This statement is packed with accountability to share our work, partner with leading expert institutions, and deliver results that could be amplified throughout the Province, the country and globally.

We are committed to remedying historic practices that contributed to the risks now threatening water security. We reiterate that Syilx people and cultural values, as well as local government interests were not considered in previous decision-making.

That is why building partnerships with the Province and collaborating with all knowledge base institutes including the UVic POLIS Project Group, the University of BC Okanagan, and Forest Enhancement Society BC, and expertise in other jurisdictions (ie. US Forest Service PODs) are so important.

We are obligated to partner, communicate and engage with those affected by our work so that:

- Citizens understand where their water comes from and why we need to protect it;
- Tenure holders and licencees understand their role in mitigating risk of catastrophic wildfire and impacts on water sources (ie. responsible forestry, agriculture, recreation and ATV use, land leases, etc);
- Citizens understand the wildfire mitigation work doesn't prevent catastrophic wildfires - it only mitigates the impacts. This includes the use of prescribed fire (eg. 'a few ribbons of smoke now to avoid a summer choked with wildfire and smoke');
- Syilx knowledge keepers will play a pivotal role in determining future actions to complement western ways of knowing and provide for better future results, and;
- Importantly, local knowledge and influence contributing to decision-making in this area will deliver positive results.



CONCLUSION

Our commitment to mitigating the impacts of climate change, land development, and unresolved legacy issues drives our vision for water security in the North Aberdeen Plateau.

We will take deliberate steps starting with Wildfire Resilience planning and projects with the Ministry of Forests and the BC Wildfire Service. Each step we take will inform our broader interests that will be captured in the Watershed Resilience Plan.

For clarity, both the Wildfire and Watershed Resilience Plans will be centered around water security. Wildfire resilience is about managing and adapting to the impact of wildfires, watershed resilience involves a broader set of decisions to maintain the integrity of water systems, ecological and community health.

By embracing a collaborative approach, we aim to establish a new standard for water security, stewardship and governance. The legacy we build today will ensure that future generations inherit a vibrant, resilient, healthy and respected landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was developed over four workshops and countless discussions with participants from the partner organizations - Okanagan Indian Band, Regional District of North Okanagan and District of Lake Country with facilitation support from Positive Precedent Consulting Services Inc. The Ministry of Forests and BC Wildfire participated in two of the workshops. The UVic Polis Project and UBCO provided expert advice throughout the process, and continue to provide invaluable support. The partners would like to thank all that provided input into the development of the document and thank the Ministry of Forests for providing the funding.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIAL

1. Watershed Security Fund [Home - Watershed Security Fund](#)
2. The Four Chiefs Enowkinwixw Discourse <https://indigenoussharing.org/docs/The-Four-Chiefs-Enowkinwixw-Discourse.pdf>
3. Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) Watershed Plan "A Collaborative, Community-based Planning Process led by Cowichan Tribes and the Province of BC [Xwulqw'selu \(Koksilah\) Watershed | Koksilah Water](#)
4. University of Victoria POLIS Project on Ecological Governance – Wildfire Resilience Project

"Learning to Live with Fire: State of Wildfire in B.C., Policy, Programs & Priorities"; May 2024

"Wildfire and a Whole-of-Society Approach"; July 2024

"Economic Impacts & Implications of Catastrophic Fire"; September 2024
5. Forest Service US Department of Agriculture, Rocky Mountain Research Station Potential Operational Delineations (PODs)
<https://research.fs.usda.gov/rmrs/projects/pods>
6. Okanagan – Shuswap Land Resource Management Plan pgs. 206-241 (dated April 11, 2001) [Okanagan-Shuswap Land & Resource Management Plan - Province of British Columbia](#)

APPENDIX 1 – OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP
TABLE MEMORADUM OF AGREEMENT AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table



TERMS OF REFERENCE April 24, 2025



Working together on matters of common concern to protect and restore siwłk^w in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds, now and for future generations.

OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP TABLE TERMS OF REFERENCE

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OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP TABLE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Endorsed on April 24, 2025

1. Background

On November 15, 2024, the Syilx Nation and Local Government elected leaders of the Okanagan and Similkameen river watersheds formalized their commitment to the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table (the “Table”) to collectively protect and restore siwłkʷ, water across the region by signing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). This historic and pivotal agreement is founded on the longstanding directives of the Syilx Nation Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) and reflects the shared commitment of both the Syilx Nation and Local Governments to develop a collaborative, government-to-government decision-making process. The MOA acknowledges the vital role each party has in water governance while respecting jurisdictional authorities. The parties recognize that collaboration is critical for improving the protection and management of the Okanagan and Similkameen river watersheds now and for future generations.

