

Syilx Okanagan Nation Celebrate World Water Day with 8th Annual Water Forum that Included Key Notes from Maori Water Activists and Local Water Ceremonies

tkwəłniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory: The Syilx Okanagan Nation celebrated World Water Day with the 8th annual siwtk^w (Water) Forum. This year's Forum explored how the Syilx Okanagan Nation holds up siwtk^w as a living relative, and how we can continue to collaborate to protect siwtk^w. The morning included an online event, which started with WFN councillor Jordan Coble opening with a prayer and reading of the Water Declaration.

This was followed by presentations on different water initiatives taking place on the territory, and a keynote presentation from a Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui representative on I am the River, and the River is me: Legal personhood and emerging rights of nature. Their efforts to get the Whanganui River, in Aotearoa (New Zealand) recognized as a living entity have set an international precedent.

"We re-indiginized the law, then are working to decolonize the legal frameworks and processes." Nancy Tuaine, Chief Executive Officer at Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui told the audience.

The online event included opening presentations on Syilx siwtk^w protection by Maryssa Bonneau and Wendy Hawkes, both Syilx Nation members and water protectors, as well as a presentation and panel discussion on of the Okanagan Lake Responsibility Planning Initiative by Kelly Chiatto (MFLNRORD) and Syilx Nation water champion Sarah Alexis. Opening remarks highlighted the Syilx Water Strategy, which is a call to action that outlines how the *Syilx* Nation intends to care for our territory and work to ensure that siwtk^w is properly respected and available for all living things.

"Our relation siwtk^w, our most sacred medicine, must be kept healthy to restore and hold its relationship to tmix^w to ensure the resiliency of our Mother for the good of all, for all time." — Syilx Okanagan Natural Resources Committee, 2018

Following the virtual event, participants from across the territory went to the shores of kłúsxnítkw^w (Okanagan Lake) at 2:30pm to offer prayers and gratitude for siwtk^w. Water ceremonies were held at three sites along kłúsxnítkw^w, including at Okanagan Lake Park, Komasket Park, and the Westbank First Nation.

At the ceremony in Westbank Jordan Coble shared with the crowd that, "We have to give water the rights. I fully uphold and support giving this lake, this water, those rights, so that we recognize it as an individual. We often treat each other with more respect, even if we don't get along, then we treat the water. So we need to rally our spirits and our energy together so

we continue to provide a good, healthy environment, not just for our future generations, but for all the beings that rely on water just as we do.”

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The Okanagan Nation Alliance is committed to conserve, manage, co-manage and where appropriate, develop the natural resources of the lands and waters of the Nation's territory. In doing so, the Nation will be true to its spiritual and environmental values, mindful of the economic and social needs and aspirations of its individual bands, and strong in its assertion of the Nation's rights and title to its entire area of occupancy and use.

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