ANNUAL REPORT 2024~25

BRINGING THE SALMON HOME

BRINGING *the* SALMON HOME

kɬ cp̓əlḱ stiḿ iʔ ntytyix

ʔatɬ suʔkiniɬ swaq̓mu

Tspelq̓entém re Sqlélten

The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative

THE SALMON ARE COMING HOME

Bringing the Salmon Home: The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative is the Indigenous-led collaboration of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, Secwépemc Nation, and Ktunaxa Nation, with Canada and British Columbia. Columbia Basin Trust also contributes funding. This is the sixth year of this Initiative, which builds on unending generations of commitment by the Indigenous Nations to ensure salmon continue and thrive for the benefit of all. The result of these cumulative efforts: salmon are swimming again in the upper Columbia River in Canada.

With the guidance of our Elders and Knowledge Keepers who remain steadfast in their cultural beliefs, the Tri-Nation Technical Working Group has been busy with a number of exciting studies introducing and tracking juvenile and adult salmon movements via acoustic stations deployed throughout the Arrow Lakes Reservoir.

This includes a tracking study of adult sockeye (using Okanagan-origin adult sockeye) translocated to the Arrow Lakes, a former sockeye habitat of the upper Columbia River. In Summer 2024, our Initiative translocated 57 adult sockeye and released them into the Arrow Lakes Reservoir. These are the first adult sockeye to freely swim in the Arrow Lakes since 1938 when Grand Coulee Dam construction extirpated salmon from the upper Columbia.

On November 1, 2024, Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries staff located an adult female sockeye in a creek north of Castlegar. This female is the first sockeye recorded in an Arrow Lakes spawning tributary since 1938, when an observation was made at Kuskanax Creek (Chapman, 1943). This is a monumental result.

We recovered the external tag from this fish, and, once the study is completed, we will be able to add more details about the movements of this and the other adult fish that were released.

Other key highlights of the past year include the Tri-Nation Cultural and Salmon Warrior Gatherings, the promising technical work, and the Transboundary Tour launch and numerous related events that embody our collaborative efforts.

The important principle of the Indigenous-led One Watershed approach is evident in the recent successes of the Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative and partner Indigenous Nations. These results prove the remarkable value of Indigenous-led salmon reintroduction, benefiting the entire Columbia and Pacific salmon eco-systems and communities.

The partner governments are working to advance Indigenous-led governance and ensure sustaining core funding for this generational work. An interim Transition Agreement is in process.

MAKING HISTORY

The front cover image of this report is from a video recorded by Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries Team member Tara Gleboff, who, along with colleague Ross Zeleznik, observed this first female sockeye showing spawning behaviour in a tributary of the upper Columbia River north of Castlegar, BC, November 1, 2024. *Image courtesy of Okanagan Nation Aliance*

