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KATZIE FIRST NATION CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION ON SÁNƏSAʔŁ (ALOUETTE) RIVER RESTORATION

New Report Highlights Devastating Cumulative Impacts as well as Pathways to Healing

Pitt Meadows & Maple Ridge, B.C. | Unceded traditional territories of the Katzie First Nation

The Katzie First Nation has released a comprehensive report grounded in Katzie knowledge and Western science, “*Katzie-Led Rights & Cumulative Effects Assessment for the sánəsaʔł (Alouette) Foodshed,*” that underscores the urgent need to address the environmental and cultural degradation caused by more than a century of water diversion and development in the sánəsaʔł (pronounced sawn-us-alhth) River and Lake system.

This groundbreaking study is unique in that it is First Nation-led and examines the cumulative impacts on the lands and waters of the sánəsaʔł from the perspective of a community that has existed in the region for millenia. Key findings of the report include:

- **Water Flow Disruptions:** Since 1928, the river has been dammed, and water has been diverted to Stave Lake for hydroelectric power, **reducing natural water flow by 86%**. This has caused ecological imbalances and drastically impacted fish populations, particularly Katzie’s sockeye salmon family.
- **Ecosystem Decline:** The reduced water flow has severely damaged the watershed’s previous abundance and large capacity to support diverse plant, fish and wildlife species. This has disrupted traditional Katzie fishing, hunting and gathering practices that have sustained the Nation for generations.
- **Need for Restorative Action:** The report calls for increased water releases from the dam, re-establishing natural, seasonal water flows and reconnecting the slough system to restore habitats for fish and other wildlife. It also emphasizes the need for future land and water management decisions to be guided by Katzie law and knowledge. The focus will be on working collaboratively to ensure work is done in a safe way.

- **Cultural Impact:** The dam has restricted Katzie people's access to the river, sloughs and other traditional food sources. These changes have affected knowledge transfer, ceremony and spiritual practices tied to the sánəsaʔł ecosystem.

"Water is life for all our relations, the feathered, the finned, the 4 legged. The health of our lands, waters and people are intrinsically tied," said Chief Grace George of the Katzie First Nation. "For too long, the life-giving waters of the sánəsaʔł have been dammed, diverted and degraded. It's time to restore balance, and this report provides a clear path forward to heal our ecosystems and honour our responsibilities as guardians of this land."

The report also highlights a powerful living river declaration from Katzie Law, which recognizes the waters of the sánəsaʔł as a living matriarch who sustains all life within the territory. This living law affirms that the sánəsaʔł River and Lake must be protected, restored and respected according to Katzie traditional protocols.

"The report aligns with the Crown's commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)," said Councillor Rick Bailey of the Katzie First Nation. "Particularly in supporting our right to maintain our distinct relationship with our lands and waters. The Katzie First Nation calls on the provincial and federal governments, along with BC Hydro, to prioritize collaborative efforts to restore balance and the vitality of the sánəsaʔł."

The Katzie First Nation intends that the report inform ongoing discussions with BC Hydro and other stakeholders regarding water use, dam safety, fish habitat restoration and the future of the Alouette Generating Station.

The report also addresses the broader impacts of settler activities, including agricultural development and urbanization, on the watershed. With this in mind, it outlines several critical recommendations to restore the health of the sánəsaʔł and re-establish the Katzie Nation's traditional practices tied to the river and its surrounding ecosystem:

1. **Increase Water Flow to the sánəsaʔł River:** The report calls for increased water releases from the Alouette Dam, aiming to restore natural flow patterns that support fish migration, ecosystem health and the vitality of the sánəsaʔł River. Seasonal water flows should mimic natural cycles, with higher flows in the winter and spring and reduced flows in the summer.
2. **Restore Fish Habitat and Passage:** The Katzie First Nation advocates for the installation of fish ladders and other fish passage systems at the dam, allowing sockeye and other salmon species to complete their natural migration cycles. Habitat restoration projects within the river and lake should also be prioritized to improve spawning and rearing areas.
3. **Enhance Water Quality Protections:** Stronger protections against pollutants, including stormwater runoff, agricultural chemicals and waste from urban areas, are needed to

improve water quality in the lowlands. This includes measures to reduce impervious surfaces and promote groundwater recharge.

4. **Collaborative Land and Water Management:** Future land and water use decisions in the watershed must be guided by Katzie law and knowledge. The report calls for ongoing collaboration with BC Hydro, government authorities, and other stakeholders to ensure that Katzie voices and stewardship principles are central to future planning efforts.
5. **Adapt to Climate Change:** The impacts of climate change, including warming water temperatures and changing precipitation patterns, are an increasing concern. The report highlights the need for climate resilience strategies to protect fish populations, water resources and traditional Katzie practices for future generations.
6. **Reconnect the Slough Network:** Restoring the ancient slough system, which has been severed by dikes, agricultural development, and urbanization, is a priority. The sloughs were once a vital part of the watershed, supporting fish populations and other wildlife, and reconnecting them will improve water quality and habitat health.

“It’s clear that we’re at a crucial moment when it comes to the *sánəsaʔł*,” said Kimberly Armour, Katzie’s Director of Territorial Guardianship & Referrals , “The vitality of the *sánəsaʔł* was greatly weakened when it was dammed and diverted to Stave Lake more than 100 years ago. The consequences of this have been extensive, and we’re creeping closer and closer to a point of no return. What’s needed now is balance. The Katzie First Nation recognizes the importance of electricity generation and other water uses—but reducing natural water flow by 86% and decimating the sockeye population is not sustainable. It is in the best interest of all that the *sánəsaʔł* be protected.”

The detailed *Katzie Rights & Cumulative Effects Assessment: sánəsaʔł (Alouette) Foodshed* can be downloaded [here](#).

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About Katzie First Nation:

The Katzie First Nation are Coast Salish people whose traditional territories encompass the *sánəsaʔł* (Alouette River), Pitt Lake, Fraser River and surrounding lowlands. As stewards of the land for thousands of years, the Katzie people continue to uphold their responsibilities to protect, restore, and sustain the health of their ancestral lands and waters.

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