



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Okanagan Nation Raises Awareness of Salmon Restoration in the Columbia with the ‘Fish in Schools’ Program**

**tkwəniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory:** Five groups, including four schools, in the Columbia region received salmon eggs, from the *kt cpəlk stim* Hatchery, last week as part of the Okanagan Nation Alliance Fish in Schools (FinS) Program. FinS is a comprehensive fish education program for youth, with a focus on salmon, their lifecycle and the importance of their ecosystems. By creating greater awareness of fish species, the intent is for students to become future advocates for both salmon and their habitat. The program has been significantly scaled down compared to last year, in which we had 16 programs in the Columbia, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

A significant milestone for the FinS program in the Columbia this year is that we have provided chinook salmon eggs to the two original pilot schools (Twin Rivers Elementary, Castlegar, and Glenmerry Elementary, Trail).

“Chinook are significant in that they represent n'titxw – Chief Salmon – one of the four Syilx Food Chiefs. The presence of chinook in the Upper Columbia after an absence of 80 years is a remarkable cultural and ecological achievement,” Chief Keith Crow, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, states.

Chinook populations in the Okanagan River are currently at the forefront of additional restoration efforts underway by the ONA, and provided this opportunity to access Chinook eggs through the *kt cpəlk stim* Hatchery.

In the Columbia Region, this program further cultivates awareness of salmon’s historical runs from the ocean, upstream to the Kettle River, Columbia, Pend d’Oreille and Kootenay Rivers, including major tributaries the Salmo River and Slocan River. This program is another illustration of the ONA’s commitment to leading salmon restoration throughout all parts of Syilx territory.

The ONA upholds their responsibility to the *tmixw* (all living things), our Syilx Okanagan traditional ecological knowledge systems and actively involve our knowledge keepers that inform our interactions on the land – balanced with the incorporation of western science. Through the integration of these two systems, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) has been persistent in ensuring that we are restoring and rejuvenating the habitats and ecosystems of the Upper Columbia and Okanagan Basin in the most dynamic way possible. We engage both traditional knowledge and cutting-edge science to contribute to protecting and advancing a biodiverse environment. FinS is a key step in the Syilx Nation’s broader intent to raise awareness and bring salmon back to their original range, having been blocked from returning by dams along the Columbia River in the 1940s.

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*The Fish in Schools program has run successfully since 2003 in the Okanagan region, and contributes to the kt cpəlk stim Hatchery’s fry release efforts. The kt cpəlk stim Hatchery is a testament to the perseverance of the Syilx people to realize their dream of restoring the n'titxw (Salmon) – one of our Four Food Chiefs – to their original habitat and rightful place in our territory.*

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