Syilx Nation *Siwɬkʷ* 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

SIWɬKʷ - WATER

siwɬkʷ is a part of us and a part of all life.

siwɬkʷ must be treated with reverence and respect. Our relationship with *siwɬkʷ* is not taken lightly; we are responsible to ensure that our relation can continue to maintain the health and resiliency of our *tmxʷulaxʷ* and *timixʷ*.

siwɬkʷ is the lifeblood of our *tmxʷulaxʷ* and our *timixʷ* and we as Syilx People recognize *siwɬkʷ* as a sacred entity and relative that connects all life.

siwɬkʷ comes in many forms and all are needed for the health of *tmxʷulaxʷ* and for the *timixʷ*.

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

siwɬkʷ 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 *siwɬkʷ* water teaches us that we have great strength to transform even the tallest mountain while being gentle, soft, and flexible.

siwɬkʷ will always find a way around obstructions: under, over and through. It teaches us that anything is possible.

siwɬkʷ movements, pathways, resiliency and power teach us who we are and who we can be as people.

RESPONSIBILITY

Our sovereign, unceded right to self-governance and self-determination are affirmed within our Syilx Laws and customs as dictated through our captikʷɬ. 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 *siwɬkʷ* connects and sustains all life. We as the Syilx people have a duty and responsibility to ensure *siwɬkʷ* 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 captikʷɬ teach us these values, this is our *stɬtaɬt,* Aboriginal Title and Rights.

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

Our yəlyílmixʷm, 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

Syilx peoples assert that *siwɬkʷ* 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. *Siwɬkʷ* must be treated with honour, respect and reciprocity. We care for, protect and honour our relationship and bond with *siwɬkʷ* through our Syilx Laws, customs, traditions and practices.

siwɬkʷ is not a resource or a commodity.

siwɬkʷ 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 *siwɬkʷ* that must be acknowledged and respected. Women hold *siwɬkʷ* as a precious and sacred gift in which our children are nurtured and brought into this world. Women hold a deep understanding of *siwɬkʷ* that is reflected in all of our hearts, our Indigenous creation stories and from time immemorial.

WHAT WE SEE

All life requires *siwɬkʷ* and yet our *siwɬkʷ* supplies are quickly becoming over allocated, abused and polluted. Challenges related to *siwɬkʷ* quality, access, quantity, use and allocation have become more prevalent within Syilx Territory. *siwɬkʷ* 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 *siwɬkʷ* but also their practices.

Our lands and *siwɬkʷ* 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, *siwɬkʷ,* 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 *siwɬkʷ*. The narrow minded focus of western-scientific approaches to 'resource' extraction and management have utterly failed to protect our sacred *siwɬkʷ*.

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 *siwɬkʷ*, *tmxʷulaxʷ*, and all living things are all intricately connected, *what you do to one you do to all*.

NXʷELXʷELTANTET – THAT WHICH GIVES US LIFE

The Syilx People affirm our relationship with our *tmxʷulaxʷ* and responsibility to future generations to raise our voices and speak for the protection of our *siwɬkʷ*. We are resilient, strong and resolute; deeply rooted in our lands and flowing with the *siwɬkʷ* 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, *siwɬkʷ*. These responsibilities were given to us by the Creator, *K̓ʷuləncútn* 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 *siwɬkʷ.* Maintaining the integrity of *siwɬkʷ* and respecting its relationship to all life is essential to our identity as Syilx People and is entrenched in our responsibility to our homelands.

STŁTAŁT ABORIGINAL TITLE AND RIGHTS

The Syilx Nation governs our lands and *siwɬkʷ*. Any external process for any proposed use of *siwɬkʷ* 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, *siwɬkʷ* and resources of our Territory will be used. Any activities within and around our *siwɬkʷ* 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.

Iʔ KʷUꞌSYILX Iʔ SIWɬKʷTƏT – OUR SYILX WATER

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

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

Through the guidance of *Ḵʷuləncútn* we accept our sacred trust to protect our *siwɬkʷ* and fully express our Peoples jurisdictional authority and responsibilities to protect and respect our relative *siwɬkʷ*.

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 – *siwɬkʷ*.

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