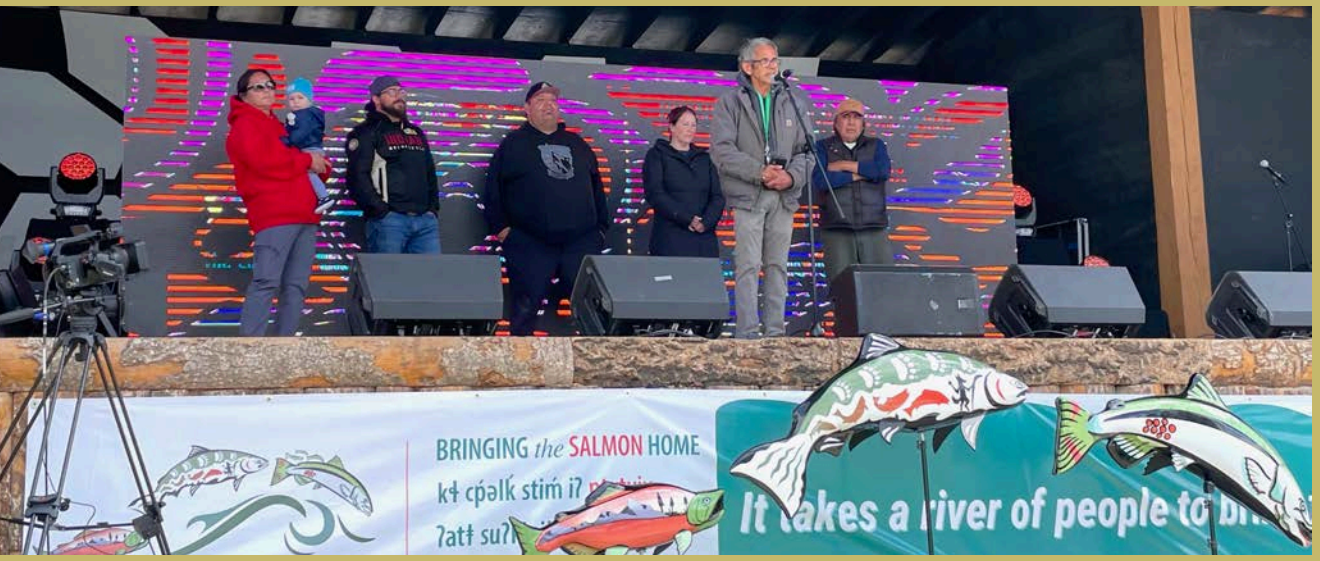
FEEDING THE SPIRIT OF THE SALMON

Indigenous Knowledge Counsel, EWG, IT, TWG members, and Salmon Warriors from the Syilx Okanagan, Secwepemc and Ktunaxa Nations joined together for ceremony and celebration on the shore of the Lower Arrow Lake of the Columbia River system, December 14, 2024.

BRINGING THE SALMON HOME TRANSBOUNDARY TOUR LAUNCH

This page clockwise from top left: Tour launch events included Indigenous Knowledge presentations; unveiling of a Bringing the Salmon Home mural by Ktunaxa artist Darcy Lake at ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation; EWG Chair Mark Thomas and Host Secretariat Executive Director Pauline Terbasket welcomed US Tribal guests including Brian Saluskin and Deland Olney from the Yakama Nation; and packed community film screenings at Golden Secondary School.

Adjoining page clockwise from top left: Tour launch presentations included performances by the Secwépemc Columbia River Hoop Dancers; Ktunaxa Elder Alfred Joseph; the Tri-Nation ceremonial salmon fry release also drew large crowds in Invermere; the festival site overlooking the Columbia River wetlands.



BRINGING the SALMON HOME
kʷ cpalk stem i7 ntytyit
7att sułkiłt swaqmu
Tspelq'entén re Sqlélten

MORE TRANSBOUNDARY TOUR EVENTS

Clockwise from top left: Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative members were honoured to be invited to help celebrate the Yakama Nation's innovative helix design fish passage opening near Cle Elum, WA in July 2024. Upwards of 10,000 people have seen our *Bringing the Salmon Home* film, including in tour screenings hosted by Pacific Salmon Foundation in Vancouver, and by the Vermilion Forks Naturalists Society in Princeton, BC.

WORKING GROUPS

EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP (EWG)

The Executive Working Group met four times over the past year. The EWG continued its work guiding the vital next steps to develop and begin implementation of a Roadmap plan to establish an enduring and sustainably funded Indigenous-led initiative. This action was called for in the 2022-2025 Extension Addendum to the original July 29, 2019 Letter of Agreement. The Roadmap lays out six critical success factors, each with a number of activities, timelines, and responsibilities, to support the evolution of this important Initiative.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM (IT)

The Implementation Team meets monthly and provides direction to the Technical Working Group and Management Team and makes recommendations to the Executive Working Group. A data and knowledge sharing protocol continues to be developed. Highlights of the IT's work include drafting an outline for a Memorandum of Understanding with BC Hydro, development of an Indigenous-led governance model development process, work on Nation capacity assessment and development, and drafting of a Transition Agreement committing the five governments to provide the necessary support for the Initiative to become an enduring organization.

MANAGEMENT TEAM (MT)

The Management Team supports the working groups, communications and engagement, extensive fundraising, coordination of grants and budgets, and financial administration and reporting. Successful applications to Environment and Climate Change Canada's Environmental Damages Fund for technical and engagement support, and to Teck Resources' Indigenous Stewardship Fund for Nation capacity development work, were prepared and approved. Work continued on Roadmap actions and progress reporting.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE COUNSEL (IKC)

The Indigenous Knowledge Counsel acknowledges that we are not working alone to bring salmon home. The Nations' ancestors and relatives continue to guide us and show us that our prayers and ceremony are critical in the return of salmon into the Canadian waters of the upper Columbia.

