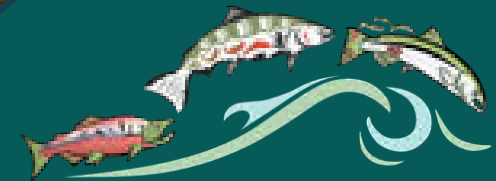


# ANNUAL REPORT 2025~26

## BRINGING THE SALMON HOME



BRINGING *the* SALMON HOME

kʔ cʔəlʔkʔ stím iʔ ntytyix

ʔatʔ suʔkiniʔ swaǫmu

Tspelǫ'entém re Sǫlélten

The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative

# HISTORIC RETURN OF SALMON

**In our seventh year**, the Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative, led by the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Ktunaxa Nations, in partnership with the governments of British Columbia and Canada, proudly announced a historic achievement: sockeye salmon released as fry in the upper Columbia River in Canada returned as adults as far upriver as fish passage currently allows.

The Columbia's headwaters in BC's Kootenay region, once the spawning grounds of the world's greatest salmon runs, have been blocked to returning salmon since the downstream construction of Grand Coulee Dam in 1939.

Two tagged sockeye salmon released by the Initiative in the upper Columbia as juvenile fry in 2023 were detected returning into the Columbia River as adults in the summer of 2025. The fish completed a remarkable journey down through a dozen major dams to the ocean and back toward their ancestral waters.

One adult sockeye was tracked making its way upstream past Wells Dam in Washington State, as of June 30, 2025. The second adult sockeye was detected passing through the nearby Rocky Reach Fishway on July 7, 2025. There were no further detections beyond these points.

Cultural processes were observed within the respective Indigenous Nations and then this momentous news was shared widely.

"This is a powerful affirmation of what our Elders and Knowledge Keepers have always told us," said kal?lùpaq'n Chief Keith Crow, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Syilx Okanagan Nation. "Our Peoples have never stopped working together across colonial

borders to call the salmon back. The salmon belong here, and with ceremony, Indigenous Knowledge combined with western science, and determination, we are bringing them home."

Mark Thomas, Shuswap Indian Band Councillor, Secwépemc Nation, and Chair of the Bringing the Salmon Home Executive Working Group said: "This proves that, given the chance, the salmon know where they need to go. This moment is cause for celebration, reflection, and renewed commitment. We do this work for our grandchildren, for the river, and for all of our relations."

Jason Andrew, ʔaǰam Councillor, Ktunaxa Nation, added: "Our ancestors taught us that salmon are part of who we are. Their return signals hope, healing, and responsibility. We will continue advocating for the necessary resources until ultimate fish passage is secured and salmon once again thrive in the upper Columbia."

The Honourable Joanne Thompson, Minister of Fisheries, said: "The recent return of adult sockeye salmon to the Columbia River is a meaningful reflection of what can be achieved through collaborative effort. Canada values the opportunity to contribute to this important work, which honours Indigenous leadership and knowledge, and supports ecological restoration efforts to benefit salmon."

BC's Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Randene Neill said: "This result confirms the success of collaborative reintroduction studies and the resilience of salmon life cycles once thought lost from these waters. This is a vital step in restoring salmon populations integral to the entire Pacific salmon ecosystem and communities."

**HEADWATERS MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT** On September 26, 2025, representatives of the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Ktunaxa Nations gathered at the headwaters of the Columbia River near Canal Flats, BC, to announce the historic return of sockeye—released in 2023 as fry in the upper Columbia River—that were detected returning as adults as far upriver as current fish passage allows this year.



### INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINING FINANCING

*Clockwise from top:* Internal forum panel with Cliff Fregin, Executive Director, Four Pillars Society, Rosalie Yazzie, Implementation Team Chair, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, and Si Sityaawks/Jessica Wood, Deputy Minister of the Declaration Act Secretariat; First Nation Leadership Gathering participants watch a special screening of our *Salmon Warriors* film; and Carolyn Kamper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, EWG Chair Mark Thomas, Ktunaxa EWG member Jason Andrew, Premier David Eby, Ktunaxa IT member Vickie Thomas, and IT Chair Rosalie Yazzie met at FNLG, November 4, 2025, Vancouver.



# WORKING GROUPS

## **EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP (EWG)**

The Executive Working Group met quarterly and continues its work guiding the Initiative to establish an enduring and sustainably funded Indigenous-led process and organization. This action featured in the 2022-2025 Extension Addendum to the original July 29, 2019 Letter of Agreement and was reconfirmed in the 2025-2027 Transition Agreement, signed by all five governments. The Initiative's leadership held an Indigenous-led Governance and Sustaining Financing Forum in October 2025 where key leaders from outside groups shared their learnings on sustainable options for organizational growth.

