

COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY

Information and Updates

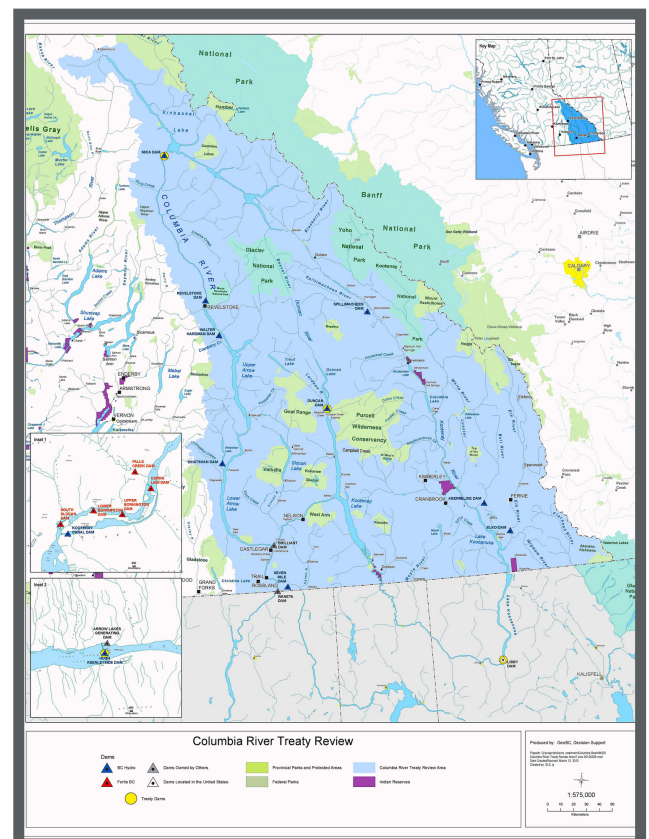


What is the Columbia River Treaty ?

The Columbia River Treaty (CRT) is a transboundary water storage treaty, between Canada and the US, that has two major components: holding back 15.5 million acres/feet of water for flood control, while also optimizing hydroelectric energy production in the Columbia watershed every year. This storage of water has generated millions of dollars of revenue, the majority of which largely goes to the Province of British Columbia as annual general revenue.

The CRT was developed and agreed upon by Canada and the US without consultation, involvement or consent of the Sylx Okanagan Nation. This exclusion of Sylx Okanagan peoples in the original Columbia River Treaty process, alongside its dams and their impacts, represent one of the most significant and on-going infringements of Sylx Okanagan Title and Rights.

- In 1964, the Governments of Canada and the United States entered into the CRT, which altered river flows and ultimately commodified the international river system of the Columbia Basin.
- The CRT resulted in BC storing a large amount of the annual spring run-off behind three Canadian dams (Duncan Dam, Hugh Keenleyside Dam, and Mica Dam), that flooded the Slocan Valley (Arrow Lakes) and converted the Upper Columbia watershed into a massive reservoir system, flooding an est. 270,000 acres, forever altering the environment.
- Canada and the United States started preparing for the renegotiation of the CRT in the spring of 2018, as the flood control component of the Treaty otherwise terminates in 2024.



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How has the CRT Impacted Syilx Okanagan People?

The CRT is one of the largest infringements on the Syilx Okanagan territory and has profound and lasting impacts on Syilx Okanagan people, Title and Rights, territory and way of life.

- Its dams industrialized the Columbia river system, destroyed thousands of square kilometers of land, permanently disrupted natural ecosystems, and threatened a multitude of species that call this territory home.
- The flooding desecrated historical Syilx Okanagan villages, sacred sites, burial grounds, and food harvesting areas, breaking many of the cultural and familial connections Syilx Okanagan communities held with the Upper Columbia and n̓xwntkwitkw (Columbia River)



2006 Syilx Unity Trekk Canoe Journey

What is the ONA's Commitment to the CRT and the Upper Columbia?

The Syilx Okanagan Nation adheres to our responsibilities to all parts of our territory, including the Upper Columbia. In the face of many challenges on many fronts, the Syilx Okanagan Nation remains committed to ensuring that not only is our voice heard, but that our presence is felt.

- Over the decades, the leadership provided by the Syilx Okanagan Nation's Chiefs Executive Council (CEC), guided by Syilx Okanagan knowledge keepers, advisors, and language speakers, ensured the Syilx Okanagan Nation was not excluded from the CRT negotiations this time around.
- In 2018, Global Affairs Canada made an initial unilateral decision to exclude the First Nations from direct participation in the US-Canada CRT Renegotiation process between Canada and the US.
- Through the hard work and dedication of Syilx Okanagan leadership and staff, the deputy PM and Minister of Global Affairs Canada reconsidered this previous decision and in April 2019, gave us a seat at the US- Canada CRT negotiation table. This was a hard-fought achievement which included legal intervention, advocacy and negotiation support.



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Today the Syilx Okanagan People continue to assert our jurisdiction and responsibility over stewarding of the land and water.

What is the ONA's Commitment to the CRT and the Upper Columbia? (cont.)

- Through negotiations we were able to get the agreement of Canada and BC to establish a Cultural Values Table and an Ecosystems Function Table (see sidebar), which provide technical information regarding both cultural and ecological impacts to support Syilx Okanagan leadership decision making in relation to the renegotiations, and to allow for a different approach to determine CRT impacts.

These Tables also provide the technical information required to try to ensure the renegotiated CRT leaves space for ecosystem and cultural values to be used in decision-making, rather than just hydro production and flood control.

- The CEC has also directed the Syilx Okanagan Nation legal and negotiation team to participate to address impacts on Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights, negotiate benefits and governance issues in relation to CRT dams. These tables provide forums where Syilx Okanagan perspectives can be asserted in the CRT renegotiation process, while also providing direct pathways for benefits to be delivered back to Syilx Okanagan Nation. These take place through a wide range of activities which include Syilx-informed suxtem initiatives, traditional knowledge recording and promotion, partnership projects, and events.



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ECOSYSTEM AND CULTURAL VALUES

Ecosystems Function Subcommittee:

Made up of representatives from the Syilx, Ktunaxa, and Secwepemc Nations and the provincial government and also specialized experts. Through this Sub-Committee, Indigenous Nations are currently leading work on how to protect ecosystem values under a modernized CRT.

This work involves developing goals and objectives for what a healthy ecosystem would look like, and ways to measure whether these goals and objectives have been met, incorporating Syilx knowledge.

Cultural Values Subcommittee:

Syilx Okanagan Nation representatives have been interviewing Syilx members to better understand Syilx Okanagan Nation values in the Columbia Basin. Information from the interviews will inform what cultural values need to be taken into account in future decisions on CRT dam operations. The Nation has taken steps to protect the confidentiality of information provided in interviews.



For any questions or concerns regarding the Syilx Okanagan Nation's involvement in the CRT negotiations, please contact:

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