

## Appendix D. Spotted Lake (Ha? Ki lil xw) Landscape Connectivity Workshop

Lower Similkameen Indian Band Office, Similkameen, British Columbia, November 2015

Prepared by Gregory Kehm (Transboundary Connectivity Group) and Alan Peatt (ONA)

*“A discussion about wildlife movement is really a discussion about people and their actions on the landscape.” Ron Hall, Osoyoos Indian Band*

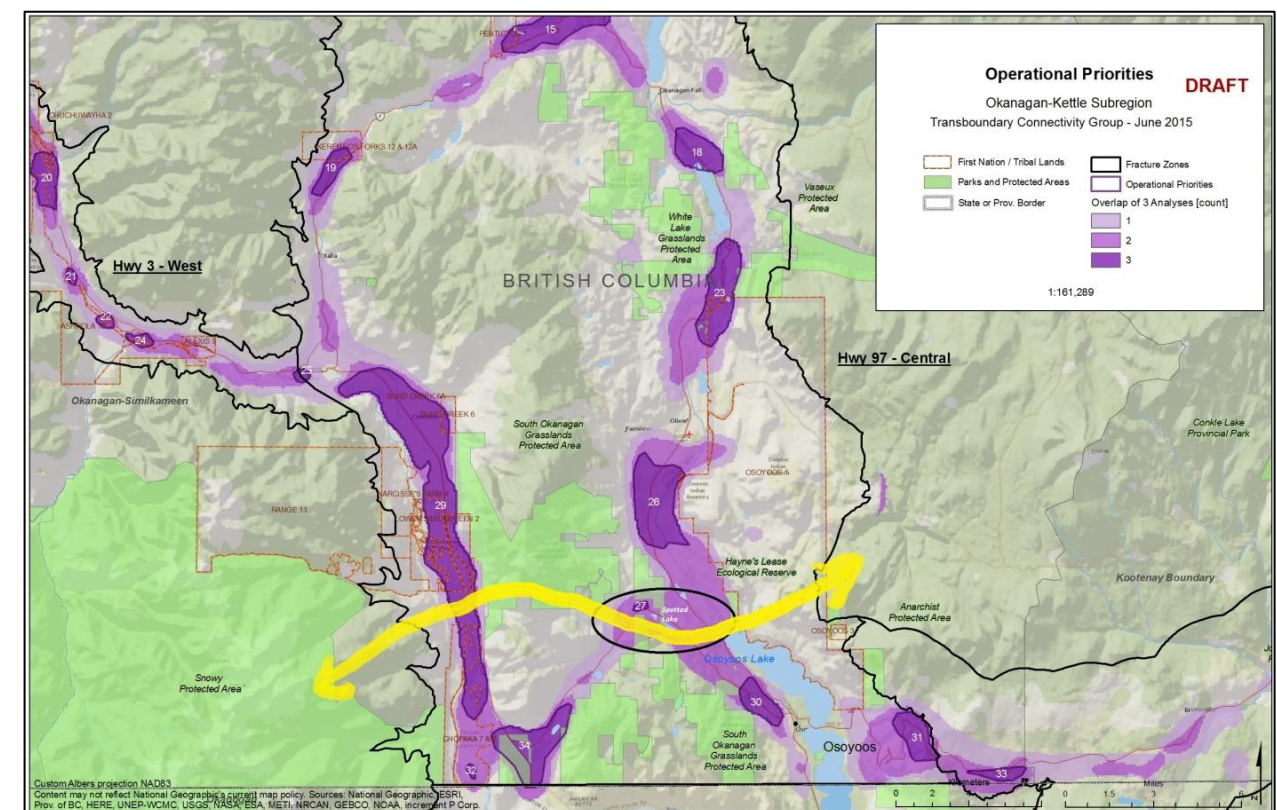


*Ha? Ki lil xw (Spotted Lake) is a sacred spiritual place and its surrounding lands are central to wildlife movement.*

### Workshop Goals

For thousands of years, the Syilx (Okanagan) people were self-reliant and well provided for through their own ingenuity and use of the land and nature. Today, fences, highways, and other land developments are making it hard for *s̓laʔcinəm* (deer), *skəm̓xist* (bear) and other animal relatives of the people to move easily and safely across and between the lower Similkameen and Okanagan Valleys.

