Columbia River Treaty and the Syilx People

Presented to CBRAC
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The Okanagan People Today

Okanagan (Syilx) Nation
Revitalization of an Okanagan Fishery & the Salmon People

Seven member band communities:
1. Osoyoos Indian Band
2. Penticton Indian Band
3. Westbank First Nation
4. Okanagan Indian Band
5. Upper Nicola Band
6. Lower Similkameen Band
7. Upper Similkameen Band, and
8. Colville Confederated Tribes (USA)
Okanagan Title and Rights

- Okanagan are a Non-treaty First Nation and as such have not surrendered its Title and Rights interests on its (69,000km²) Territory.

- The CCT in the US formally re-joined the ONA and the CEC in 2010.

- The CEC is the elected political decision making governing body.

- ONA is the administrative and technical arm of the Nation.

- ONA has five departments and over 100 f/t staff.

- One of the largest Fisheries departments in BC -- bigger than DFO-BC Region and the BC FLNRO/MOE fisheries combined.
Sinixts were the original inhabitants of the Arrow Lakes. Okanagan (Syilx) and the Sinixts were the same Insyilchen speaking peoples. Smallpox and miners devastated Sinixts populations. By 1960s most of Sinixts population abandoned last West Kootenay reserves. Federal Government declared Sinixts Extinct in 1959. Yet up to 8,000 Sinixts descendents reside primarily at CCT and the ONA, and in other neighbouring First Nations. First Nations still use and access region — practice rights regularly.
Columbia River as a Life Force

- Okanagans are a Salmon People

- Columbia River is the main artery of the nation delivering salmon and as historical corridor – Okanagan River is a tributary of the Columbia River
  - Industrialization and CRT devastated region and Salmon
  - First Nations had no involvement in CRT – despite letters
  - Massive impacts from CRT flooded lands/ fisheries and erosion
  - Okanagan System is a tributary
“The key resource for many of the Okanagan groups was fish, especially salmon.”

“It has been determined that the Syilx consumed four or five times more salmon than other game animals.”

“The Indians at Okanagan have a very clever way of catching the salmon..... They make an artificial leap of wicker work right across the river over which the fish jump only to tumble into a basket on the other side.”

Surveyor Charles Wilson, August 12, 1860 (quoted in Hudson, 1990, p. 59)
“Salmon fishing was controlled by a Salmon Chief who directed the construction of the traps and weirs and performed a ceremony to mark the capture of the first salmon. ...the First Salmon Ceremony symbolized the dependence on the salmon and the need to maintain a proper relationship with this renewable resource.”

“The Syilx trading networks reached as far south as the Walula (Snake River confluence), to the Thompson country in the north, to the west the Pacific Coast and extended to the Plains country in the east.”

IMPACTS

Fishing at Kettle Falls
Grand Coulee Dam under construction
NO FISH PASSAGE

Grand Coulee Dam
CEREMONY OF TEARS
COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY

“The Treaty has disrupted our way of life in ways that very few other things have.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Okanagan Nation Alliance
CRT Impacts

- Industrialization of the Columbia culminated with the CRT
- CRT has had massive impact to the Title and Rights interests of the Nation – habitat and 100k + species lost to flooding
- Flooded hundreds of kilometers of land – inundated village and burial sites, fishing and hunting grounds, fertile valleys
- Altered the river system into an industrial reservoir
- Continues to Impact on eco-systems, fish, erosion
- Removed FNs from their responsibilities to the land
- Villages, Ancestral remains, and cultural burial sites inundated – many exposed to erosion/ exposure on new banks
ONA rejected BC’s original consultation process
Jointly designed new ‘CRT Critical Path Process’
Insisted Canada Join process – Canada remain as Observers
Critical Path - Concluded with BC unilaterally releasing its 14 principles
Deeper fisheries mitigation
Salmon Passage restore
Resolution to Industrial reservoir on-going impacts
Consistent processes from Tsilhqot’in SCC decision
CRT with meaningful eco-system functions – all species
Meaningful Economic Benefits
A DIFFERENT FUTURE AHEAD
HARD WORK, PARTNERSHIPS & PRAYER
THE MIRACLE CONTINUES
iʔ siwtkʷ

WATER IS OUR RELATION.
iʔ ʕęyʔat stim siwtkʷ iʔ ɣłmixʷmtot.

