Floodplains: A Syilx Perspective

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Photo courtesy Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries
The breath of life (scxʷəlxʷəlts) of the river is the floodplain.
The Protectors (suxʷtəxʷtəm) are the Floodplain Forest Cottonwoods

In En’owkin Cottonwoods
Photo courtesy of En’owkin Centre

Eagles Watching the River- Okanagan River Ellisford WA.
Photo Jeannette Armstrong.
Flood Forest Trees

Trembling Aspen

Water Birch

Black Cottonwood

Photo: Richard Armstrong  Photo: Richard Armstrong  Photo: Richard Armstrong
Floodplain Forests of the Rivers in Syilx values is like a basket filled every year for all to share.

95% of wildlife are dependent upon floodplain ecosystems and use them more frequently than any other habitat.

All are among the rarest plant communities now in the province of BC.

Floodplain habitats supported former huge populations of food mammals, local and migratory food birds, and plant foods.

Cottonwood floodplain systems provided sub-irrigated wild hayfields, water birch stands and red-osier ecosystems.
Food Plants on the En’owkin Conservation Floodplain Forest Land

Saskatoon

Blue Elderberry

Oregon Grape

Nodding Onion

Photo: Nancy Turner

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Our riparian floodplain foods and medicines are the major foods for our bird, animal and insect relatives.

- Black & Red Chokecherry
- Pin Cherry
- Thimbleberry
- Raspberry
- Black Thornberry
- Red Thornberry
- Rosehips
- chokecherry (sm. Dark red variety)
- Red Osier Dogwood Berries
- 3 varieties Saskatoon
- Wild Mint tea
Our Sacred Bird Relatives. Many can only live in floodplain

Many Small Song Birds

• Vulture
• Osprey
• Red Tail Hawk
• Redwing
• Ducks, mallards, geese.

Yellow-headed Black Bird

Lewis’s Woodpecker

Bald Eagles

Great Horned Owl

Photo: Carl Donohue

Great Blue Heron

Photo: Fred Voetsch

Photo: Richard Armstrong

Photo: Brian E. Small
96% of Riparian Floodplain Lands Gone in the Okanagan

Municipal development, damming and flood control measures destroy sensitive riparian lands and riparian habitats.

In the Okanagan they have been reduced to less than 4% of the original areas (SOSCP)

Channeling to straighten the river drained the many lush riparian and wetland areas leaving behind dead lands, arid weed meadows and small stagnant oxbows.
Our Elder Relatives take care of us. We have to take care of rich riparian floodplains they need.

Black Bear

Salmon

Photo: August Armstrong

White-tail Deer

Photo: Carl Donohue

Photo: Carl Donohue

Photo: August Armstrong
Osoyoos Floodplains drained and channeled

Photo Marlowe Sam

Photo courtesy Friends of the Oxbows
Okanagan River Floodplain lands river channeling
Penticton and Osooyos BC.

Photo courtesy ONA Fisheries

Photo Marlowe Sam
Human to Tmixw Relationship

The Indigenous relationship to the abundance provided by floodplain and its characteristics determines the kind of lifeforce (tmixʷ) that is present in each different place.

Tmixʷ relationship is one of **rights and responsibility**.

It is to be rightly thought of as a sacred water relationship in Syilx law, rather than as “land use”.
En’owkin Centre River Floodplain Lands Restoration. Community Collaboration

At En’owkin Cottonwoods Conservation/Restoration Site

photo En’owkin Centre
Our story teachers are now endangered

Painted Turtle

Great Basin Spadefoot Toad

Tiger Salamander
River Floodplain Restoration is part of our responsibility to Salmon Recovery.

However it is us and all tmixʷ relatives into the future that is being restored.

Photos courtesy of En’ówkin Centre