The IKC continues to support the Roadmap and goals set out by the Initiative. This past year the IKC welcomed aboard three Nation-based cultural coordinators to support the Nations working together to build foundational cultural coordination regarding respective worldviews and understanding of salmon and the restoration of this devastated landscape. This includes the critical importance of coordination of cultural research to be conducted within each Nation. The work has involved bringing the Nations together to strengthen relationships, sharing cultural ceremonies and practices, and salmon stories.

Through these gatherings, Nation members have engaged in salmon release ceremonies, supported the launch of the Transboundary Tour and represented at numerous Tour events, met with the Technical Working Group and Knowledge Holders from across the Nations to discuss cultural needs related to fish passage and other technical work, as well as performing ceremony in the basin to honour salmon and the efforts of the Technical Working Group.

The Nations held their second Tri-Nation Cultural Gathering in January 2025, drawing together Knowledge Holders, Elders, and Youth Salmon Warriors from across the three Nations. Additional efforts have been made to advance a knowledge sharing protocol amongst the Nations and clarify the specific cultural research needs for bringing the salmon home.

Beyond relationship-building activities, the IKC sees that salmon will continue upholding their obligations to come home and to find a way no matter the obstacles they face. The work of the IKC continues to echo and reinforce that sustainable wild salmon populations are the ultimate goal.

TRI-NATION CULTURAL GATHERING

The Indigenous Knowledge Counsel organized the second Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative Tri-Nation Cultural Gathering on January 24-26, 2025 at Moccasin Square Gardens in T̓kemlúps te Secwépemc.

This three-day *Gathering to Witness for Salmon* event was hosted by the Secwépemc Nation. We came together as members of the Secwépemc, Syilx Okanagan, and Ktunaxa Nations to strengthen our relationships around our shared vision to bring the salmon home again.

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP (TWG)

Over the past year, the Technical Working Group has made substantial progress in year two of the nine technical activities being supported by the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BC SRIF).

Highlights from these studies include collaborating for a second year on an experimental release of tens of thousands of tagged juvenile sockeye salmon within the Canadian portion of the Columbia River to help answer questions about downstream movement and survival. Adult sockeye salmon were also successfully translocated from the Okanagan River for the purpose of tracking their movement and fate. This marks the first time that adult sockeye salmon have been present in blocked areas of the upper Columbia since the late 1930s.

Technical staff from the three Nations collaborated in the field collection of habitat data focused on gathering measurements of physical habitat condition, stream temperatures, and flow, to quantify the availability and suitability of habitats for potential future salmon populations. These field studies provided meaningful opportunities for capacity development of technical staff of the Nations and Salmon Warriors. Desktop studies are also underway to investigate fish passage and hatchery strategies to best support salmon reintroduction, explore the impacts of climate change, as well as build habitat and life cycle models to provide decision-makers with better tools for evaluating reintroduction options in the future.

The Technical Working Group also collaborated and supported the efforts of other working groups. This included working with the IKC and Nation-based cultural coordinators to interweave a cultural perspective into the technical work, hosting an internal forum to provide working groups with an update on technical activities, and presenting the technical work at the Transboundary Tour launch, and at a variety of Transboundary Tour events through the year, including joining in the celebrations around the opening of the Cle Elum fish passage project by the Yakama Nation.

COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY GROUP

The Communications Advisory Group guides activities under our High-Level Communications Protocol, and supports the Communications Advisor and the Nation-based Outreach & Engagement Organizing Team.

This has been a busy year, expanding our reach to new audiences every week. Bringing the Salmon Home Transboundary Tour launch events at the Columbia River's headwaters in late May 2024 drew over 1,200 people. Bringing the Salmon Home representatives then led dozens of Transboundary Tour film screenings and events in communities the length of the Columbia River and beyond.

