



Natural Resources Department

Okanagan Water Forum

Forward Thinking: Sylx Knowledge Informing Watershed Management

May 30, 2017

UBCO, Kelowna BC

Summary Report



Last updated: June 15, 2017

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Executive Summary

Okanagan Water Forum held May 30, 2017 at UBCO in Kelowna, British Columbia was the third annual gathering of bringing decision makers around water in the territory together with *Syilx* Okanagan community members and Chiefs executive. The event was hosted by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (“ONA”) to build a collective knowledge based on principles from *Syilx* natural law, shared responsibility to water, to build trust and relationships and find synergies for future collaboration on water management projects in the territory. Chief Byron Louis stated, in his closing remarks:

“We need to turn water management on its head and find a new way to manage sustainably for all users and not just humans. Our elders teach us that we look after the animals, they will look after us.”

His message resonated with the crowd and participants left the event with revitalized knowledge, relationships and energy. Gatherings like the Water Forum are important to celebrate and raise awareness to water work and projects that communities and the Okanagan Nation Alliance are already working on. The Forum served as an important step for the ONA Natural Resource Watershed Responsibility planning in the territory to ensure waters are managed in a holistic way and protected for future generations.

Through a survey before the event participants were motivated to attend the event because they wanted to learn water challenges *Syilx* people face in the territory, *Syilx* perspectives and knowledge of water, a space to network and build relationships for future collaboration and learn more about what the Okanagan Nation Alliance is currently working on. The *Okanagan Water Forum* had three panels, an afternoon dialogue session and a Youth Water, Art, Poetry social mixer at the end of the day. Keynote speakers included: Chief Byron Louis, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong and Dr. Marlowe Sam.

As directed by the ONA Chief’s Executive Council, the Natural Resource department works to promote and create public awareness of *Syilx* people, their title and rights, and their sacred connection to *siw+kw*.

Evaluation Summary Highlights

Okanagan Water Forum was attended by 130 participants, with a balance of *Syilx* and non-*Syilx* citizens. Participants came from a range of sectors including NGO community, Government, industry, academia and Indigenous organizations. The Mayor of Lake Country, James Baker was in attendance as well as members of the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary, Regional District of the Similkameen, Regional and District of North Okanagan. As well representatives from the Shuswap Nation and Colville Confederated Tribes participated. In addition, 8 Okanagan Nation Alliance staff was on-site to hear, present and support the event.

Participant evaluation and feedback was solicited through a post-forum online survey sent out following the event. Feedback was positive and participants were able to network with acquaintances, new people in the water sector and connect with *Syilx* community Natural Resource workers. Sixty percent found the balance of content and networking was about right and thirty percent would have liked to see

more networking. In the future participants want to see more Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for environmental management, hear more of *Syilx* programs and hands on learning, engage in project based planning and have more opportunity to discuss the content of presentations. Favourite parts of the event included the dialogue tables, networking, the Youth Social and learning from the presenters.

Speakers

Okanagan Water Forum opened with an acknowledgement and welcome to the beautiful unceded lands and waters of the Okanagan Indian Band (“OKIB”), Westbank First Nation (“WFN”) and the Okanagan Nation. Grand Chief Stewart Phillip opened the day with inspiring words of the important work ahead and paradigm shift that is needed for the water and future children. ONA Natural Resource Manager Lisa Wilson provided context on what the Nation is doing for water and ONA priorities.

Summary for Dialogue Session

Question	What Was Heard	Action Items
<p>How can we protect a waterbody in the Okanagan with Human Rights?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry, development and pollution need to be managed better; • Importance of Salmon reintroduction for protection and providing nutrients; • More <i>Syilx</i> communication materials and presence (signage); • Science students also trained in TEK; • Relationship building and reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-indigenous peoples; • Building trust is important for collaboration; • Have conversation in terms of “protection”; • Have spaces of dialogue for innovative solutions; • Build more awareness of <i>Syilx</i> peoples and restoration work already done; • Better understanding and modeling on climate change; • Build collective “responsibility” mentality; • Needs to be more gatherings and meetings around water; • Water has the right to flow, where it traditionally flowed; • We have to agree together on waters protection; • People individually need to minimize their water footprint; • Learn from <i>Syilx</i> stories and natural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops integrating Western Science and TEK (more training); • More signage of <i>Syilx</i> presence; • Monitoring of cattle and illegal structures on lakes; • Workshops of <i>Syilx</i> protocols of being on the land

	<p>laws;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights are supported by river rights; • Don't get lost in definition of human rights; • Ensure that ecological function is priority; • River consent; • How to know when river rights are infringed; 	
<p>What are the challenges that you see to collaboration and how do we overcome these together?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural differences and interpretation of priorities; • Multi-jurisdictional; • Institutional exclusion and consultation process; • Need leaders of collaboration; • Capacity challenge of First Nation organizations; • Need to be safe spaces for dialogue and to build trust; • Lack of decision maker accountability; • "Collaboration" is not new in water sector but still lack First Nation's at the table and in existing framework; • Rights versus Responsibility; • Competing interests; • Transparency and honesty; • We "assert our responsibility" • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision makers need to be on the ground locally; • Provide learning and sharing opportunities; • Indigenous studies a pre-requisite; • Understand Four Food Chiefs captikwl and lessons, build in your community for transformative change over time; • Curriculum for elementary schools;
<p>How can you work better with ONA to implement TEK and the Water Declaration into your watershed planning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversation needs to be more holistic and less human centric (include EFN and animals); • TEK needs to be included at the very start of the process; • Water needs to have a voice at the table; • Collaboration is the way forward; and • Get out on the land together 	

Activity: 2020 Tweets and Hashtags

In a creative visioning activity participants dialogued for headlines and tweets they hope to see in the future for water in the Okanagan. The following are some of the highlights:

- 15th annual *Syilx* Water Forum complete success #waterstories #water relations
- *Syilx* Water Declaration adopted by all levels of government
- Andronomous salmon fully restored throughout the Okanagan territory

- Syilx Nation, Public, and Planners celebrate ten year anniversary of watershed renewal agreement with record year salmon feast
- #wateristruth #waterunitesus #rightsarerresponsibilities

Commitment Statements

To close the day participants of the *Okanagan Water Forum* made a shared commitment to the people at their table for the water in the territory:

“We learned that water is not a right, rather an obligation, and therefore we will take responsibility”

“We learned that reconciliation and acknowledgement is the first step moving forward in bringing TEK and Western Science together and therefore we will learn to work together more respectfully”

“Listening was very important. Being vulnerable is necessary. Responsible to do something for water. Duty and obligation to do something for water.. And therefore we will commit to collaboration, high consciousness, to be open to opportunities”

“Host a water ceremony in Penticton. Will put a call out and bring our own message to the center”

“Commit to collaboration, higher consciousness, be open to opportunities”

“Promote the ‘How food was given story’, embrace other perspectives and, ‘break brains’.”