2. Purpose of the Terms of Reference

This Terms of Reference (**TOR**) establishes the governance framework for the Table by delineating membership roles and responsibilities, operational protocols, decision-making processes, consensus-building methodologies, and the code of conduct. The TOR provides a foundational structure for how the Syilx Nation and Local Governments will collaborate in their shared goal of protecting and restoring siwłkʷ within the Okanagan and Similkameen watersheds. The TOR supplements the MOA, which includes the vision, shared purpose, guiding principles, areas of common concern, and general clauses governing the Table. In the event of any conflict or inconsistency between the TOR and the MOA, the terms of the MOA will prevail. The TOR will be reviewed every three years or at the direction of the Table.

3. Membership

Membership of the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table includes Syilx Nation and Local Government organizations that have signed the MOA. Other Syilx Nation communities and Local Governments in the Okanagan and Similkameen watersheds are welcome to become members by signing the MOA.

3.1 Table Representatives

Syilx Nation Member Bands will appoint their Chief and one alternate. Local Government member councils will appoint their Mayor and one alternate. Regional Districts will appoint the Chair or Rural Area Director, as appropriate.

3.2 Duration of Term for Table Representatives

Table representatives and their alternates will represent their organizations at the Table for the duration of their respective election cycles.

4. Decision-Making Process

As described in the MOA, the Table will seek to make decisions by consensus by utilizing *n̄awq̄n̄wixw* and *əł̄sac̄x̄ən* processes, which are set out in more detail in this section.

A **consensus-building process** is a collaborative approach to decision-making, where all parties can come to an agreement or reach a common understanding on a solution, direction, or course of action. This process is important as it allows for input from the multiple perspectives. The goal is to build a unified direction that everyone can support, even if there are disagreements during the process.

A process grounded in teachings from the Four Food Chiefs strongly supports a consensus-building approach by building connections with each other, considering existing laws and policies, and bringing forward innovative and creative outcomes. The consensus-building approach will be participatory, inclusive, and include the principles of Syilx self-determination, inherent rights affirmation and consensus-building decision-making. It is built on the understanding that Syilx peoples have the inherent rights, responsibilities and the place-based knowledge for decision-making in Syilx Territory.

A consensus-building process involves cooperation, patience, and compromise to ensure that decisions reflect the input and concerns of all parties at the Table. It emphasizes mutual respect and a shared commitment to the chosen solution. The consensus approach to the decision-making framework listed below is designed to support the Table:

- i) Defining the issue, objective or a question
 - *Chief siya? (Saskatoon Berry)* reminds us to bring forward innovation and creativity to reflect the diverse needs of the Table and a long-term vision for the next 25, 50, 100 years.
 - Clarify the issue: The Table must first agree on what the issue or challenge is. This involves defining the problem or objective that needs a solution.
- ii) Open discussion & idea generation
 - *Chief sk̄mxist (Black Bear)* idea generation includes:
 - Bring forward the knowledge that we know.
 - What values and principles need to be maintained for the watershed?
 - Resource guests may be invited to meetings and given opportunity to speak.
 - Encourage open and honest communication, where everyone can share their views, ideas, and concerns without judgment. It's common to encounter different opinions. These differences should be acknowledged and explored to understand underlying concerns or constraints. Important questions to consider are:
 - How are people affected in short and long term?
 - How is the watershed and *tmixʷ*, all living things are affected short and long term?

- How is the whole community affected short term and long term?
- iii) Evaluating Options
 - *Chief n'tyxtix (Chinook Salmon)* evaluation includes examination of current land-uses and impacts. It identifies laws and policies that work, and ones that need to be updated or developed.
 - Assess potential solutions: The Table representatives discuss and examine various ideas and weigh the pros and cons, considering how each option meets the needs and constraints of the representatives.
 - Identify areas of common concern: Find aspects of proposed solutions that align with most table members' priorities to identify common areas of concern.
- iv) Consensus-Building
 - *Chief spitlem (Bitter Root)* encourages Table representatives to build connection to each other, and connections between our communities.
 - Propose a solution or course of action that incorporates the best elements from different ideas.
 - Encourage further dialogue if there are still reservations or hesitations. Adjust the objectives and or scope until there is a general feeling of agreement.
- v) Decision & Commitment
 - Final decision: Once everyone has had a chance to provide feedback and concerns are addressed, the group collectively agrees on a solution(s).
 - Commitment to implementation: All members commit to executing the decision, which may include sharing responsibilities, resources, and timelines.
 - Document the decision: The Coordinating Team will document the agreed-upon objective or actions so there is a clear understanding of the direction from the Table.

