

Gidayaangwaami'idimin Ezhi-inawendiyang

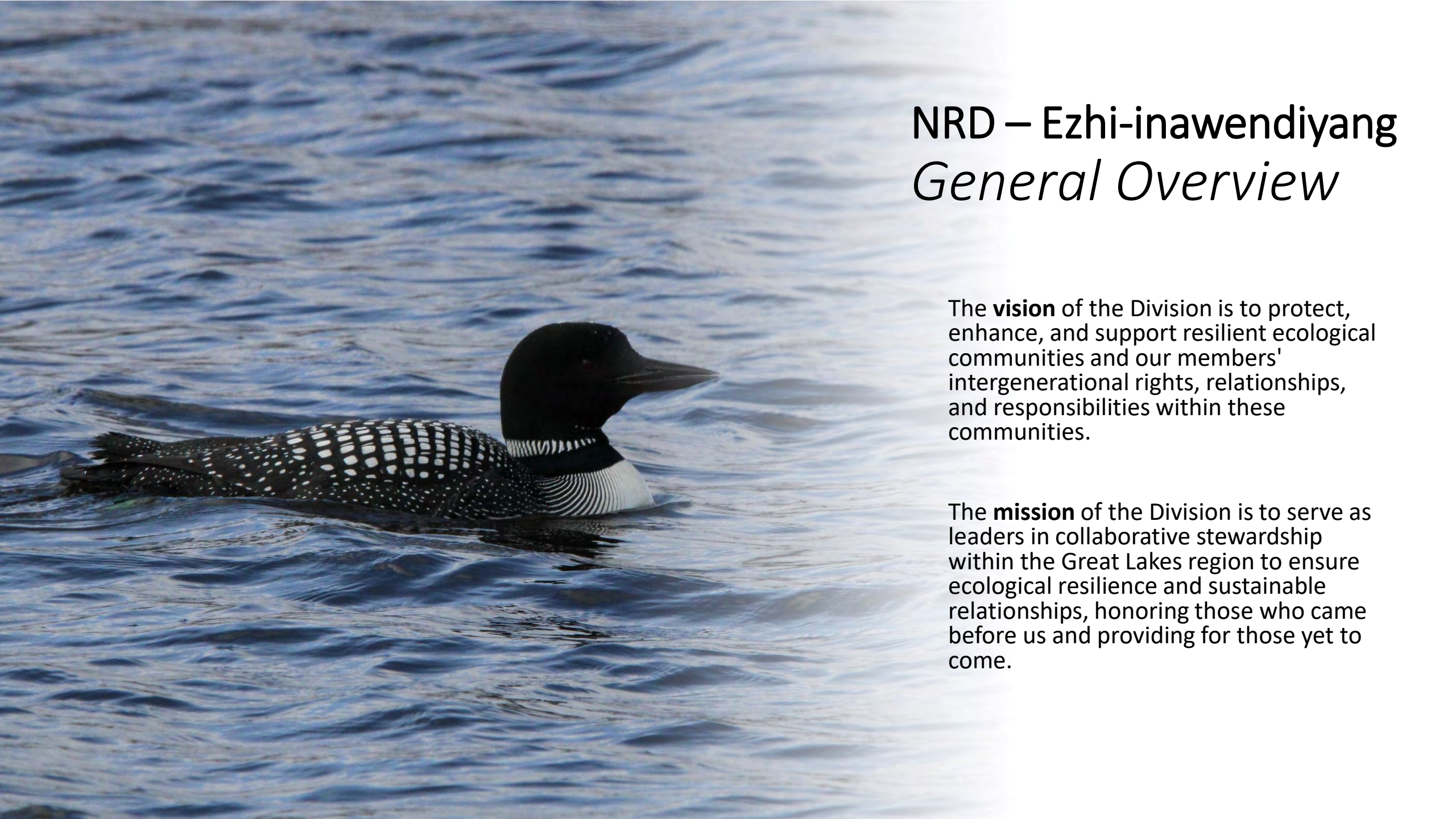
Natural Resources Division

Semi-annual Review

July – December 2025

Prepared April 2026





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *General Overview*

The **vision** of the Division is to protect, enhance, and support resilient ecological communities and our members' intergenerational rights, relationships, and responsibilities within these communities.