The workshop goals included: (1) introducing the Transboundary Connectivity Group’s wildlife habitat connectivity concepts, maps, and science results (Fig. 1) to an Indigenous audience with perspectives and a knowledge base preceding the arrival of European settlers; (2) discussing the cultural and traditional significance of landscape connectivity and relevance of the transboundary group’s results to the Spotted Lake landscape; and (3) engaging in a technical and Elders/Knowledge Keepers discussion to identify threats and suggest actions to maintain and enhance wildlife movement through the area.



**Figure 1.** Map of potential for east-west landscape connectivity between the Similkameen and Okanagan Valleys through Ha? Ki lil xw (Spotted Lake).

Perhaps the most important outcome of the Okanagan-Kettle Transboundary Connectivity Group’s project was the opportunity to share the wildlife habitat connectivity results with on-the-ground leaders and decision makers who could evaluate, apply, and implement the results. In November 2015, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) held a workshop with its First Nation member communities to review the transboundary group’s results and discuss the cultural and traditional significance of landscape connectivity and wildlife movement between the lower Similkameen, Ha? Ki lil xw, and Osoyoos Lake areas.



## Attendees

Fifteen people attended the workshop, including elders and knowledge holders, a former Smelqmix (Similkameen) Chief, the current Band councillor, Band referrals coordinators and land managers, an ONA cultural researcher, and the ONA's professional wildlife biologist. Four Okanagan Nation communities were represented: Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Upper Similkameen Indian Band, Penticton Indian Band, and Osoyoos Indian Band.

The workshop was facilitated by Alan Peatt (ONA) and Gregory Kehm (Transboundary Connectivity Group) on a beautiful, cold desert day.

## Discussion

The workshop attendance was greater than anticipated and had a reasonable representation of ONA community members. This broad representation is important as these sharing opportunities are as much about learning as they are about trying to achieve specific workshop outcomes and next steps.

All attendees remained at a single table throughout the day and had a suite of map products to reference, as well as a live GIS map projected on a wall (Fig. 2). The workshop began with a round of introductions where we learned of the varied interests and backgrounds of the attendees and were reminded of the possibilities of political tension in bringing western science into an Indigenous meeting space.

One participant provided the quote at the beginning of this report to correctly frame our responsibility for the wildlife movement connectivity problems we are now struggling to solve, and in so doing placed a lens of responsibility on recent non-Indigenous land stewardship including narrow, non-holistic views of the land and nature.

Western science approaches and outcomes represent a fundamentally different world view than the one held by the Syilx people. In addition to this fundamental difference, western science has been used to rationalize government and third-party interests on Syilx traditional lands and to disqualify the submission of oral history and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as evidence in the courts. While legal tests were expanded years ago to include oral history, earlier distrust remains a very strong discount to acceptance of western scientific principles within many Indigenous communities.

Consequently, the workshop agenda was carefully and collaboratively developed to allow the boundaries of the discussion to be framed by the community Elders/decision makers. While the two world views pose a basic challenge of 'how,' or even 'if' they can be brought together within a science focused discussion, a bigger need was to enable the participants to be comfortable with the discussion.

For example, several themes were raised throughout the conversation that taken together provided an interesting critique of western practices, and possible tactical next steps drawn from current political and social license opportunities:

- *Ownership and management of the land.* e.g., Why do provincially-designated agricultural reserve lands (ALR) overlap with Indian Reserves? Band lands should be removed from ALR as this is important for connectivity management through maintaining natural land cover.
- *Industry and business culture.* e.g., We need to change the mentality about deer so they are not considered a 'problem' by vineyard operators, government managers, and private land owners.
- *Western practices.* e.g., Road salt attracts deer and thus increases collision interfaces. Amphibians are attracted to road warmth.
- *Aboriginal title and rights/governance.* e.g., Spotted Lake is a perfect launch point for achieving broader wildlife connectivity goals because the Okanagan Nation already owns property there. It has very high Indigenous cultural/spiritual value, and there is a lot of "sway" behind the Indigenous voice in BC.