4.1 Voting Mechanism

If a decision cannot be reached through consensus-building, the Co-Chairs may call for a vote. For the vote to pass it will require a 2/3's majority from the Syilx Nation Table representatives and alternates and 2/3's majority from the Local Governments Table representatives and alternates in attendance. For clarity, each member with a Table representative or alternate present is entitled to one vote. Voting must be done in-person. However, telephone or video conferences may be called to address issues or developments as needed.

5. Co-Chairs

The Table meetings will be co-chaired by one representative from the Syilx Nation and one representative from the Local Governments for a 2-year term.

5.1 Co-chair elections

- The Syilx Nation Chiefs will elect their Co-Chair representative at a CEC meeting prior to the start of a new 2-year term.

- The Local Government Mayors and Regional District Chairs or Rural Area Directors or their alternates will vote for their co-chair.
 - The Co-Chairs and the Coordinating Team will send out a call for expressions of interest for the Local Government Co-Chair before the new term starts. Interested representatives are asked to send their expression of interest by e-mail.
 - If more than one local government representative is seeking the co-chair position a closed ballot vote will take place at a Table meeting.

5.2 Co-Chairs Roles and Responsibilities

- Act as a spokesperson for the Table.
- Work with the Coordinating Team and the host community representatives to develop agendas for meetings that support the progression of the MOA.
- Ensure the Code of Conduct is followed at the meetings.
- Facilitate discussion at the Table.
 - **Create an open environment:** Foster an atmosphere where participants feel safe to express their opinions, share ideas, and challenge each other's perspectives without fear of judgment or retribution.
 - **Encourage participation:** Actively invite input from all members, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard, especially quieter or marginalized voices.
 - **Moderate discussions:** Keep discussions focused, on-topic, and respectful. Gently steer the conversation when it veers off-course or becomes unproductive.
 - **Manage conflict:** Address conflicts as they arise by acknowledging differing views, encouraging mutual respect, and finding common ground.
- Facilitate the consensus-building approach.
- Co-Chairs will work with the Coordinating team to develop a Communication Protocol.

6.0 Table Representatives Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Roles of Table representatives and alternates include:

- Work to foster and strengthen relationships and trust among Table members.
- Promote collaboration by utilizing the consensus-building approach for problem solving for the areas of common concern. Uphold the vision and principles of the MOA.
- Remain unbiased: Recognize we each carry unconscious biases such as, over-generalizations, stereotypes and confirmation biases. Strive to be aware of biases so the Table can make more informed and balanced decisions.

6.2 Responsibilities of Table representatives and alternates include:

- Review agenda packages prior to the Table meetings.
- Demonstrate a commitment to truth and reconciliation by participating in learning opportunities at the Table.
- Identify funding opportunities to support the Table and its initiatives.

7.0 The Coordinating Team

The role of the Coordinating Team is to work with the Co-Chairs to:

- Plan and organize Table meetings, events and working groups.
- Develop communications for the membership and external partners.
- Facilitate the development of the Okanagan Similkameen Watershed Responsibility Planning Process.
- Secure funding for the Table and its initiatives.
- Manage resources, including human resources and budgets.
- Gather feedback and monitor the progress of the Table.

8.0 Guests and Elders

Guests may be invited to participate in or observe meetings of the Table. Elders, knowledge keepers and guests may provide expertise, guidance or conduct ceremonies for the Table.

9.0 Working Groups

Working groups will be an important part of the ongoing work of the Table. Working groups may be established by the Table to champion and undertake specific projects or initiatives. Working groups will be comprised of Table representatives and may include external partners with specialized expertise, and members of the Coordinating Team. Working groups should be established with a balance of Syilx Nation and Local Government representatives. The role of a working group is to:

- Develop workplans and timelines for specified water projects or initiatives.
- Identify additional funding requirements and opportunities.
- Provide updates to the Table as required via online presentations or at Table meetings.
- Bring recommendations for consideration to the Table.