WATER BONDS US TO OUR ANCESTRY, OUR DESCENDANTS AND OUR LAND.
kʷu ʕęyʔat iʔ kʷu ᵐsqiłxʷ ksecpúta?stm āliʔ ɣłmixʷmtot iʔ siwtkʷ.

WATER MUST BE TREATED WITH REVERENCE AND RESPECT.
āliʔ iʔ ʔłxʷʔłaatstim lūt kاستmustm, āliʔ ksecxistim yʔayʕat iʔ stim.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH WATER IS NOT TAKEN LIGHTLY, WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO ENSURE THAT OUR RELATION CAN CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN THE HEALTH AND RESILIENCY OF OUR LAND AND ANIMALS.
iʔ siwtkʷ ĝxʷʔłaat sʔ tʰmixʷʔuʔaxʷ ul yʔayʕat iʔ stim

WATER IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF OUR LAND AND OUR ANIMALS AND WE AS SYILX PEOPLE
ksecxʷstm iʔ siwtkʷ sʔʔ sʔʔ knaqs ckʰiss]\x93\x93 yʔat aʔ cxʷálx.

RECOGNIZE WATER AS A SACRED ENTITY AND RELATIVE THAT CONNECTS ALL LIFE.
iʔ siwtkʷ yʔat taʔkín kí ksecxʷʔímixʷʔuʔaxʷ ul kí tmixʷ.

WATER COMES IN MANY FORMS AND ALL ARE NEEDED FOR THE HEALTH OF LAND AND FOR THE ANIMALS.
mip nósʔat iʔ sʔʔ sʔʔ iʔ siwtkʷ kí yʔayʕat iʔ stim.

WATER IS OUR MOST SACRED MEDICINE, WATER NOURISHES, REPLENISHES, CLEANSES AND HEALS.
ta kʰúlstm iʔ siwtkʷ kšchaʔstim ul ksecxstím.

ANY USE OF WATER SHOULD BE AN ACT OF REVERENCE AND A COMMITMENT TO OUR RESPONSIBILITIES.
yʔayʕat iʔ sxʷ áltx, ālqíʔ ul cenh tʰprí̱n, āliʔ kʷu sʔukʷnaʔqínx.

OF ALL LIFE, NOW AND TO COME, AS SYILX PEOPLE.
iʔ siwtkʷ cxʷ uy tí tmixʷʔuʔaxʷ tí wíst ul lút ksecxʷí·cuts tí stim.

WATER COMES FROM THE SKY AND THE HIGHEST PLACE YET IT NEVER WILLFULLY RISES ABOVE ANYTHING.
iʔ taʔxʷ út mu ctyap, náxíl ti yʔat tí stim, mísxʷáʔkʷ act.

IT WILL ALWAYS TAKE THE LOWEST PATH IN ITS HUMILITY. YET OF ALL THE ELEMENTS, IT IS THE MOST POWERFUL.
kʷu sʔcúnmaʔstm iʔ siwtkʷ kʷu kʷcōkʷ act ul qíqaráí.

OUR SACRED WATER TEACHES US THAT WE HAVE GREAT STRENGTH TO TRANSFORM THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN WHILE BEING GENTLE, SOFT AND FLEXIBLE.
iwá lo ᵐtíoqip kskxʷúnmixʔaxʔ itiʔ. kíʔulxʷ, tgü̱kín, km mixʷuy̱n.

WATER WILL ALWAYS FIND A WAY AROUND OBSTRUCTIONS, UNDER, OVER AND THROUGH.
kʷu ksecxʷúnmaʔstm ksecxʷí·łnusstm xʔí mixing stim.

IT TEACHES US ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.
ta ctyap iʔ siwtkʷ lut stim īə ctilxʷsts ul kʷu kššílaʔx itiʔ.

WATER MOVEMENTS, PATHWAYS RESILIENCY AND POWER TEACH US WHO WE ARE AND WHO WE CAN BE AS PEOPLE.
As we learn from the past, our Nation moves forward. We envision a sustainable territorial land, culture and way of life hundreds of years from now.
When we take care of the land and water, the land and water take care of us.

This is our law.

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