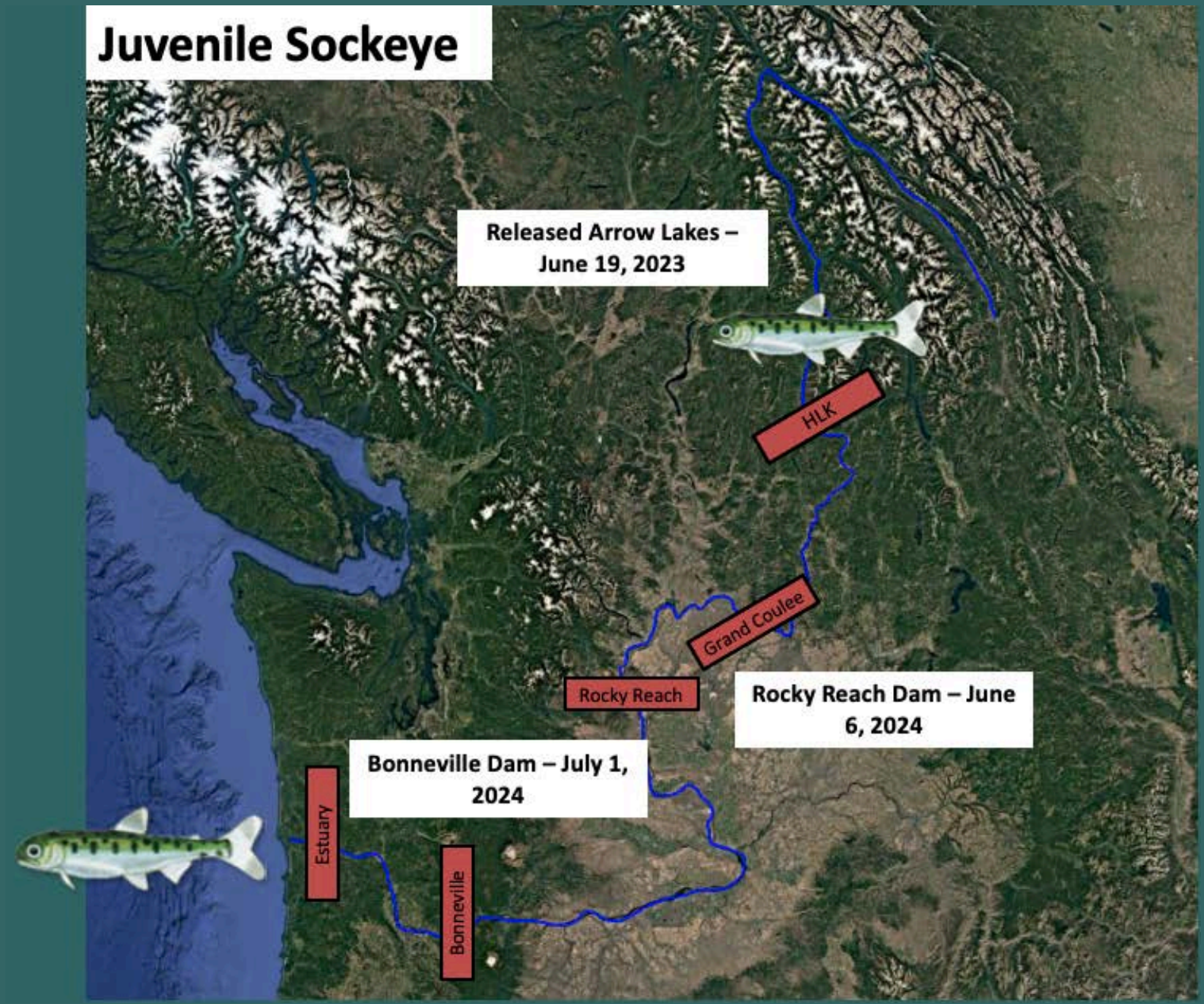
Our 30 minute *Bringing the Salmon Home* documentary continued to garner awards over the past year, including recognition for "Outstanding Excellence" from Nature Without Borders International Film Festival, "Honourable Mention" from the World Water Film Festival, and as a Finalist at the Portland EcoFilm Festival. Transboundary tour events included film screenings opening the Meadowlark Festival in Penticton, at the Qathet 3 Ears Indigenous Film Festival in Powell River, the Ryga Festival in Summerland, the Oregon Documentary Film Festival, the Columbia River Transboundary Water and Ethics Symposium in Spokane, a special screening hosted by Pacific Salmon Foundation in Vancouver, and a screening for BC Ministers and participants at the First Nations Leadership Gathering in January 2025.