10. Code of Conduct

Table representatives are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner, based on **wa'y sic mi kwu x̣slca'wt ki ya'fpu?sm̓ntm** (We will act in a good way to stay focused on a common purpose). Table representatives must act with the principles and values of:

- Good faith
- Mutual respect and honour
- Kindness
- Generosity
- Trust
- Humility
- Honesty
- Integrity

10.1 Complaint Process

Anyone wishing to file a formal complaint must submit a summary of the complaint to the Co-Chairs. The summary should include the date of complaint the matter of the complaint and a proposed resolution sought of the complaint. The Co-Chairs must arrange a meeting as soon as possible with the parties of the complaint so they may reconcile and reach a resolution.

11. Table Meetings

11.1 Frequency

There will be a minimum of three meetings per year and meeting date(s) will be set at the beginning of each year. Members will take turns hosting the Table meetings throughout the watersheds. Meetings will be in person. Telephone or video conferences may be used to address issues or developments as needed.

- Table meetings will be held on the 3rd Friday of January, April and November.

11.2 Closed Meetings

Closed meetings may be scheduled to deal with legal and financial matters that affect the members.

11.3 Quorum

The minimum meeting quorum is 2/3 of Syilx Nation Table representatives and 2/3 Local Government representatives.

12. The Table Duration

The Table will continue to exist in perpetuity.

12.1 Exit Clause

- If a Table representative needs to be replaced at any time, its respective member will provide a member council resolution to the Table that includes the name of its new Table representative. The resolution will be included in the next meeting of the Table and documented in the meeting minutes.
- Members who wish to leave the Table may do so by providing a resolution to that affect.

13. Conflict of Interest

Each Table representative must declare if they have a conflict of interest or a perceived conflict of interest, relating to personal, professional, or financial interests in relation to their work or responsibilities.

Table representatives must disclose any potential conflicts to the Co-Chairs should they arise during their time on the Table to ensure transparency and integrity of the Table.

14. Confidentiality

The following parameters described below for the Table shall be considered confidential for the Table and such information is to be used for the sole purpose of fulfilling objectives of the Table.

- The Table will not communicate or divulge information in any manner; nor alter, copy, or interfere with such information except upon authorization and in accordance with objectives of the Table.
- Each Table representative and guest is responsible for maintaining the confidentiality, integrity, accuracy and privacy of the data entrusted to them as a representative of the Table and shall safeguard the data using best practices against accidental or unauthorized access, disclosure, use, modification, and deletion.
- Syilx Nation members information brought to the Table shall remain the intellectual property of the Syilx Nation and is not to be shared outside the Table without the permission of the Syilx Nation members.

Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table

Working together on matters of common concern to protect and restore siwłk^w in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds, now and for future generations.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

between the
SYILX NATION

Including

Lower Similkameen Indian Band
Okanagan Indian Band

Osoyoos Indian Band
Penticton Indian Band

Upper Similkameen Indian Band
Westbank First Nation

and

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Including

City of Kelowna
City of Penticton
City of Vernon
City of West Kelowna
District of Lake Country
District of Peachland

District of Summerland
District of Coldstream
Regional District of Central Okanagan
Regional District of North Okanagan
Regional District of
Okanagan-Similkameen

Township of Spallumcheen
Town of Oliver
Town of Osoyoos
City of Armstrong
Town of Princeton
Village of Keremeos

of the

OKANAGAN AND SIMILKAMEEN RIVER WATERSHEDS
INCLUDING kłúsǰnítł^w, OKANAGAN LAKE AND
THE nməlqaytk^w, SIMILKAMEEN RIVER

hereafter

“THE PARTIES”



