

Tribe recognized as Climate Change Champion



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You may have seen in recent news reports that the Sault Tribe was one of 16 communities (and one of only two tribal nations) recognized by the White House as climate change champions. We even got a “shout out” from the president in his closing remarks at the White House Tribal Nations Conference, which happened to be aired live on national news networks. OK. I’m just darn proud of this well-deserved recognition in Indian Country. It’s not often we have a moment to celebrate accomplishments. And all the credit goes to our program and division managers and their

staff for pulling this achievement together.

Leads on this project were Kathleen Brosemer and Eric Clark of our Environmental and Natural Resource departments — as well as collaborative planning and development contribution across virtually all operational units of the Sault Tribe.

So, what the heck is this all about and what does it mean for the tribe and for tribal members? Since elected to office in 2010, I have asked every chairman I have served with to please tackle a comprehensive vision/strategic plan for our tribal nation. A blueprint, if you will: “Where we are; where are we going; and how are we going to get there.” In my estimation, this is the closest planning document I have seen that attempts to strategically align a direction for this tribe moving forward.

Just to give you an idea of scope: In 2014, we will spend close to \$3 million in heating and electric costs. That does not include vehicle fuel usage. No small chunk of change!

In a nutshell, this plan seeks to achieve sustainability and self-sufficiency here in our tribal

territory. The focus is energy: the efficient use of energy and renewable generation of energy.

Key objectives and excerpt from “Climate Change and Resilience Project”

— *The Sault Tribe’s energy strategy, developed in 2012, has as its bold long-term goal, “no net purchased energy.” This means that for any energy the tribe must purchase for its operations (including vehicles and flights), an equivalent amount of energy will be produced for export to the grid for other users. The staged approach that has been laid out in this strategy means the first steps include aggressive measures to reduce energy consumption before taking broad scale action with renewable energy.*

— *“From sustainable food and medicine systems to energy conservation and renewables, Sault Tribe has shown leadership and commitment to building resilient communities. Several strategic-level plans guide the tribe’s approach to climate resilience, including an energy strategy with a progressive staged approach to achieving the long term goal of net zero purchased energy,*

an emergency operations plan with details on management of climate emergencies, an integrated resource management plan covering forestry, wetlands, and other natural resources, integrated solid waste management plan detailing waste diversion goals, a sustainable development code and a land use planning process. All of these processes employ a strategy of piloting, then disseminating across our region, so all can serve as a model for other communities elsewhere.

— *The energy strategy, in particular, calls for a strategic approach beginning with demand reduction in all energy uses, then installation of renewables sized and located to best meet demand, reducing reliance on the grid infrastructure and reducing vulnerability to catastrophic events. All available renewable options will be utilized and distributed across the demand centers of the seven counties, to increase resilience of supply. The long term goal is to produce power from renewables to supply all power needs of the tribe plus to export to the grid to offset all purchased energy, including transportation energy, and be a net-zero green-*

house gas emitter.

When we talk about energy, it’s not just the electricity that powers our world. It’s also about taking the resources available to us and converting them into self-sustainable deliverables that improve and protect the wellbeing of our tribal nation and our people: Economic, environmental and social (culture, education, health, healthy communities). Not only to reduce costs, but to train our people in skilled trades, to create local jobs, to improve the food sources available in the territory and to improve appreciatively the health and quality of life in our tribal nation as well as the communities in which we live.

“Capacity building” and “piloting” describes the phase we are in currently. Nothing is written in stone. It comes with a basket of technical, professional, financial support to leverage it into sustainable economic opportunity. Or, we can take a “pat on the back” and promptly ignore this plan. Time will tell. I’m hopeful.

Wishing everyone a very blessed Christmas and a promising new year!