The **mission** of the Division is to serve as leaders in collaborative stewardship within the Great Lakes region to ensure ecological resilience and sustainable relationships, honoring those who came before us and providing for those yet to come.



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Organizational Structure*

The Natural Resources Division is comprised of Division administrative staff, the Consortium for Cooperative Ecological Resilience, the Fisheries Program, the Wildlife Program, and the Environmental Program.



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Tribal Members Served

Division staff, projects, and programs serve:

- Tribal members exercising treaty rights within the 1836 Treaty Ceded Territory
 - Hunters, fishers, trappers, and gatherers (> 4,000 Sault Tribe license-holders)
 - Tribal members participating in ceremonies that require clean water, air, and healthy inland, coastal, and aquatic ecosystems
 - Tribal members seeking to eat Great Lakes fish and regional wildlife as part of healthy traditional food systems
- Tribal households seeking assistance with indoor air and drinking water quality
- Broader communities across the Service Area and Ceded Territory who benefit from natural resources protection and restoration



NRD – Ezhi -inawendiyang Program Overviews

- Division Priorities
- Environmental Program
- Fisheries Program
- Wildlife Program
- Consortium for Cooperative Ecological Resilience





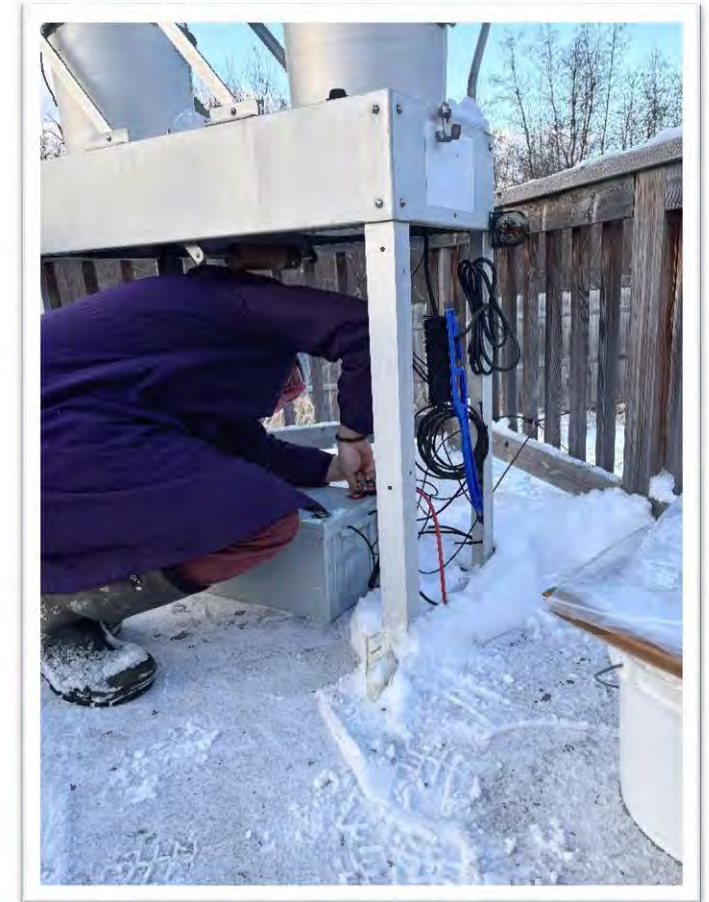
NRD Priorities

- Protecting rights, relationships, and responsibilities
- Supporting strategic land acquisition
- Advancing meaningful co-stewardship across the 1836 Ceded Territory

NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Environmental Program-Air Quality

