



The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative

BRINGING *the* SALMON HOME

kł cǫłk stím i? ntytyix

ʔatł suʔkinił swaǫmu

Tspelq'entém re Sqlélten

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE STATEMENT

The primary purpose and responsibility of the Indigenous Knowledge Counsel (IKC) is to be the foundation of the Indigenous-led Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative. This responsibility involves the continued collaboration and commitment amongst the three Indigenous Nations: the Syilx Okanagan Nation, Secwépemc Nation, and Ktunaxa Nation. This will ensure that Indigenous Knowledge, cultural values, and worldview are respectfully recognized and integrated to ground the intention, guidance, implementation, and coordination of these efforts through ongoing learning and developments.

Our respective Nations' customs and cultural practices make us distinct. Through our respective "Creation Stories" the Indigenous Knowledge Counsel provides inspiration and guidance to move forward. Although our stories are different and vary, the common messages have been carried through millennia about our Indigenous responsibilities in carrying out the intimate connection of all living things. These stories embed the principles of reciprocity and respect of the spirit of the natural world; they teach and support the health and well-being of our co-existence and relationship to all living things, including all the human beings. These ancient knowledge systems or ways of knowing provide stamina in the face of barriers and hardship. These systems have been passed down for millennia, signifying the importance of Place in our stories.¹ One of these stories is about our relationship with the salmon, as our relatives continue to carry out their responsibility to feed the land and all things. We depend on the salmon for our survival – our food and spiritual source. Our stories are not just anecdotal stories, they are encoded messages which represent the specific Knowledge, Protocols, and Laws that define and are sacred to the Syilx Okanagan, Ktunaxa, and Secwépemc Peoples.

From our tribal perspectives of "all living things," our Indigenous Stories, Worldviews, and Laws uphold as sacred the water, animals, plants, lands, and People of the Columbia River. The health and well-being of all things depends on how we carry out these sacred responsibilities to protect all species – which are interconnected and linked to that of other animals, to the waters, to the forest, and to the ocean. One species we are focusing on is Salmon, who truly live in reciprocity for the next generation by providing life to the waters and lands where they spawn. Our Salmon family is, and was historically, larger than just sockeye and chinook. For all Indigenous Nations up and down the Columbia River system, this family is inclusive of resident and ocean-going species, such as coho and pink salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey, where each species has a meaning and a responsibility to each other. The connection among all living things in the Columbia River basin has been disrupted. Our worldviews can guide the scope and focus of this Initiative beyond salmon as they have done for thousands of years for the best chance of survival for all.

We, the Indigenous Peoples from the Columbia River system, respect and maintain tribal responsibilities to honour our creation stories and each other along this One River in a way that is not divided by the international colonial border separating Canada from the United States. Through our varied and diverse worldviews, languages, and laws, we maintain collective approaches for a healthy and vibrant future.

¹ <https://www.syilx.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Fish-Passage-Captiwlk.pdf>
<https://rootsandblues.ca/secwepemc-stories/>
<https://www.ktunaxa.org/who-we-are/creation-story/>

Prior to contact, we built, maintained and continued to rely on our relationships with each other, in ceremony, in social customs, and our traditional economies and trade systems. Through these practices, our cultural continuum affirms our ways of being: the practices and agreement protocols that support the sustainable management responsibilities of sharing salmon along the River. As Indigenous Peoples we also acknowledge the differences amongst us (caused by colonization) and will focus to address the larger threats to the planet and specifically for the restoration of our shared and collective interests – the salmon. We know our tribal relationships can together lead, contribute, inspire, and persist in the collaboration among Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to Bring the Salmon Home for the holistic health of the land and each other.

Each of our Nations have distinct languages, ceremonies, protocols, laws and governing institutions for how we have maintained continued use and occupation. Even when there is no more salmon, the memory guides as our oral traditions and storytelling signify the capacity and perseverance in the restoration of salmon as the Salmon People. We acknowledge and understand the severe impacts of colonization upon all Indigenous peoples. However, the laws and teachings expressed through our languages (*tmixʷ*, *tmícw*, *?aknumuṭtiṭ*, and *?a-kxaṁis ḡapi qapsin*) and actions express our ways of caring for ourselves in and on the land as our lives and our future depend on it.

Salmon are a vital part of a healthy Columbia River ecosystem and remain under ongoing threat. Salmon returning to the Columbia Basin have also been displaced for more than 80 years since massive hydro-electric dams have blocked the natural migration and return of salmon throughout the Columbia River system. As other western experts continue to inform, discuss, and announce through modern day applications what the salmon need for regeneration, Indigenous Peoples have been fierce in our assertions and advocacy in the carrying out of these same responsibilities.

The salmon show us how we must carry on even through the most difficult times and continue to find a way to work with each other, no matter how turbulent the waters may be. The salmon are showing us the way for what we need to do. Our lives depend on how we uphold and advance our responsibilities together. This makes all the difference in our collective survival. It is through our collaborations among the Nations and with other federal, provincial, and international governments and forums that we have been the most successful in recovery for each other and salmon. We can't talk about just western science recovering salmon without the Salmon People. Salmon are a part of who we are. Our community input is a necessity in the cultural and technical research being undertaken to ensure that the information and perspectives from Elders and Knowledge Holders are being considered within and across the three Indigenous Nations. Indigenous leadership needs to continue advancing collective approaches through the growing and supportive Bringing the Salmon Home partnerships.

We observe many things in our lives and the cycles of life, and the full regeneration of life is not something humans can control. How we co-exist on the planet is a responsibility we all share. We know our Indigenous Nations have a deeper understanding of the salmon, the plants, the trees, and the water for our survival, and "they do not need us". For these reasons, the integrity by which we carry ourselves forward must be strict, known, upheld by all, and not be compromised. Respect for each other relies on the respect we have for ourselves. The salmon remind us that life is short, life is a journey, and that we must always remember where we come from. This work is more than just salmon recovery and reintroduction and all that entails. It is for the healing and the health of all things, including all the people who are a part of this journey with us. We will never give in or give up, especially on each other.

We would like to thank all those who have dedicated their lives in this way. Our teachings, that are passed down through our ancestors, are continuing to be heard through the voices within the Columbia River system and echo through time in the work that we are doing together to Bring the Salmon Home.

~ Indigenous Knowledge Statement created by the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Ktunaxa Nation members of the Indigenous Knowledge Counsel of Bringing the Salmon Home: The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative (September 2023)