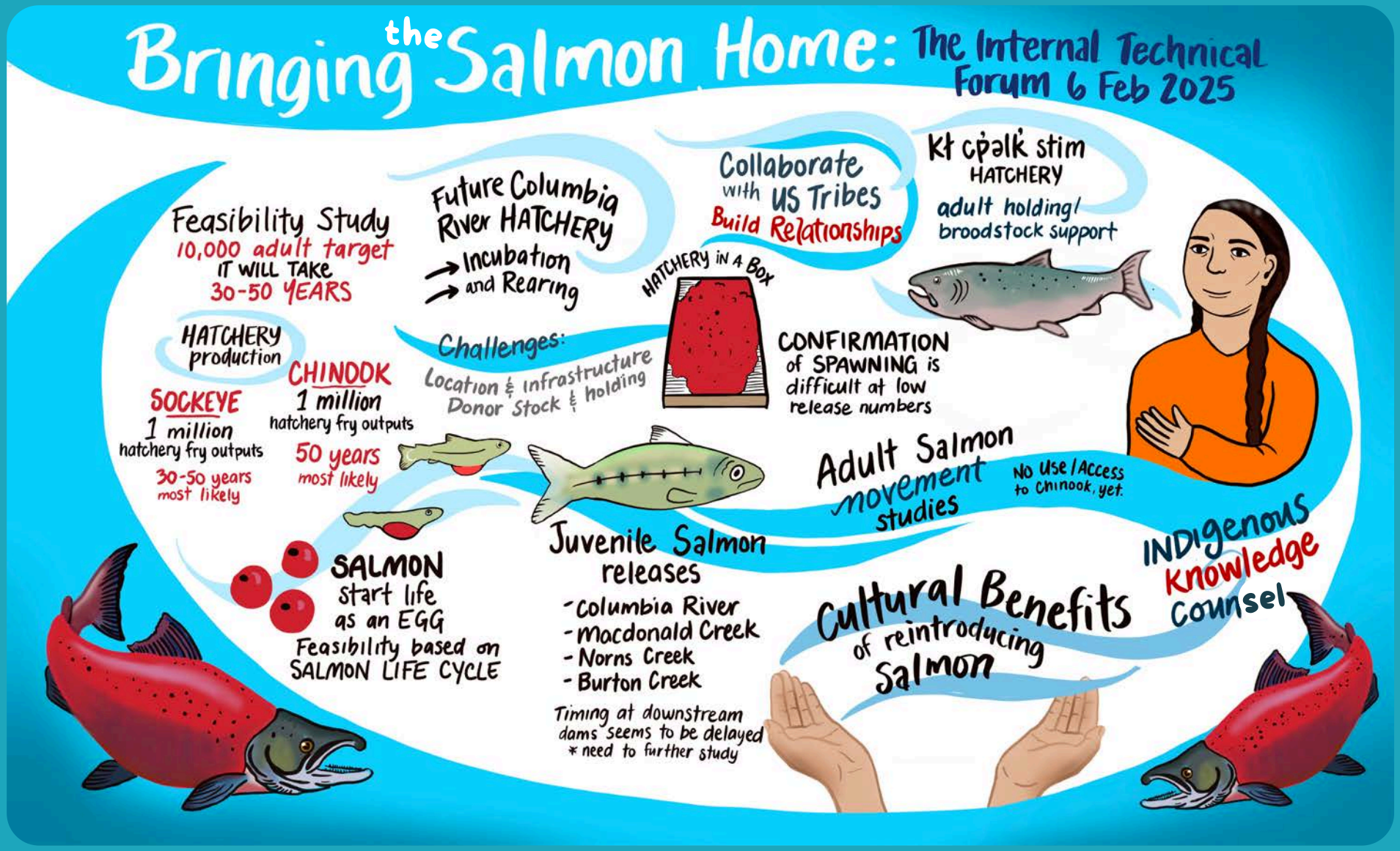
The communications and engagement team coordinated the third Tri-Nation Salmon Warriors Gathering in mid-October 2024. This year, Salmon Warriors from the three Nations were invited to get in the river and assist with the Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries' broodstock collection. Some of the fry raised from this broodstock collection will contribute to Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative reintroductions in the upper Columbia River in the coming year. Watch the new five-minute *Celebrating Salmon Warriors* video on our website at ColumbiaRiverSalmon.ca.