- **Monitoring & PFAS**
 - Weekly NADP/NTN site visits + sampling; deployed new collection bucket.
 - Installed one Purple Air Sensor on the Sault Tribe Housing Building in Kinross.
 - PFAS deposition sampling launched Dec 1, 2025.
- **Indoor Air Quality**
 - Completed six IAQ assessments and reports.
 - Four on Tribal Members' private residences.
 - Two Tribal facilities, Childcare Center-Lambert Center and Enrollment.
- **Compliance & Planning**
 - EPA-approved IAQ Assessment QAPP, Level 4 EI QAPP, and Air Sensor QAPP.
 - Submitted two, two-year grant workplans, CAA 103 for 140k and SIRG for 60k, for internal capacity-building.
- **Coordination & Reporting**
 - Presented NTN/PFAS site updates at MTEG and the TAMS Center.
 - Participated in the National Tribal Forum on Air Quality-Committee Planning Meetings.
 - Attended TAMS Steering Committee bi-annual meeting and voted in as Vice Chair.



Maintenance at the NADP Site

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Environmental Program-Brownfields

• Standards & Policy Development

- Re-reviewed Brownfields Network cleanup standards and strengthened the Tribe's cleanup standards draft (added missing themes/sections).
- Reviewed illegal dumping code and began drafting edits to improve clarity and effectiveness.
- Reformatted the Tribal Brownfields public record; submitted the PALs report.

• Response & Technical Support

- Supported remedial action planning for a diesel spill at Whitefish Point Harbor.
- Developed a comprehensive soil sampling considerations list (soil properties & special-interest contaminants by plant species) for a requested project.
- Began support work for monitoring/evaluating future orchard plots to ensure soils are safe for food cultivation/harvest.

• Training & Capacity Building

- Participated in the Coast Guard Planning Committee for a tabletop exercise focused on the Cut River Oil Release from an Enbridge line. The exercise took place in St. Ignace in August and was well received. The Sault Tribe was the only tribe on the planning team.
- New staff onboarded (started in October) and progressed through onboarding materials.
- Attended multiple webinars on hazardous waste generation and safe handling.

• Coordination & Tracking

- Continued receipt/tracking of NRC notices.
- Continued acquisition work for Sault Tribe landholding shapefiles to support Brownfield site identification/inventory.

EPA Form: 6200-18
OMB Control No.: 2050-0192
Expiration Date: 3/31/2026 (update pending approval)

United States
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, DC 20460

BROWNFIELDS PROGRAM ACTIVITY LEVELs ('PALs') REPORTING FORM

This collection of information is approved by OMB under the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. 3501 et seq. (OMB Control No. 2050-0192). Responses to this collection of information are mandatory (2 CFR 200.328, 2 CFR 200.333, 2 CFR 200.335, 40 CFR 30.31). An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 4.66 hours per response. Send comments on the Agency's need for this information, the accuracy of the provided burden estimates, and any suggested methods for minimizing respondent burden to the Regulatory Support Division Director, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2321T), 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20460. Include the OMB control number in any correspondence. Do not send the completed form to this address.

The Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization is requesting the information below to capture impacts from the funding received under the Section 128(a) State and Tribal Response Program. Responses should consider programs impacted by broader capacity-building activities (e.g., regulation development, database tracking enhancements, site inventories, or staff training) and/or site-specific activities (e.g., brownfields assessment, cleanup oversight, or public participation) on properties (or sites) that are supported under any hazardous and solid waste programs. Cooperative Agreement Recipients ("CARs") are to input data that accurately reflects the work carried out by the response program, which may include entering zeroes ("0") for some fields where those activities were not carried out in the previous federal fiscal year. CARs must submit the requested PALs information on or before the due date in your Cooperative Agreement Terms and Conditions. CARs must submit PALs information directly into EPA's Assessment, Cleanup, and Redevelopment Exchange System ("ACRES") database. For detailed instructions on how to report PALs in ACRES, please see the quick reference guide at <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/acres-training-tips-and-tools#state-tribal>.

