MEDIA RELEASE | MAY 20, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Syilx Okanagan Nation Declares a Watershed Emergency

stqaʔtkwɬniwt, Westbank, Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory: The Syilx Okanagan Nation has formally declared a Watershed Emergency across the Okanagan, Nicola, Similkameen, Kettle, Salmon, and Bessette watersheds in response to accelerating drought, ecosystem decline, and growing threats to water security.

The Syilx Nation has long affirmed its rights, responsibilities, and jurisdiction to protect and care for siwɬkʷ-water in accordance with Syilx law, knowledge systems, governance, and the Syilx siwɬkʷ Declaration (2014).

Elders, knowledge holders, and technical staff across Syilx Territory have observed accelerating environmental changes, including early hot temperatures; low snowpack; unusually dry upper watershed creeks, springs, and wetlands; increasing water temperatures and ecosystem stress; the early die-off of spiƛ̓əm-bitterroot, and declining streamflows impacting xʷəxʷmĭnaʔ-rainbow trout populations in Mission Creek and other tributaries.

As of May 1, 2026, snowpack levels across Syilx Territory ranged from just 9% to 69% of normal, raising urgent concerns about water shortages, ecosystem collapse, extreme wildfire risk, and long-term watershed health. These conditions represent an escalating cultural, ecological, and governance emergency that threatens communities, ecosystems, and timxʷ-all living things.

“The Syilx Nation is acting within its inherent jurisdiction and responsibility to protect siwɬkʷ for future generations,” said Chief Robert Louie. “Water is life, and the health of our watersheds can no longer be treated as secondary to development and short-term interests.”

Current government and management systems have failed to adequately protect watershed health. This is compounded by major knowledge gaps around headwaters, groundwater interactions, and cumulative impacts that continue to limit informed decision-making.

The Okanagan Nation has long demonstrated leadership in watershed collaboration through initiatives such as salmon reintroduction, the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative, and the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table.

In response to the escalating watershed crisis, the Nation is calling on the Province of British Columbia and all relevant agencies to take immediate and coordinated action through the following measures:

- **A moratorium on new surface and groundwater licences;**
- Mandatory reductions in water use;

- Establishment of a Syilx Nation–BC co-governance forum on water scarcity;
- Inclusion of local governments in coordinated watershed management; and
- Protection of critical fish flows through emergency measures.

All levels of government are called upon to prioritize long-term investment in watershed restoration, climate adaptation, wetland and riparian protection, and First Nations-led stewardship and monitoring.

The Syilx Okanagan Nation emphasized that all water users—including agriculture, industry, municipalities, and the public—share responsibility for reducing water use, preventing pollution, and protecting watershed health for future generations.

This is a formal call to action for governments, organizations, industry, and communities **to work in true partnership with the Syilx Nation** through shared decision-making, accountability, and urgent collective action.

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TRIBAL COUNCIL RESOLUTION **TCR 576**
Natural Resources

iʔ‿siwɬkʷ sxʷɬxʷaɬtət – Water is our relation - Syilx Okanagan Nation
DECLARE A WATERSHED EMERGENCY

May 15, 2026

WHEREAS: The Syilx Okanagan Nation has governed and cared for our lands and waters since time immemorial under Syilx laws, customs, captikʷɬ, and nsyilxcən teachings, carrying the sacred responsibility and jurisdiction to protect and care for siwɬkʷ-water and all living things for future generations, as affirmed through Syilx governance, knowledge systems, and the Syilx siwɬkʷ Declaration (2014); and,

WHEREAS: siwɬkʷ-water is a living relative essential to the health of lands, ecosystems, and all communities; and,

WHEREAS: Elders and knowledge holders across the Syilx territory have observed alarming and accelerating changes, including:

- Early hot temperatures,
- No snow in upper elevations,
- Unusually dry upper watershed creeks, springs, and wetlands,
- Increasing water temperatures and ecosystem stress,
- Indicator plant species like spiƛ̓əm–bitterroot dying early,
- xʷəxʷmin̓aʔ–Rainbow Trout suffering with low flows in Mission Creek and other tributaries; and

WHEREAS: Snowpacks as of May 1, 2026, range from 9% to 69% of normal across watersheds in Syilx territory, which means reduced stream flows, low water supply, increased stress on aquatic systems, low salmon returns, and increased fire hazard this year.