WHEREAS

- A. The Parties understand that, as governments, they each occupy unique jurisdictional space and have historically different relationships with other international, national, regional, and local governments:
- i. The Syilx¹ Nation's sovereign, unceded right to self-governance and self-determination are affirmed within Syilx laws and customs as directed through their captik² and they hold and exercise title, rights, responsibilities and jurisdiction over lands and waters within Syilx territory³, including in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds.
 - ii. The Local Governments operate in the interests of their residents and the public through their statutory authority under the Community Charter and the Local Government Act having jurisdiction in respect of matters delegated to them by the Province of British Columbia.
- B. The Parties live together in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds and share a responsibility to safeguarding the siwɬk^w that sustains their communities.
- C. For the Syilx Nation, their relationship with siwɬk^w means that they are responsible to ensure that siwɬk^w as our relation can continue to maintain the health and resiliency of our tmx^wulax^{w4}, land and tmix^{w5}, all lifeforms. This relationship with siwɬk^w is the foundation for the Syilx Nation for these discussions.
- D. For the Local Governments, their authorities under the Community Charter and the Local Government Act, govern their powers and responsibilities regarding their residents, communities, water and ecosystems.
- E. The Parties seek to understand and apply these foundations as they build the government-to-government relationships and processes contemplated in this Memorandum of Agreement.
- F. The Parties seek to engage in mutually respectful dialogue and take action on shared priorities consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- G. The Parties recognize the value in collaborating on matters of common concern and seek to establish ongoing, positive, collaborative government-to-government relationships, and processes through this Memorandum of Agreement.

1 Syilx are the original nsyilxcən speaking people who learned to live together on the land in peace; dreaming ones; bound together; of the land.

2 captik^{w4} are stories and oral traditions; creation stories that hold the laws.

3 The Syilx Territory encompasses over 27 different watersheds, each with its own personality, needs, and ways of being.

4 tmx^wulax^w is the land; the core spirit from which all creation arises and which unites everything.

5 tmix^w is the nsyilxcən word that most closely translates as "ecology." tmix^w includes everything alive – the land, water, insects, people, animals, plants and medicines.

PURPOSE OF AGREEMENT

The purpose of this Memorandum of Agreement is to formalize a government-to-government Leadership Table to set strategic direction and address matters of common concern to protect and restore *siwłk^w* in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds now and for future generations.

OUR SHARED VISION

Our relation *siwłk^w*, our most sacred medicine, must be kept healthy to restore and hold its relationship to *tmix^w*, in order to ensure resiliency of all, for the good of all, for all time.

PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING TOGETHER

The Parties agree that the following principles will guide the Leadership Table and the work related to *siwłk^w* under this Memorandum of Agreement.

GOVERNMENT-TO-

GOVERNMENT: Work together to achieve respectful, strong, enduring, and meaningful relationships among our governments to advance issues of common concern.

SYILX-LED: Respect Syilx values and processes, including recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

RECONCILIATION: Support the framework for reconciliation set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

DIVERSITY: Respect the diversity of cultures, histories, and traditions among the Parties and respect that each may have unique political and policy priorities.

COMMON CONCERN ON SIWŁK^w: Work together to make progress and achieve outcomes on matters that they have agreed are shared priorities.

EQUITY: Ensure that there is equitable sharing of the benefits and the responsibilities associated with addressing issues of common concern.

JURISDICTIONAL

COLLABORATION: Respect each other's autonomous jurisdictions, while agreeing that collaboration based on mutual respect creates deeper understanding and partnership opportunities to protect and restore *siwłk^w*

KNOWLEDGE SHARING: Recognize and respect the different forms of knowledge, information, and data held by the Parties and, where appropriate, to share knowledge to advance issues of common concern.

OTHER AGREEMENTS: Recognize that bilateral arrangements and agreements may also be appropriate to facilitate further cooperation between the governments.

PRINCIPLES GUIDING OUR WORK WITH SIWŁK^w, WATER

The Parties are guided by existing principles developed by their respective systems regarding their relationships with the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds. The Parties agree that while these principles are unique, they can also be complementary. It is the Parties' intention that they be guided by all of these principles in their work under this Memorandum of Agreement.

SYILX SIWŁK^w STRATEGY

Okanagan Nation Alliance

- Recognize and treat siwłk^w as a relative.
- Work to revitalize Syilx culture, language, and ceremonial practices in all of our work.
- Prioritize Syilx Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Lead with TEK and leadership.
- Maintain integrity of all Syilx research, content, and data.
- Utilize Western Science in conjunction with Syilx-based processes.
- Continue land-based gatherings and research to build relationships with each other and the tmix^w.
- Improve partnerships and collaborations across all projects and initiatives.
- Be future looking by creating space to connect Youth to Elders and siwłk^w.

