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Okanagan Nation Alliance earns full voting rights on water board

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JAKE COURTEPATTE / Mar. 2, 2022 2:00 p.m. / NEWS



The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) has been granted full voting rights on financial matters pertaining to the area’s water management.

Announced on Mar. 1, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has changed the board’s governance structure allowing the ONA to have their say on financial concerns related to things like sustainable water supplies, clean drinking water, and healthy lakes and streams.

The ONA was first granted a seat on the OBWB in 2006, though with limited voting power on such items.

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“I’m pleased that the ONA now has equal voting powers consistent with the regional districts, allowing the Indigenous voices of the Okanagan to be heard,” said Westbank First Nation Chief Chris Derickson. “We need to improve the way siwłkʷ (water) is managed within the Syilx territory so it will be there for our future generations and all living things.

“Syilx people have a deep-rooted and sacred connection to siwłkʷ. It is our living relative and it is our job to protect it. We need the voices of Indigenous people to do that.”

The idea to grant full voting rights to the ONA first began to take traction at a July 2021 board meeting.

Water Board Chair Sue McKortoff said the OBWB is “very happy” with the new voting powers granted to the local First Nations.

“Endorsing the Syilx Nation’s seat at the board table as equal to the voting power of regional district representatives is one important step forward in our work towards reconciliation and implementing the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Syilx rights.”