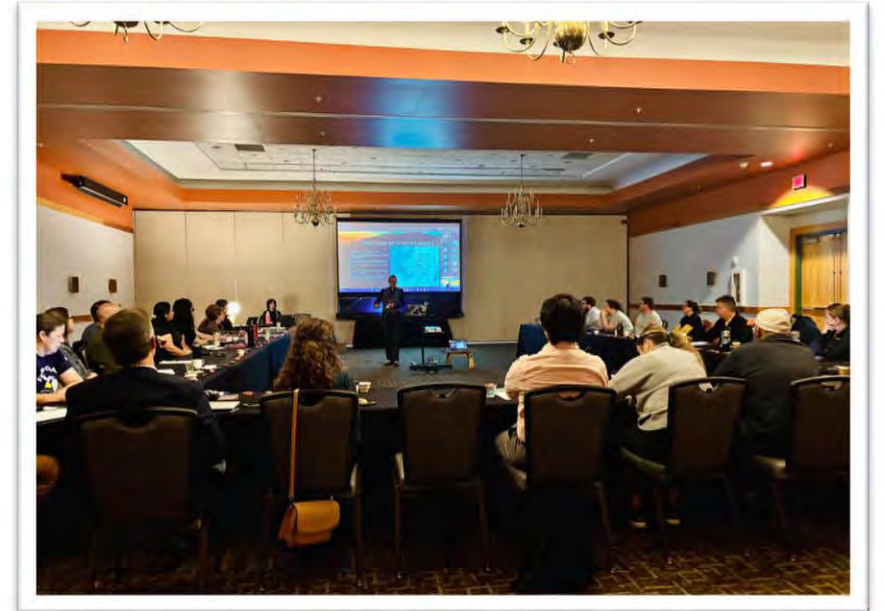
Responses to the questions below should reflect activities for the period covering the last federal fiscal year (October 1 – September 30).

PALs Report Reporting Form

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Environmental Program-Drinking Water

- **Incident Response & Public Health Protection**
 - Responded to a hydrant break at Wetmore Housing (Dec 4, 2025) that triggered a boil-water notice.
 - Coordinated resident bottled water distribution and follow-up sampling; boil-water notice lifted Dec 8 after results confirmed water was safe.
- **Routine Monitoring & Reporting**
 - Continued routine drinking water sampling and monthly meter checks across Tribal facilities and housing sites (Christmas Casino, Manistique Casino, Wetmore, Manistique & Hessel Housing, Manistique Health Center).
 - Completed lab coordination, results review, and reporting to support ongoing compliance and safe operations.
- **EPA Significant Deficiencies – Drinking Water Systems**
 - EPA identified significant deficiencies at four non-Utility Authority funded sites: Manistique Casino, Christmas Casino, Manistique Tribal Health Center, and Bear on the Mountain Golf Course.
 - Submitted a corrective action plan to the EPA, which outlined repairs and timelines. The plan was accepted, and has been updated to account for weather and staffing constraints. Actively coordinating with internal agencies to ensure timely completion of corrections and keeping the EPA informed of progress.
 - These deficiencies were not caused by Environmental's failure to complete required sampling. The physical well systems are managed by Facilities, Casinos, and EDC.
 - Utility Authority/Housing-supported systems, which fund Environmental staff time/travel to those housing sites, received strong 2025 IHS review results: 15/16 O&M score, no EPA violations, and no potential significant deficiencies.
 - Next step: develop stand-alone internal service contracts so Environmental can provide the same level of sampling, compliance tracking, EPA coordination, and oversight to all Tribal public water systems.



Michigan Tribal Environmental Group Meeting October 2025

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Environmental Program-Surface Water

- **Planning & Field Season Readiness**
 - Continued updating the CWA Section 106 Monitoring Strategy for the 2026 field season.
 - Developed a five-year Water Quality Strategic Plan to guide long-range priorities.
 - Advanced the Surface Water Monitoring QAPP, approximately 100 pages, and submitted it to EPA for review.
 - Assessed Tribal streams across the seven-county service area.
- **Partnerships & Regional Engagement**
 - Attended the Lake Superior Work Group meeting and engaged with regional partners.
 - Participated in watershed and coastal partner meetings, including BPAC, Loyola University, LAMPs, and the Coastal Program Working Group.
 - Attended the Manoomin Gathering at Kewadin Casino and conducted related networking.
 - Attended the MTEG Q3 meeting at KBIC, presented at the MTEG Q4 meeting, and distributed a recap to attendees.
- **Outreach & Communication**
 - Submitted a Salt Watch article to the Tribal newspaper.
 - Conducted a successful rain barrel outreach program, hosting eight workshops and distributing 70 rain barrels.
- **Regulatory Review & Tribal Comments**
 - Drafted a comment letter on Michigan’s Water Quality Standards triennial review.
 - Drafted a comment letter regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ proposed updates to the Nationwide Permits.

