

Mayor's Report – December 19, 2023

Last Wednesday, December 13, the chiefs of five syilx communities and the mayors and chairs of nine Okanagan municipalities and three regional districts came together on Osoyoos Indian Band territory to discuss the protection of the Okanagan Lake watershed.

This Collaborative Leadership Table, as it's called, was initiated by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and was facilitated by the Winnipeg-based Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER), who have held similar tables in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories.

The Table is an Indigenous-led process to build trust and strengthen relationships with local government, with the aim of getting us working together on common issues. Together, we decide the scope and structure of the Table, which was the primary focus of last week's meeting. We will meet again in the new year to continue our discussions and identify joint actions to protect the Okanagan watershed.

One great example of an action in the watershed that's already underway is the Lower Trout Creek restoration project, which is being led by the Okanagan Nation Alliance with participation from all levels of government, including the District of Summerland. Natasha Lukey from the ONA Fisheries Department provided a project update at the last Okanagan Basin Water Board meeting on Dec. 5. She explained how western science and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) are both being used for the restoration work and how, with the first of several riffle pools in place, salmon have already returned to spawn.

Later that day (Dec. 5), I attended an equity and anti-racism forum at Summerland Secondary School involving students, teachers and several community members. The forum included small group discussions on concrete actions that students and others can take individually and collectively to promote equity and combat racism. It was especially valuable hearing the students' voices on these matters. I will join the students again in the new year as they continue their discussion and consider specific initiatives.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and happy new year. Looking back on 2023, I have to say we've had a very busy year and we've made good progress on many of our strategic priorities. I look forward to keeping the momentum going in 2024.

- Mayor Doug Holmes