



# Syilx Nation *Siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> Declaration

***Water is life.***

***Water is our relation.***

***Water bonds us to our ancestry, our descendants and our land.***

***July 31 2014***

***ONA AGA Spaxomin, BC***

## *Siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> - WATER

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*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> is a part of us and a part of all life.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> must be treated with reverence and respect. Our relationship with *siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> is not taken lightly; we are responsible to ensure that our relation can continue to maintain the health and resiliency of our *tmx̓<sup>w</sup>ulax̓<sup>w</sup>* and *timix̓<sup>w</sup>*.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> is the lifeblood of our *tmx̓<sup>w</sup>ulax̓<sup>w</sup>* and our *timix̓<sup>w</sup>* and we as Syilx People recognize *siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> as a sacred entity and relative that connects all life.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> comes in many forms and all are needed for the health of *tmx̓<sup>w</sup>ulax̓<sup>w</sup>* and for the *timix̓<sup>w</sup>*.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> is our most sacred medicine: *siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> nourishes, replenishes, cleanses, and heals. Any use of *siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> should be an act of reverence and a commitment to our responsibilities to all life: now and to come, as Syilx People.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> comes from the sky and the highest places yet it never willfully rises above anything. It will always take the lowest path in its humility, yet of all the elements, it is the most powerful.

Our sacred *siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> water teaches us that we have great strength to transform even the tallest mountain while being gentle, soft, and flexible.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> will always find a way around obstructions: under, over and through. It teaches us that anything is possible.

*siw̓tk̓*<sup>w</sup> movements, pathways, resiliency and power teach us who we are and who we can be as people.



## RESPONSIBILITY

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Our sovereign, unceded right to self-governance and self-determination are affirmed within our Syilx Laws and customs as dictated through our *captikw̓t*. Self-determination includes the right to control our institutions, territories, social order and cultures without external interference or domination. The Syilx Nation is a sovereign Nation and we have governed our lands under Syilx Laws, customs and Syilx institutions since the beginning of time.

Our sacred *siw̓tkw̓* connects and sustains all life. We as the Syilx people have a duty and responsibility to ensure *siw̓tkw̓* can maintain all of its relationships, known and unknown, by showing due respect and humility.

When we were created, a covenant was made that we, as Syilx People, were required to act as caretakers of our lands and in return we would be looked after, our *captikw̓t* teach us these values, this is our *st̓t̓at̓t*, Aboriginal Title and Rights.

*St̓t̓at̓t* is an unchanging truth; it is a responsibility of reciprocity that the Syilx people continue to honour, exercise and act upon.

Our *yəlyimixw̓m*, Chiefs, leaders and all Syilx peoples have a responsibility to our homelands. This obligation cannot be given away; it is the foundation of who we are as a Tribal People, and of our continued existence on this land.

Our responsibilities are an unchanging truth that will continue to be upheld through our Syilx knowledge, understanding, and worldview throughout our Territory.



## RELATIONSHIP

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Syilx peoples assert that *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* has the right to be recognized as a familial entity, a relation, and a being with a spirit who provides life for all living things. *Siwtk<sup>w</sup>* must be treated with honour, respect and reciprocity. We care for, protect and honour our relationship and bond with *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* through our Syilx Laws, customs, traditions and practices.

*siwtk<sup>w</sup>* is not a resource or a commodity.

*siwtk<sup>w</sup>* is central to our ceremonies and holds a sacred place within our spiritual teachings. We and future generations will continue to honour the water spirits in our ceremonies, governance structures, and daily lives.

As life givers, women have a sacred relationship and connection with *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* that must be acknowledged and respected. Women hold *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* as a precious and sacred gift in which our children are nurtured and brought into this world. Women hold a deep understanding of *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* that is reflected in all of our hearts, our Indigenous creation stories and from time immemorial.

### WHAT WE SEE

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All life requires *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* and yet our *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* supplies are quickly becoming over allocated, abused and polluted. Challenges related to *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* quality, access, quantity, use and allocation have become more prevalent within Syilx Territory. *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* is not being respected under externally driven government regulations and management conditions. Syilx People question not only the provincial and federal government's decision making authority related to the use of our *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* but also their practices.

