



Lake Stewardship FAQ

Updated: July 9/26

1. What is ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation's connection to Lake Windermere and Columbia Lake?

ʔAkisq̓nuk means the land between the two lakes referring to both Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere. ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation has stewarded the ʔamak (land) and wuʔu (water) within ʔamakʔis Ktunaxa, including Columbia Lake and Lake Windemere continuously for more than ten thousand years. That relationship comes with a responsibility to protect ʔa-kxam̓is q̓api qapsin (all living things) for everyone who depends on them, now and in the future. Caring for these lakes is not new for ʔAkisq̓nuk, it is who we are.

2. Why is ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation pursuing water stewardship of Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere?

Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere are waters that ʔAkisq̓nuknik' (ʔAkisq̓nuk people), community members and many neighbours depend on and enjoy. The health of the lakes has declined over time. As stewards of the lands and waters, ʔAkisq̓nuk is working on a collaborative and data driven water stewardship strategy.

Water stewardship has been identified as a strategic priority in ʔAkisq̓nuk's annual planning process, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to protecting culturally and environmentally significant waters for future generations.

Lake stewardship efforts will be informed by ʔA-kisq̓nuknik', neighbours, and governments, and scientific evidence to ensure that our lakes are healthy for generations to enjoy.

3. What principles will guide water stewardship?

The stewardship of Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere is guided by four core principles: collaboration, respect for knowledge systems, structure with flexibility, and transparency.

These principles reflect ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation's commitment to working together with governments, neighbouring communities, lake users, businesses, and environmental organizations to protect the long-term health of Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere. They also ensure decisions are informed by evidence, community input, and open communication throughout the process.

4. What information will guide lake stewardship? How will decisions be made as part of the stewardship planning process?

Indigenous knowledge and Western science will guide lake stewardship.

Generations of lived experience on these waters provide important knowledge about environmental change, cultural values, and ecosystem health. This knowledge is complemented by measurable scientific data, including bathymetric mapping, environmental monitoring, and technical studies. Together, these approaches provide a stronger understanding of lake health and help support evidence-based stewardship decisions.

5. Are lake stewardship efforts being developed in partnership with others?

Collaboration is central to the stewardship approach. ʔAkisq̓nuk is committed to working with local governments, neighbouring Indigenous Nations, provincial and federal agencies, environmental organizations, businesses, residents, and lake users.

The goal is to build a shared understanding of lake health and identify stewardship approaches that support both environmental sustainability and community well-being.

6. How will stewardship efforts remain transparent?

ʔAkisq̓nuk is committed to an open and accountable process. As technical studies and engagement activities progress, information will be shared about what is known, what is still being studied, and where decisions have or have not been made.

Community feedback, scientific findings, and Indigenous Knowledge will all help inform the process. Public engagement opportunities will be provided throughout stewardship efforts so community members can stay informed and contribute their perspectives.

7. What is the status of ʔAkisq̓nuk's lake stewardship planning process with the Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship?

ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation and the Province of British Columbia are working together to advance reconciliation, collaborative decision-making, and shared stewardship of lands and waters within Ktunaxa Territory.

This collaborative approach between ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation and B.C. aims to steward Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere for current and future generations, and will include participation from local governments, First Nations, and environmental organizations.

8. What is a Vessel Operation Restriction Regulation?

A Vessel Operation Restriction Regulation (VORR) is a federal tool under the Canada Shipping Act that allows local authorities to request restrictions on boating activities on specific waterways to address

safety, environmental, and public-interest concerns. A VORR can be used to establish speed limits, restrict vessel propulsion or engine power, regulate hours or areas of operation, limit or prohibit towing activities or wake surfing, and restrict or prohibit the operation of motorized vessels within a defined area.

There is already a VORR mandating a speed no higher than 10 km/hr within 30m of shore on the lakes, and no higher than 10 km/hr within 100km of the shoreline on Columbia Lake within the wildlife management area.

9. Why is ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation considering a VORR application?

Healthy lakes are essential to healthy communities. As the original stewards of these waters, ʔAkisq̓nuk First Nation has a responsibility to protect, restore and sustain them for present and future generations through collaboration, evidence, respect and long-term thinking.

Emerging research shows that wake boats are less appropriate on shallow lakes such as Windermere and Columbia. A VORR application would allow the Nation to work with Transport Canada and stakeholders to evaluate whether a restriction on wake surfing is needed to better protect the ecological, cultural, and recreational values of the waterway while supporting safe and responsible use.

9. How will the public be involved in the VORR process?

If and when an application for a VORR restriction is made related to wake surfing, we would complete the pre-application steps, including public consultation and community engagement.

The VORR process includes mandatory public input before any regulations are enacted, and ʔAkisq̓nuk is committed to ensuring residents, businesses, and lake users have a meaningful role as this work moves forward.

10. What work is ʔAkisq̓nuk doing to support informed decision-making?

Water stewardship has always been a priority for the Nation and, with increasing capacity, the Nation is expanding its efforts. ʔAkisq̓nuk has been actively engaging and collaborating with local environmental organizations to build on existing lake stewardship efforts, identify data gaps, and update outdated data.

The Nation is actively investing in studies including bathymetric mapping (measurable data on lake depth) of Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere. We are also commissioning a study to better understand the economic impacts of ballasted boat use. These efforts will inform evidence-based decisions for the lakes.

11. How is AFN considering the needs of the local economy?

AFN understands that Columbia Lake and Lake Windermere support livelihoods, businesses, and a way of life that matters deeply to this community. That's why AFN is commissioning a survey to better understand the impact of recreational use of the lakes, including ballasted boat use, on the regional

economy. The goal is decisions grounded in evidence that works for the lakes and the people who depend on them.

12. How can community members stay informed and get involved?

AFN will continue engaging with local governments, the province, members, residents, and lake users as technical work progresses and additional information becomes available. We encourage all interested parties to continue reviewing the webpage for updates. For questions, please contact lands.resources@akisgnuk.org.