## Outcomes

Attendees were encouraged to draw on the maps to spatially capture ideas and areas of importance when designing a set of next steps for on-the-ground action related to wildlife habitat connectivity.



**Figure 2.** Participants discuss how to maintain and improve wildlife connectivity.

## Actions to Maintain and Improve Connectivity/Traditional Use

### *Ownership and Management of the Land*

- Identify where the best wildlife movement corridors are, designate them as wildlife corridors, and buy them where appropriate.

- Develop an Indigenous Fire Keepers (prescribed burn) organized group. Fire is a great tool for corridor maintenance and enhancement by restoring natural ecosystem processes and associated plant communities. Prescription burns would reduce severity and prevent catastrophic fire.
- Secure available provincially-titled lands near north-end of Osoyoos Lake and construct underpass there. Monitor and improve the existing snake and toad crossing.
- Talk to the Nature Conservancy about Syilx interests in the lands that they are buying.
- Encourage wildlife habitat stewardship on private lands in important movement corridors, especially the Spotted Lake area.
- Change where roads are. Over the next hundred years, move the roads.

#### ***Industry and Business Culture***

- Look for opportunities and discuss with orchard and vineyard owners about keeping gates open during winter to allow deer to pass through for winter forage and/or plant diversion crops. Close fences and gates in spring to protect the crops; install one-way gates at back of properties for deer to escape or install jump outs.
- Develop communications/marketing strategies to underscore why deer populations are not a problem. Work with vineyards to start planting diversion crops that deer will eat.
- Inventory barrier fences along roadways and agricultural lands. The amount, location, and design of fencing needs more organized and systemized planning for impacts to wildlife. Breach existing fencing in movement corridors.
- The guard rails along Highway 3 are too high for deer fawns to go over. The range fences are page wire in some places and too small/high for wildlife to go through or over.
- Stop or modify the putting down of road salt in winter that attracts wildlife.
- We need to understand more about how climate change is affecting ecosystems and wildlife connectivity.
- Conduct remote camera study of wildlife crossing of roadways near north end of Osoyoos Lake, Deadman Lake, lower Similkameen, and other high kill zones.

#### ***Aboriginal Title and Rights/Governance***

- Work with others to purchase and/or otherwise acquire those lands that are critical to wildlife corridor connectivity especially around Spotted Lake.
- To preserve the spiritual values of Spotted Lake we need a big area around it, not just the lake. Noise level is important. For drumming ceremonies, they need a big area for the echo.
- Review and or create principles about ownership, noise, land uses, and access around Spotted Lake. Encourage local government to help protect the area through bylaws and development permits. Complete the Spotted Lake Management Plan and update the regional district's community plan. Seek out alternate but complementary means of protection such as an area of geological significance.

- Much of the Spotted Lake connectivity corridor area is within the Syilx Tribal Park concept area and there is both Tribal and Band Council resolutions about the park.
- Property owners wanting to build wildlife barrier fencing should have regulations and there should be a long-term plan for fence locations, open corridors, and wildlife-friendly design.
- The ALR lands include Indian Reserve lands which inflates their total area. ALR lands are becoming smaller because the Province takes out private land for development. Talk to the Province to exclude Band lands so they get an actual accounting of ALR.
- Continue land use planning on Band lands and incorporate measures to protect and enhance wildlife movement.

#### **Evaluation and Future Workshops**

Overall, the workshop was well attended and the participants were engaged throughout the day in a lively discussion. Knowledge about animal travel routes and challenges was shared and transferred from community members to the ONA wildlife staff and workshop facilitators. The discussion touched on many aspects of maintaining and enhancing wildlife throughout the Spotted Lake corridor and identified a range of specific actions requiring follow-up. There was interest in understanding the transboundary maps and overall project, and an appreciation for thinking at local and landscape scales when discussing wildlife connectivity.

The idea of future community workshops in other parts of the Syilx Territory resonated, and the Upper Similkameen Indian Band is specifically interested in working with the ONA Wildlife Program to host a workshop in 2016.