What is the Correct Amount of Salt?

Incorrect Amount **Correct Amount**



How to be a Smart Salter:

SHOVEL	SCATTER	SWEEP
		
Clear walkways before snow turns to ice.	A 12 oz mug holds enough salt to treat a 20' driveway or 10 sidewalk squares!	Sweep up excess salt and reuse it!



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Fisheries - Decree Reporting*

Harvest Reporting and Permitting

- **Great Lakes Decree**
 - Bi-weekly Commercial Reporting
 - Currently 50 fishers are registered
 - Retail Bill of Sales
 - Monthly Subsistence Reporting
 - Currently 258 fishers registered
 - Grid 306 spring walleye permits & reports
- **Inland Decree Permits & Reports**
 - Spring Walleye Lakes
 - Special Harvest Reports
 - Jun/Jan summary reports to co-managers
 - Black Lake Sturgeon Permit Lottery



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Fisheries - Assessments*

Great Lakes Fishery Assessments

- **Commercial Sampling and Management**
 - Staff conducted 5 ride-alongs with 3 fishers on Lakes Huron and Michigan
 - Staff conducted 29 dockside samples of commercial fishers on Lakes Huron, Michigan, and Superior
- **Fishery Independent Sampling**
 - Giigoonh Survey
 - General fish community survey. Conducted each year July – September
 - 24 net set/lifts in 7 days
 - 403 fish caught – 16 species
 - Deepwater Survey
 - Final year of this work.
 - 4 net set/lifts in 2 days
 - 19 fish caught – 4 species
- **Committee Representation (Great Lakes & Inland)**
 - Technical Fisheries Committee (Modeling Subcommittee)
 - Lake Technical Committee Meetings
 - Lake Trout Working Group for Lakes Huron and Michigan
 - Inland Fisheries Committee





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Fisheries – Atikameg Initiative*

- **Stocking**

- Ponds were harvested, and fish were stocked in late June and early July
 - **Barbeau Hatchery:** 50,178 whitefish stocked (≈67% survival)
 - **Odenaang Pond:** 59,669 whitefish stocked (≈40% survival)
 - **Total:** 109,847 whitefish released — *our best year yet!*

- **Rearing**

- Staff collected eggs during the month of November.
- The team spawned 105 pairs of fish.
- They initially collected over 1.7 million eggs.
- Approximately 1.5 million eggs reached the “eyed-up” stage.

- **Translocation**

- The team completed year two of the translocation project.
- Staff moved 189 adult whitefish into the Carp River.
- They fitted 64 fish with external acoustic transmitters.
- Crews deployed and later retrieved eight acoustic receivers from the river.

- **Ongoing Work**

- Staff monitored eggs daily.
- The team continues to analyze translocation data.

- **Next Steps**

- Evaluate stocking success and survival.
- Begin the adaptive management process for Atikameg and develop a fisheries management plan for the species.





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Fisheries - Ogaa Hatchery*

- **Stocking**

- Staff stocked 437,696 spring walleye fingerlings across priority waters.

- **Ongoing Work**

- Staff processed otoliths to verify OTC hatchery marks.
- Staff processed aging structures.
- Maintenance crews installed new doors and windows, improving hatchery efficiency.

- **Next Steps**

- Staff will codify the Ogaa Stocking Plan in a written document.
- Staff will develop an Ogaa Fisheries Management Plan.



