

Protecting our rights under consent decrees issues

CATHY ABRAMSON, DIRECTOR,

UNIT I

Congratulations to our new chairman – Mr. Joe Eitrem. Our board of directors worked together to make this appointment by reaching a complete consensus. (Well, we almost did, as there was only one objection.) I am happy with the appointment of Joe. I think that he will do a good job. Ideally, having the membership select the chair would have been preferable but to appoint Joe with the near unanimous support of the board will ensure strength in the decisions we make on behalf of the people. I pledge to work with Chairman Eitrem and assist him anyway I can in an effort to move our tribe forward.

On another good note, our board of directors passed a change in our ordinance that would allow our elder advisory committees to conduct a tribal “Meet the Candidate” forum for the upcoming election. Our elders have worked for about two years on this bring this to fruition. I fully support them and would like to thank them for their persistence and patience with our process. I wish them well in organizing and conducting their first forum. I’m sure that our members will be mindful and respectful to our elders as they hold these forums. They plan to make these forums fair and orderly and they will be as long as we all follow their rules.

During the week of July 18, I represented our tribe at the “Honoring the Waters Indigenous Water Conference 2011.” Approximately 200 delegates consisting of Anishinaabe leadership from across the Great Lakes area gathered in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, to address the quality of our waters. Chiefs, grand chiefs and various tribal leaders came from Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, Quebec, Manitoba and Ontario in the name of continuing a forward path to protect our waters.

During the four-day gathering, the leaders all gave input on how to educate and empower first nations, tribal nations and mainstream society with regard to history, jurisdiction and rights of Anishinaabe. We developed an action plan that would ensure water quality for the next seven generations.

It was an excellent event and so very necessary. Many youth and elders came and actively gave input. This event was live streamed at www.indiancountrytoday.com and will be archived.

As Director Pine reported last month, we travelled to Lansing to meet with Governor Snyder to discuss our tribal issues. Governor Snyder wants to “reinvent Michigan.” Our main message to him is that he needs to look to the tribes and include us more in decision-making. There are many issues that our tribes could help to improve our Native lands, which eventually became Michigan. Our meeting with him was good. He is an outside-the-box thinker so I have hopes that he will be more inclusive with the tribes and look to us to help him out.

While there, I hand delivered to him a packet of information from the Sugar Island group in regards to cleaning up the Canadian sewage in the St. Marys River. The sewage treatment plant still has overflows and the contents shoot across to the shores of Sugar Island and down through the North Shore. It’s disgusting and unacceptable.

We were very pleased that Governor Snyder came to Sault Ste. Marie just last week and we were able to give to him more information that included a resolution from the Sault Tribe that supported our Chippewa County Health Department to receive more funding to assist in monitoring the river. It is vital to the health of our people! I’d like to thank Chief Dean Sayers of Batchewana First Nations in joining us to show support, as this is not just a Sugar Island issue. Chief Sayers also informed Governor Snyder that the First Nations people are here to help him in improving, protecting and preserving our waters. We will constantly remind him!

I recently attended the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA) meeting and Executive Committee meeting on behalf of our chairman. The parties of the 2000 and 2007 Consent Decrees — Sault Tribe, Little Traverse Bay Bands, Little River Band, Grand Traverse Band, the United States and state of Michigan — met on Aug. 25 for the Executive Council meeting. The council is comprised of principles from the above-mentioned parties and meets once each year to discuss the inter-agency management of the agreements. There were several items of new business discussed, including harvest reporting by subsistence fishers and commercial wholesalers; management issues with Black Lake sturgeon harvest and allocation; walleye management on the Inland Waterway Chain of Lakes in the northern Upper Peninsula; and permitting and reporting associated with the specially regulated fishing seasons.

Following the Executive Council, we had a very productive breakout session with Diane Rosin, BIA Regional Director, to talk about base funding for the implementation of the 2007 Inland Consent Decree (ICD). This is vital because currently there are no federally appropriated dollars to implement all the aspects of the ICD. The 1836 tribes have put significant effort into this endeavor. However, we have not been successful in having dollars appropriated. We were advised on new approaches to forwarding this funding need to the federal government and more importantly we had the opportunity to express, face-to-face, the need we have for funding.

This last meeting was just yesterday, so now I am racing to get this to Jennifer at the newspaper office. Enjoy our fall season because it is here! School has started for many so parents, please get involved in your child's education. Your involvement will ensure that they have a much more successful experience.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at cabramson@saulttribe.net or my cell, (906) 322-3823. Thank you!

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