Our lands and *siwtk<sup>w</sup>* have been grossly mismanaged by these external entities which has resulted in ecosystem degradation, severe water quality deterioration, extreme stress upon local ecologies and species loss at a scale and rate which is unprecedented. We see that our waters are being dramatically over licensed, mismanaged and polluted. We see improper uses for water through: energy production, mining, dams, diversions, over allocation/exploitation, recreational development, wastewater dumping, unsustainable economic development, pesticides, herbicides and disease.

Broad issues associated with climate change, energy demands, increasing population and "economic sustainability" have devastated our forests, dammed our rivers and exploited our relative, *siwtk<sup>w</sup>*, in ways the Syilx peoples would have never thought possible.

We see increasing need and an ever hungry western-economic engine demanding more of our *siwtk<sup>w</sup>*. The narrow minded focus of western-scientific approaches to 'resource' extraction and management have utterly failed to protect our sacred *siwtk<sup>w</sup>*.



The Syilx have implemented our knowledge systems and occupied this land since time immemorial. In but a fraction of that time, the western-scientific approach to management has decimated our environment using untried, untested and ineffective management methodologies.

The *siw̓tk̓w*, *tmx̓wulax̓w*, and all living things are all intricately connected, *what you do to one you do to all*.

### *Nx̓w̓ELX̓w̓ELTANTET*— THAT WHICH GIVES US LIFE

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The Syilx People affirm our relationship with our *tmx̓wulax̓w* and responsibility to future generations to raise our voices and speak for the protection of our *siw̓tk̓w*. We are resilient, strong and resolute; deeply rooted in our lands and flowing with the *siw̓tk̓w* that we have lived in harmony with since the beginning of time.

We were placed in a sacred manner upon this earth and charged to care for and protect all of our relations within our homelands especially our most sacred relative, *siw̓tk̓w*. These responsibilities were given to us by the Creator, *K̓w̓ulāncútn* and they have been upheld since the beginning of time by our ancestors. They now pass to us through our grandmothers and grandfathers.

Syilx Peoples have a deep intrinsic and spiritual relationship with our relative *siw̓tk̓w*. Maintaining the integrity of *siw̓tk̓w* and respecting its relationship to all life is essential to our identity as Syilx People and is entrenched in our responsibility to our homelands.

### ST̓T̓AŁT̓ ABORIGINAL TITLE AND RIGHTS

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The Syilx Nation governs our lands and *siw̓tk̓w*. Any external process for any proposed use of *siw̓tk̓w* or lands within our homelands must be premised on our unextinguished Syilx Aboriginal Title and Rights, which includes the right to decide how the lands, *siw̓tk̓w* and resources of our Territory will be used. Any activities within and around our *siw̓tk̓w* will be led by the Syilx Nation and carried out with the participation of Syilx Nation members in accordance with Syilx Laws, customs and practices. The province of British Columbia and federal government have notice of our Title and Rights.

The provincial and federal governments do not have jurisdiction or ownership of lands and resources within Syilx Territory.

### İP̓ K̓w̓U\_SYLX İP̓ SIW̓K̓w̓T̓T̓—OUR SYILX WATER

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Syilx Peoples have inherent and implicit Aboriginal Title, Rights and Responsibilities to *siw̓tk̓w*.

Syilx People must be at the forefront of all *siw̓tk̓w* planning, *siw̓tk̓w* protection and *siw̓tk̓w* operational processes including allocation and generation.



Through the guidance of *K'wulancútn* we accept our sacred trust to protect our *siw#k*<sup>w</sup> and fully express our Peoples jurisdictional authority and responsibilities to protect and respect our relative *siw#k*<sup>w</sup>.

We stand united and will apply and implement our Syilx knowledge, Syilx laws, Syilx customs and Syilx self-determination to preserve, conserve and protect life's most sacred gift – *siw#k*<sup>w</sup>.

We, the Syilx Peoples will survive and *continue to govern our mother and her resources for the good of all for all time...*