## **IMPLEMENTATION TEAM (IT)**

The Implementation Team continued to meet monthly and provide direction to the Technical Working Group and Management Team and make policy and budget recommendations to the Executive Working Group. Work continued on establishing an ongoing relationship with the Columbia Power Corporation and BC Hydro, as well as Nation capacity-building with respect to salmon reintroduction.

## **MANAGEMENT TEAM (MT)**

The Management Team supports the working groups including the Funding Action Committee, extensive funding applications and coordination of grants and budgets, communications and engagement, capacity-building, and financial administration and reporting. Work continued with managing technical, cultural and engagement funding including through the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund, Environment and Climate Change Canada's Environmental Damages Fund, and Teck Resources' Indigenous Stewardship Fund for Nation capacity development. Additional funding outreach included to Salmon Returns, Salmon Resiliency Foundation, and MakeWay Foundation. Work continued on Roadmap actions and progress reporting.

## **INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE COUNSEL (IKC)**

Our salmon reintroduction work is led through ceremony and community. The role of the IKC is to lift each other and salmon up. This is our responsibility. The courage to do this work is in our DNA. The damage to the river, the salmon, and our culture, requires redress. Our future depends on how we do this work together for salmon for all time.

With British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BC SRIF) support, the IKC and Nation-based Cultural Coordinators continued to advance Indigenous leadership and cultural priorities. This work strengthens relationships within and among Nations, revitalizes Inter-Tribal cultural protocols, broadens community awareness and participation in salmon reintroduction, supports cultural gatherings and salmon ceremonies, integrates Indigenous perspectives into other working groups, and clarifies cultural research needs for the Initiative.

The IKC provided cultural guidance across the Initiative, including coordination with the Technical Working Group on conservation hatchery and fish passage strategies.

In Spring 2025, the IKC and Cultural Coordinators participated in salmon release ceremonies in the Canadian upper Columbia. In Summer 2025, they joined calling-back ceremonies that coincided with the return of adult sockeye salmon into the lower Columbia that the Initiative had released as juveniles in 2023, marking an important milestone.

In late September 2025, the Ktunaxa Nation hosted the third Tri-Nation Cultural Gathering at the Columbia headwaters. Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and Youth Salmon Warriors gathered to share teachings and perspectives on salmon reintroduction, practice Inter-Tribal protocols, play Indigenous games, and share meals.

In late February 2026, the IKC hosted a Recognition Gathering and working meeting in Kelowna. Nation representatives from all working groups came together to honour contributors to the Initiative, strengthen relationships, and discuss cultural research protocols and priorities.



**SALMON REINTRODUCTION** *Clockwise from top left:* Devin Capilo, Shuswap Guardian and Junior Salmon Chief, recording water quality on an Illicilleawat tributary in October 2025 for the Salmon Habitat Data Collection study; Shuswap Band member Suzie Thomas, with ONA biologist Patrick Zubick, releasing translocated adult salmon into the upper Columbia July 25, 2025; gathering for the salmon fry release, Columbia River near Revelstoke, May 15, 2025.



## TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP (TWG)

The Technical Working Group has made substantial progress around the nine technical activities being supported in the final year of the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BC SRIF).

Highlights from these studies include collaborating for a third 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. In summer of 2025 the TWG observed the first detections of several returning adult sockeye released as juveniles from the Initiative in 2023. These adults were detected as returning spawners at lower Columbia River detection points, migrating to the furthest upstream extent at Wells dam. Representatives from the three Indigenous Nations held an announcement and celebration about these returning salmon at the headwaters in late September.

Adult sockeye salmon were also successfully translocated from the Okanagan River for a second year for the purpose of tracking their movement and fate during their spawning stage of life. Fewer numbers were translocated compared to last year due to low adult returns in the Okanagan River.

Technical staff from the three Indigenous Nations collaborated for a final year of habitat data field collection focused on gathering measurements of physical habitat condition, stream temperatures and flow, to quantify the availability and suitability of habitats within tributary streams and mainstem river locations.

The TWG made substantial progress on developing a conservation hatchery strategy for salmon reintroduction and explored deployment of an innovative, small-scale hatchery approach called a Hatchery in a Box. This technology has the promise of supporting experimental reintroduction and conservation hatchery goals in the future.

Other desktop studies included formally identifying the facilities at Hugh Keenleyside Dam–Arrow Generating Station, and Brilliant Dam–Brilliant Expansion Generating Station, as priorities for interim fish passage trials and related studies. And the TWG continued to make progress on developing a series of quantitative models that will support decision making related to managing habitats, climate change, and salmon population survival and abundance.

The TWG also held a planning workshop in Cranbrook in the fall of 2025 to check on progress around the BC SRIF activities and to plan the next few years of technical work as the Initiative transitions to a new phase.

## COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)

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

Our Headwaters Media Announcement (September 26, 2025) received coverage in dozens of media outlets, including links to our short press conference video. The video and full media release are also available on our website at [ColumbiaRiverSalmon.ca](http://ColumbiaRiverSalmon.ca).