OKANAGAN SUSTAINABLE WATER STRATEGY

Okanagan Basin Water Board

- Respect water.
- Think and act as one watershed.
- Control pollution at its source.
- Restore aquatic and riparian ecosystems.
- Put water stewardship at the forefront of land-use planning decisions.
- Allocate water in a transparent and responsible manner.
- Ensure community water supply systems are resilient to climate change.
- Collect and share knowledge.
- Encourage active public engagement and learning.
- Practice adaptive management and think long-term.

OUR MATTERS OF COMMON CONCERN

The Parties agree to work together on matters of common concern to protect siwłk^w in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds. These matters include, but are not limited to:

GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

(e.g., mechanisms for collaborative decision-making, and implementation processes)

PROTECTION

(e.g., headwaters, species [salmon] and riparian areas)

RESTORATION

(e.g., rivers, creeks, lakes and lakeshores, wetlands, aquifers or other ecosystem restoration)

MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

(e.g., support and enhance existing work)

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY

(e.g., base flows and flow regimes, water quality and quantity standards)

DATA AND INFORMATION PRIORITIES

(e.g., ensure foundation in Syilx Knowledge and Western Science, priorities for mapping, priority research areas)

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC ISSUES, CLIMATE CHANGE AND CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Additional matters of common concern may be addressed subject to agreement of the Parties.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES:

The elected leaders of the Parties will participate at the Leadership Table to provide direction for the implementation of the Memorandum of Agreement. Only elected leaders may make decisions at the Leadership Table. A Terms of Reference to guide governance and operational procedures will be developed, and will include such items as quorum, meeting procedures, amendment procedures, and participation of the Parties (including alternates).

CONSENSUS-BUILDING

DECISIONS: The Parties agree to make decisions by utilizing the *n̓awq̓nwix*⁶ and *ə́ḥsac̓ən*⁷, a Syilx decision-making practice to gain consensus on issues of common concern. The *n̓awq̓nwix*⁶, ensures everyone at the table will be engaged in a dialogue. Everyone gets to share their personal perspective, and openly welcomes opposite perspectives that lead to resolving conflicts, making decisions, and developing plans for taking action. "Consensus" means all Parties agree or can find a way to support the decision with the group while agreeing to work to address any concerns over time.

CHAIRING THE PROCESS: The Leadership Table will be co-chaired by one representative from the Syilx Nation and one representative from the Local Governments. Co-chairs will rotate and be determined at the end of each meeting.

TASK FORCES: The elected leaders of the Parties may strike Task Forces on specific issues as needed. Each Task Force will be co-chaired by one representative from the Syilx Nation and one representative from the Local Governments. Task Forces can include elected leaders, staff from the Parties, external subject matter experts, and other representatives.

MEETINGS: The Leadership Table will meet quarterly or as determined by the Leadership Table. There will be seats at the table for Parties at every meeting, and each Party will make best efforts to attend every meeting. Meeting summaries will be produced and provided by the Coordinating Team.

COORDINATING TEAM: The Coordinating Team consists of staff from the Okanagan Nation Alliance and the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program and any such individuals, organizations or personnel as appointed by the Leadership + Table. Their efforts include leading the Syilx Watershed Responsibility Planning Process⁸.

AGENDA: In advance of Leadership Table meetings, the Coordinating Team will work with the Co-Chairs to develop an agenda and will canvas the other Parties for agenda items. Where applicable, briefing materials, reports or other documents will be shared with the Parties prior to the meetings.

Summary of Outcomes: The Coordinating Team will ensure that a summary of outcomes is produced and distributed for approval of all Parties after each meeting.

Communication and Information Sharing: The Parties agree to share information with respect to matters of common concern in an open and timely manner. Protocols for communication among the Parties, including notification of upcoming activities, regional or local visits, and/or emergent issues of concern, will be developed as an immediate priority upon execution of the Memorandum of Agreement.

RESOURCING: The Parties may collectively pursue resourcing to implement projects and meetings addressing matters of common concern.

LIVING DOCUMENT: This Memorandum of Agreement will be reviewed two years following the signing to assess and update the document as required.

6 *n̓awq̓nwix*⁶ translates to knowledge filling participants' heads like drops of water; decision making through consensus building.

7 *ə́ḥsac̓ən* is a process Syilx 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. 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.

8 The Syilx Watershed Responsibility Planning Process is a collaboration of Syilx and non-Syilx partners at the technical level to develop a watershed responsibility plan.

