



## MEDIA RELEASE

January 18, 2022

### **‘Fish in Schools’ Program Extends to Over 30 School in the Face of COVID-19 Restrictions**

**tkwəniwt (Westbank), Sylx Territory:** Over the last week the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) delivered the final round of the fish tanks and equipment to 30 schools throughout Sylx territory, including 13 returning schools and groups in the Columbia, as part of the Fish in Schools (FinS) program. These deliveries have come as new provincial regulations have halted the distribution to some institutions due to ever changing COVID-19 regulations. Ten new schools in the Columbia are anticipating delivery of chillers and tanks in the next few weeks, in the hopes that they too, can participate this year.

Chief Keith Crow, CEC member and Co-Chair of the Columbia River Salmon Initiative (CRSRI) stated that “FinS remains a key program component in the ONA’s broader salmon restoration goals to bring salmon back to their original range — raising awareness about the importance of salmon to the ecosystem and the Sylx Nation. Salmon is central to our culture, laws, practices, and principles as peoples. We know salmon have been, and continue to be, blocked from returning by hydro-electric dams created throughout the Columbia River system since the 1940’s, yet Sylx Leadership remains committed to this work as in both the Okanagan sub-basin and Upper Columbia regions where salmon once flourished. We remain steadfast to restoring and rejuvenating salmon back to the Upper Columbia and Okanagan Basin by building and strengthening key working relationships and the public’s awareness of the importance of our once primary food source. This is done by upholding our sacred responsibilities — through numerous ceremonies, ensuring salmon habitat is stewarded in the most innovative ways possible and respecting our ancestor, our elders, their teaching, our traditional knowledge keepers, while engaging western science.”

FinS is a comprehensive fish education program for youth, with a focus on sc’win (sockeye salmon), their lifecycle and the importance of their ecosystems. By creating greater awareness of fish species with youth and students of different ages, the intent is for them to become future leaders, land protectors, water managers, scientists and the multitude of environmental and social justice professions that are available for them. In the Columbia, 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 tributaries of the Salmo and Slocan River.

“The FinS program has proven to be highly successful and popular, with far more requests for participation than we can keep pace with. By having students in the room be able to directly participate in rearing eggs, and raising the hatched fry in the classroom, and seeing their life cycles firsthand, they are able to have a direct contribution and connection to salmon reintroduction efforts. The program also offers educators scientific and cultural resources that enrich students understandings of the importance of this species, for the ecosystem and Sylx people”, Howie Wright, ONA Fisheries Manager added.

Egg delivery to FinS participant schools took place over the first half of January 2022. Upon successfully raising the fry, students will include their fry in ceremonial releases taking place throughout the Sylx territory in 2022.

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*The Fish in Schools program has been running successfully since 2003 in the Okanagan region and contributes to the kt c’palk stin Hatchery’s fry release efforts. The kt c’palk stin Hatchery is a testament to the perseverance of the Sylx people to realize their dream of restoring the salmon – one of our Four Food Chiefs – to their original habitat and rightful place in our territory.*

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After 2021, which saw a rapid decrease in accessibility due to provincial COVID-19 policy, the number of schools including: Christina Lake Elementary, Glenmerry Elementary, Hutton Elementary, Kinnaird Elementary, South Nelson Elementary, Twin Rivers Elementary, Mt. Sentinel Secondary, LV Rogers Secondary School, Rossland Summit School, Hume Elementary, St. Michael's Catholic School, Ecole des Sentiers-alpins, and the Christina Lake Stewardship Society. Three schools are also working through equipment issues prior to securing participation, including W.E. Graham Community School, James E. Webster Elementary, and Lucerne Elementary. 10 new schools, throughout multiple School Districts are waiting on the final stages of chiller fabrication before their involvement can be confirmed for this year.

In the Okanagan sub-basin FinS is being offered at Casorso Elementary, Columbia Elementary, Wiltse Elementary, Penticton K-12 Excel, Queen's Park Elementary, West Bench Elementary, KVR Elementary, Osoyoos Elementary, Osoyoos Secondary, Oliver Elementary, senpokchin Elementary, South Okanagan Secondary School, tuc-el-nuit Elementary, OK Falls Elementary, Similkameen Elementary Secondary School (, John Allison Elementary, and Cawston Primary. One new school joined the program this year, Similkameen Elementary Secondary School. We are still pending as to if Dorothea Walker Elementary will be a part of FinS this year. In previous years prior to the pandemic there would be up to 24 schools participating in the Okanagan-Similkameen region.