Our *Salmon Warriors* short film screened for BC Ministers and participants at the First Nations Leadership Gathering in early November 2025. Our half-hour *Bringing the Salmon Home* documentary continued to be well-received by audiences, including Okanagan Screen Awards recognition March 2026.

The communications and engagement team assisted with numerous cultural events, and coordinated the fourth Tri-Nation Salmon Warriors Gathering in mid-October 2025. Salmon Warriors from the three Nations gained valuable skills and cultural knowledge while helping with the Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries' broodstock collection.

# TRI- NATION CULTURAL GATHERING

The Indigenous Knowledge Counsel organized the third Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative Tri-Nation Cultural Gathering September 26-28 2025, hosted by the Ktunaxa Nation, with opening and closing ceremonies at the Columbia River headwaters in the East Kootenays.

*Clockwise from top:* Members of the three Nations and technical staff were honoured; Syilx representatives Elliott Tonasket and Charlene Robards with Salmon Warriors from the Nations; Ktunaxa IKC member Marty Williams.





**TRI-NATION CULTURAL GATHERING** *Clockwise from top left:* Discussion circles focused on important questions such as “How can the Nations give this work breath, and keep this work alive?”; traditional games such as knobby ball were enjoyed by all; Syilx Nation reps Knowledge Keeper Blake Wildcat, Elder Pauline Gregoire-Archachan, and Andrea Gregoire.



# SALMON WARRIORS: FALL GATHERING 2025

The fourth Tri-Nation Salmon Warriors Gathering took place at snpink'tn October 15–19, 2025. This five day event brought 19 young adults from the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Ktunaxa Nations together with technical and cultural teams.

The Salmon Warriors worked with the Okanagan Nation Alliance's Fisheries and Natural Resource teams in hands-on habitat restoration and broodstock management. The group also toured the ONA's kł cǰáłk stírń conservation hatchery, deepening their understanding of the life cycle of salmon and Indigenous stewardship.

Restoration is not just about the land and water—it's about spirit, connection, and community. Our young people are stepping up, embracing their roles, and understanding they are part of an ongoing tradition of stewardship that spans generations.

*Top:* Salmon Warriors assisted the Okanagan Nation Alliance's broodstock team in collecting adult sockeye salmon in the Okanagan River, Fall 2025.

*Lower (l>r):* Marlyece Sampson, Secwépemc Nation; Andre Nicholas and Isaiah Shepperd, Ktunaxa Nation; Serenity Baptiste, Syilx Okanagan Nation.



**SALMON WARRIORS REPRESENT** Tri-Nation Salmon Warriors celebrate a successful day collecting broodstock in the Okanagan River, October 17, 2025.



# IT TAKES A RIVER OF PEOPLE TO BRING THE SALMON HOME!



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** *Clockwise from top left:* Executive Working Group Chair and Shuswap Salmon Chief Mark Thomas leads the opening for the ceremonial salmon fry release at Columbia Lake, May 26, 2025; Syilx Okanagan members Billie Jean Gabriel, Maria Alexis, Taylor Fulton, John Kruger, JJ Tardif (Secwépemc), and Tara Montgomery at snpink'tn Fish Passage opening, August 19, 2025; audience for *Bringing the Salmon Home* film screening, Caravan Farm Theatre, Armstrong, June 13, 2025.



**LIFTING UP THE IMPORTANT WORK OF SALMON REINTRODUCTION** Our Indigenous Knowledge Counsel brought together Bringing the Salmon Home working group members and Salmon Warriors from the Syilx Okanagan Nation, Secwépemc, and Ktunaxa Nations for a special Recognition Gathering in Kelowna, February 26-27, 2026.





**EXECUTIVE WORKING GROUP (EWG)**

Mark Thomas, EWG Chair, Secwépemc Nation  
Kukpi7 Barb Cote, Secwépemc Nation  
Chief Keith Crow, Syilx Okanagan Nation  
TBA, 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  
Anjum Mutakabbir/Rachel Breckner, 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  
Beverly Saul, Secwépemc Nation  
Rachelle Sebastian, Ktunaxa Nation  
Jennifer Young, 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  
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**

Billie Jean Gabriel, Syilx Okanagan Nation  
Beverly Saul, Secwépemc Nation  
Autumn Patrick, Ktunaxa Nation

**CULTURAL COORDINATORS**

Elliott Tonasket, Syilx Okanagan Nation  
Beverly Saul, Secwépemc Nation  
Clifford Dorian, Ktunaxa Nation



**SALMON FRY RELEASE** Bringing the Salmon Home Technical, Indigenous Knowledge, Outreach & Engagment, and Salmon Warrior representatives at Revelstoke, May 15, 2025.

*Annual Report photos contributed by: Teresa Marshall, Billie Jean Gabriel, Jeremy Williams, Vickie Thomas, Scott Cope*

