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SYILX OKANAGAN SUPPORT MOTOR VEHICLE RESTRICTIONS ON WILDFIRE BURN SITES ON THE TERRITORY

tkwəniwt (Westbank), Sylx Territory: The Chiefs of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) firmly support the recent decision by the Province of British Columbia to restrict motor vehicle (MV) access on backroads in the Thompson Okanagan and parts of the Kootenay regions that have been impacted by the 2021 wildfire season.

“As part of our continued commitment to protect our territory, the Sylx Okanagan Nation and member communities remain steadfast in ensuring that all parts of our tmix^w and tmx^wulax^w conserved and safeguarded. We have guardians out on the land in these burn sites that will be monitoring the areas and working with local conservation officers to provide information to users, observe and report incidents and support the MV closures,” Lower Similkameen Indian Band Chief Keith Crow, ONA Wildlife Working Group chair stated.

This closure is taking place over 536,000 hectares of land, and has been instituted in order to protect from the “impact to habitats that need time to recover, erosion of charred soils and the impacts to fish habitat, increased vulnerability of wildlife due to migration disruptions, habitat loss and improved sightlines for hunting where vegetation was burned and increased access to wildlife habitat due to the construction of approximately 2,900 kilometres of fire guards” according to the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (MFLNRORD).

It is important to note that these closures do not impede the ability of Sylx Okanagan members to access this land. Members are still able to use access these areas based on Section 35 of Constitution Act that clearly recognizes and affirms our Indigenous rights. The general public should be aware that Nation members have these rights and may be out on the land in these areas at this time.

The Sylx Okanagan Nation, alongside Sylx communities, are working in partnership with MFLNRORD to determine and establish long term parameters in these areas that will protect and enhance wildlife populations for generations to come.

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