GENERAL CLAUSES

Nothing in this Memorandum of Agreement creates legal or financial obligations on the Parties.

This is a political Memorandum of Agreement of signatories, is not a legally binding agreement.

Nothing in this Memorandum of Agreement infringes on the Title and Rights of the Syilx Nation rights holders, nor any related processes or negotiations.

The signatories support this Memorandum of Agreement and commit to advancing its implementation through their respective government's processes, policies, and governance structures.

Nothing in this Memorandum of Agreement shall constrain or bind the governments from exercising their powers and responsibilities, nor impose any financial obligation.

Nothing in this Memorandum of Agreement prevents the Parties from participating in other intergovernmental processes or agreements.

Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table

Working together on matters of common concern to protect and restore siwłk^w in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds, now and for future generations.

SIGNATORIES OF THE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

Signed at outma sqilx^w cultural school, snpink'tn,
this 15th day of November, 2024.

ki?lawna? xa?tus, Chief Clarence Louie
OSOYOOS INDIAN BAND

Mayor Julius Bloomfield
CITY OF PENTICTON

Mayor Patrick Van Minsel
DISTRICT OF PEACHLAND

yilmix^wm, Chief Byron Louis
OKANAGAN INDIAN BAND

Mayor Christine Fraser
TOWNSHIP OF SPALLUMCHEEN

Mayor Doug Holmes
DISTRICT OF SUMMERLAND

siwłk^w yilmix^wm, Chief Robert Louie
WESTBANK FIRST NATION

Mayor Victor Cumming
CITY OF VERNON

Mayor Martin Johansen
TOWN OF OLIVER

sil-teekin yilmix^wm, Chief Greg Gabriel
PENTICTON INDIAN BAND

Mayor Ruth Hoyte
DISTRICT OF COLDSTREAM

Mayor Sue McKortolt
TOWN OF OSOYOOS

ka?lupa?n yilmix^wm, Chief Keith Crow
LOWER SIMILKAMEEN INDIAN BAND

Mayor Blair Ireland
DISTRICT OF LAKE COUNTRY

Mayor Jason Wiebe
VILLAGE OF KEREMEOS

yilmix^wm, Chief Bonnie Jacobsen
UPPER SIMILKAMEEN INDIAN BAND

Mayor Spencer Coyne
TOWN OF PRINCETON

Mayor Tom Dyas
CITY OF KELOWNA

Mayor Gord Milsom
CITY OF WEST KELOWNA

Mayor Joe Cramer
CITY OF ARMSTRONG

Chair Mark Fethergalt
REGIONAL DISTRICT OF
OKANAGAN-SIMILKAMEEN

Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table

Working together on matters of common concern to protect and restore siw^{ik} in the Okanagan and Similkameen Watersheds, now and for future generations.

SIGNATORIES OF THE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

Signed at outma sqilx^w cultural school, snpink'tn,
this 15th day of November, 2024.

[Redacted Signature]

səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Tim Isaac
OKANAGAN INDIAN BAND

Councillor Shirley Fowler
CITY OF ARMSTRONG

[Redacted Signature]

éris səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Jordan Coble
WESTBANK FIRST NATION

Councillor Brian Guy
CITY OF VERNON

[Redacted Signature]

silx^wa əlq^w səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Tim Lezard
PENTICTON INDIAN BAND

Councillor Tricia Brett
DISTRICT OF LAKE COUNTRY

[Redacted Signature]

səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Sammy Louie
OSOYOOS INDIAN BAND

Councillor Luke Stack
CITY OF KELOWNA

[Redacted Signature]

twink^w səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Janet Tebbasket
LOWER SIMILKAMEEN INDIAN BAND

Councillor Keith Thom
DISTRICT OF PEACHLAND

[Redacted Signature]

pwálxkən səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Mike Allison
UPPER SIMILKAMEEN INDIAN BAND

Councillor Petra Veintimilla
TOWN OF OLIVER

[Redacted Signature]

chuchuwayha səx^wk^winmaʔm, Councillor Charles Allison
UPPER SIMILKAMEEN INDIAN BAND

Electoral Director Amanda Shatzko
REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NORTH OKANAGAN, AREA C (BX/SILVERSTAR)

Electoral Director Kevin Kraft
REGIONAL DISTRICT OF CENTRAL OKANAGAN, AREA EAST

BC Gov News

Forests

Wildfire-prevention project will keep Okanagan communities safe, protect water supply

The Province is working with the Regional District of North Okanagan, District of Lake Country and the Okanagan Indian Band to protect the primary water source for Lake Country and the Greater Vernon area from the risk of wildfire.