WHEREAS: These conditions constitute a cultural, ecological, and governance emergency threatening drinking water, fish, wildlife, food systems, cultural practices, local economies, and the long-term wellbeing of communities throughout the Okanagan, Nicola, Similkameen, Kettle, Salmon, and Bessette watersheds; and,

WHEREAS: Current governance and management systems have failed to adequately prioritize, resource, and protect watershed health in the Southern Interior of British Columbia—compounded by the fact that currently there is insufficient knowledge of headwater conditions, groundwater interactions, and cumulative watershed impacts to support responsible decision-making; and,

WHEREAS: The Syilx Okanagan Nation has already demonstrated watershed collaboration leadership through initiatives including the return of salmon, Fish Water Management Tool, Okanagan River Restoration Initiative, the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table, and the establishment of a long-term vision and call for intergenerational stewardship and systemic change in the 250-Year Okanagan Similkameen Watershed Responsibility Plan; and,

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THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The Syilx Okanagan Nation formally declares a Watershed Emergency** across the Okanagan, Nicola, Similkameen, Kettle, Salmon and Bessette watersheds in response to accelerating watershed decline, drought, ecosystem stress, and increasing threats to water security.

2. **The Syilx Nation reaffirms its inherent rights, responsibilities, and jurisdiction to protect, restore, and care for siwɬkʷ** in accordance with Syilx law, knowledge systems, governance, and the siwɬkʷ Water Declaration.

3. **In response to the 2026 Watershed Emergency, the Province of British Columbia and all relevant agencies are called upon to take immediate emergency actions including:**
    - **a.** Establish a moratorium on issuing any further surface water and groundwater licences;
    - **b.** Put all licensees on notice that they will be required to reduce their water use;
    - **c.** Establish a co-governance forum between the Syilx Nation and BC to monitor and assess water scarcity in the region;
    - **d.** Include local governments at the table with the understanding that they play a pivotal role in water management;
    - **e.** Recognize fish protection flows at which the Province will issue an emergency protection order;

4. **All levels of government are further called upon to prioritize long-term watershed protection and climate adaptation in the Southern Interior of British Columbia through:**
    - **a.** Restoration and protection of wetlands, riparian areas, springs, floodplains, and aquatic habitats;
    - **b.** Climate adaptation planning grounded in Syilx laws, knowledge systems, and Western science;
    - **c.** Long-term investment in First Nations-led watershed stewardship, governance, and monitoring capacity;
    - **d.** Cross-jurisdictional collaboration that reflects the interconnected nature of watersheds and shared responsibility for water quality and quantity; and
    - **e.** Land use and zoning policies that protect the natural function and movement of creeks, floodplains, lakes, wetlands, springs, groundwater, and riparian areas.

5. **All water users—agriculture, industry, municipalities, and the public—share a responsibility to:**
    - **a.** Immediately reduce water use and waste;
    - **b.** Prevent pollution and contamination of water sources;
    - **c.** Support watershed restoration and conservation efforts; and
    - **d.** Respect ecological limits and Syilx Okanagan rights and responsibilities.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED:

6. **A coordinated watershed-scale approach shall be advanced through initiatives including:**
    - **a.** The Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table;
    - **b.** The 250-Year Okanagan Similkameen Watershed Responsibility Plan; and
    - **c.** Other collaborative processes that support long-term watershed resilience and intergenerational stewardship, and;

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FINALLY IT BE RESOLVED;

7. **This resolution serves as a formal call to action for governments, organizations, industry, and communities to work in true partnership with the Syilx Nation** through shared decision-making, accountability, and urgent collective action as the Syilx Nation commits to taking continued leadership and Unity to uphold responsibilities to future generations and all living things.

Sil-teekin yilmixʷm Greg Gabriel
Penticton Indian Band

kalʔlupaqn yilmixʷm Keith Crow
Lower Similkameen Indian Band

ki law na yilmixʷm Clarence Louie
Osoyoos Indian Band

simo yilmixʷm Robert Louie
Westbank First Nation

yilmixʷm Dan Wilson
Okanagan Indian Band

yilmixʷm Dan Manuel
Upper Nicola Indian Band

yilmixʷm Charlie Allison
Upper Similkameen Indian Band

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