TRACKING JUVENILE FRY AND ADULT SALMON RELEASES

This page: Slide from animated presentation by ONA Fisheries Biologist Patrick Zubick showing movements of tagged salmon fry released in Canadian headwaters and tracked by US stations swimming downriver through major dams to the ocean.

Adjoining page: Tri-Nation technical crew releasing adult sockeye into the Arrow Lakes section of the Columbia River system.





INTERNAL TECHNICAL FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

Graphic recording by Michele Buchholz

SALMON WARRIORS:
INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

This page clockwise from left: Salmon Warriors guide salmon into collection nets, Okanagan River; Secwepemc Salmon Warrior Susan Romandia helps with the egg take at the kł cp̓əl̓k̓ stiḿ conservation hatchery in Penticton.

Following page: This year marked the largest return recorded in recent history of sockeye salmon into the Columbia system. The majority of these fish are of Okanagan origin, through the successful decades-long efforts of the ONA Fisheries program.

EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP (EWG)
Mark Thomas, EWG Chair, Secwépemc Nation
Kukpi7 Barb Cote, Secwépemc Nation
Chief Keith Crow, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Chief Byron Louis, Syilx Okanagan Nation,
Jason Andrew, Ktunaxa Nation
Avery Gravelle, Ktunaxa Nation
David Didluck, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Steve Gotch, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
David Travia, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, BC
Mike Turner, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, BC

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE COUNSEL
Chad Eneas, IKC Chair, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Dixon Terbasket, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Fred Fortier, Secwépemc Nation
TBA, Secwépemc Nation
Marty Williams, Ktunaxa Nation
Vickie Thomas, Ktunaxa Nation

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM (IT)
Rosalie Yazzie, IT Chair, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Jay Johnson, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Murray Ross, Secwépemc Nation
Adam Neil, Secwépemc Nation
Vickie Thomas, Ktunaxa Nation
Robin Louie, Ktunaxa Nation
Eddy Kennedy, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Dean Allan, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Heather Dempsey, AAROM Support, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Eva Schindler, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, BC

COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)
Tara Montgomery, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Valerie Michel, Secwépemc Nation
Rachelle Sebastian, Ktunaxa Nation
Alexandra Coutts, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Eva Schindler, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, BC

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP (TWG)
Misun Kang, TWG Co-Chair, Ktunaxa Nation
Ben Meunier, Ktunaxa Nation
Ryan Benson, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Michael Zimmer, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Scott Cope, Secwépemc Nation
Nathan Medinski, Secwépemc Nation
Will Warnock, TWG Co-Chair, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, BC
Tyler Weir, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, BC
Howard Stiff, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Lauren Weir, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (on leave)
Tommy Pontbriand, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

SECRETARIAT
*Hosted by Okanagan Nation Alliance
Pauline Terbasket, Host Administrator
David Marshall, Co-Facilitator
Marc Nelitz, Co-Facilitator
Teresa Marshall, Communications Advisor
Carla Hunt, Administrative Coordinator

OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZERS
Valerie Michel, Secwépemc Nation
Billie Jean Gabriel, Syilx Okanagan Nation
Clifford Dorion, Ktunaxa Nation

CULTURAL COORDINATORS
Rhona Bowe, Secwépemc Nation
Clifford Dorian, Ktunaxa Nation
Elliott Tonasket, Syilx Okanagan Nation

Bringing the Salmon Home Salmon Warriors and representatives with Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries team members, broodstock collection October 2024.

Annual Report photo & image contributions by:
T. Marshall, Ben Meunier, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Tara Gleboff, Patrick Zubick, cewel'na Leon Louis, Jeremy Williams, Rhona Bowe

syilx Okanagan Nation Alliance

KTUNAXA NATION

SECWEPEMCÚLECW

Canada

BRITISH COLUMBIA