"Many people in the Okanagan depend on the North Aberdeen Plateau for their drinking water," said Bruce Ralston, Minister of Forests. "We know that the risk of a wildfire in the area could have very real impacts on the water people depend on, which is why we are taking action to protect this resource now and for future generations. Local partners have put in significant work to get us to this point and our government is proud to support getting this important project underway immediately."

The North Aberdeen Plateau hosts critical natural resources and is a high priority for wildfire mitigation. Through \$15 million from the Ministry of Forests, a project team will begin planning and implementing fire-mitigation prescriptions to protect water, water infrastructure and cultural heritage values in the North Aberdeen Plateau. This is a multi-year, multi-phase project, with phase 1 beginning immediately. Fire-mitigation work includes removing flammable woody material, thinning or pruning stands, and removing fallen or dead debris in order to slow or stop the spread of wildfire.

"We are pleased to be a partner in the protection of our watersheds, as we recognize and have recently experienced the significant impact that wildfire can have on our community," said Blair Ireland, mayor, Lake Country. "We look forward to collaboratively working with our friends and partners in the Okanagan Indian Band and the Regional District of the North Okanagan to protect the cultural heritage values, water supply and water infrastructure that are important to our communities."

The plateau is a water source for 18,000 people and agriculture producers in Lake Country, as well as a water source for the Greater Vernon Water Utility, which provides domestic and agricultural water to approximately 71,000 people in Vernon and Coldstream.

"As a community that has been recently and historically affected by wildfires, we are intimately aware of the need for more wildfire-mitigation procedures being implemented," said Chief Byron Louis, Okanagan Indian Band. "While we would like to see more focus on culturally appropriate Syilx wildfire-mitigation practices, we're happy to

collaborate with our project partners to take positive steps toward protecting our land and water. It can't be understated how important water is as a resource."

Over the past five years, First Nations, local communities and the provincial government have continued to work in partnership on fire-mitigation projects in high-risk areas in the Okanagan. The North Aberdeen Plateau fuel-break project is an opportunity to build on the experience, capacity and relationships that have been developed, and continue long-term and strategic planning that can be expanded to a watershed level.

"The North Aberdeen Plateau is the primary water source for the Greater Vernon area and Lake Country," said Victor Cumming, mayor, Vernon. "Provincial funding will help with wildfire mitigation through fuel reduction and facilitate the development of a long-term plan, involving tenure and title holders, to protect the shared watershed and cultural values."

In April 2024, the Premier's expert task force on emergencies released a summary of its recommendations, which included developing landscape-level, partnership-based resilience investment projects to demonstrate how to deliver risk reduction in the natural and built environment at the watershed scale. The North Aberdeen Plateau fuel-break project is the result of a community and partnership-based resilience project that is helping to reduce the risk of wildfire to the natural landscape.

The Province continues to implement recommendations from the task force to help prepare for wildfire season.

Quote:

Harwinder Sandhu, MLA for Vernon-Monashee –

"The North Aberdeen Plateau is a critical resource for people and families in the Okanagan, and we know that more must be done to protect our water sources from the growing risk of wildfire. Getting started on this fuel-break project is an important and much-needed step in ensuring that our communities and our drinking water sources are safe."

Quick Facts:

- Since 2018 and committed through to 2028, the Province, through BC Wildfire Service, has invested approximately \$466 million in wildfire-resiliency and risk-reduction projects.
- The Province's approach to wildfire-risk reduction is through strategic partnerships with communities, First Nations and external partners, in addition to the BC Wildfire Service's direct wildfire mitigation.

- Since 2016, \$69.4 million has been invested in wildfire-risk reduction projects through the Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC).
- An additional \$60 million was announced for FESBC to continue industry- and community-focused wildfire-risk reduction and fuel management as part of Budget 2024.

Learn More:

To learn more about wildfire-management strategies,
visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/wildfire-response/management-strategies>

To learn more about the Premier's expert task force on emergencies,
visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/emergency-management/emergency-activation/em-taskforce>