Stocking Location	Number stocked
Sault Area	24,572
Lake George	69,670
Raber Bay	24,888
Potagannissing	141,295
Waishkey Bay	105,632
Lake Nicolet	71,639

NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang Fisheries- Non-Local Beings (AIS)

- Cooperative AIS (aquatic invasive species) early detection and monitoring in the St. Marys River was completed in October
 - No new species of non-local beings detected for 2025!
 - 36 total sampling events for the season using 3 different gear types (electrofishing, gill net, fyke net)
 - Examples of non-local beings captured: Eurasian ruffe, sea lamprey, common carp, rainbow smelt, threespine stickleback, and chinook salmon
 - Have begun preparation for 2026 sampling season
- Future Work/Collaborations
 - Fisheries Biologist I was trained in eDNA water sampling by USFWS Alpena biologists, and plans to take water samples in future to enhance invasive species monitoring
 - The multi-agency cooperative Spawning Whitefish and Invasive Mussels (SWIM) project tagged Lake Whitefish in Big Bay de Noc in November; Fisheries Biologist I helped facilitate contact between state/federal biologists and tribal fishers



Combating the challenges facing manoomin



Left: A hybrid cattail stand that has been cut down by Sault Tribe coastal biologists. Right: A Sault Tribe coastal biologist kayaking through a manoomin stand.

NRD Ezhi-inawendiyang

Fisheries – Outreach

Boat to School Program

Since 2019, the Fisheries Program has partnered with MSU Extension and the JKL Bahweting School to provide an immersive learning experience for 6th-grade students. The program combines hands-on classroom activities with field trips, including a visit to the Tribe's hatchery.

Non Local Beings (AIS)

- Two articles submitted to *Win Awenen Nisitotung* between July and August, focusing on non-local plants and the relationship between non-native hybrid cattail and manoomin
- Worked with Bellwether PR to create multiple social media posts in conjunction with articles, with a focus on non-local plants and invasive mussels
- Fisheries outreach materials were provided for the annual Baaweting Homecoming Powwow in Sault Ste. Marie, MI for a shared Natural Resources Division booth

Sturgeon in the Classroom

2025-2026 is the second year of the Sturgeon in the classroom program. Fisheries provided guidance, materials, and maintenance support to three local elementary schools to participate and rear a Lake Sturgeon.

Elder Meals

With the help of Massey Fish Co., the Fisheries Program processed nearly 2,000 lbs. of fish into food products (fillets, smoked fish, pate, etc.) for Sault Tribe Elder Services' Elder Meals Program in 2025. Of this total, **525 lbs.** were processed during the final quarter!



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Wildlife - Program Introduction

The Wildlife Program performs population-level assessments of nonhuman relatives (e.g., plants and wildlife) and their relationships with their environments and other beings. The Wildlife Program collaborates with external agencies to monitor and manage harvest and develop and conduct stewardship activities across the 1836 Ceded Territory, in implementation of the 2007 Inland Consent Decree and the 2006 MOU with the US Forest Service.

Primary Funding Sources

- BIA Rights Protection and Implementation (RPI) funds
- BIA Tribal Support – Trust Land Natural Resources
- BIA Competitive Grants
 - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)
 - Forestry
- US Forest Service competitive grants and agreements
- US Fish and Wildlife Service competitive grants and agreements

Strategic Plan Alignment: Aligns with NRD's Strategic Plan Priorities by performing assessment, monitoring, management, and outreach activities required for meeting each of NRD's goals.





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Wildlife - Current Work

- **Hemiboreal and Boreal Forests Initiative**
 - Ishkode (Fire) Project via Tribal Forest Protection Act, collaboration with USFS-Hiawatha National Forest and CCER
 - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative projects: marten, wolves, grouse, deer, and cedar
- **Coastal Initiative**
 - Wildlife monitoring, including migratory waterfowl, secretive marsh birds, colonial waterbirds, muskrats, and mudpuppies
 - Habitat restoration in coastal wetlands, including invasive species management and reestablishing native vegetation.
 - Revitalizing manoomin to strengthen ecosystem health, support culture, and advance food sovereignty.
- **Forestry**
 - Forest inventory, including stand exams on tribal trust lands and ecological community mapping (e.g., Shingle Bay)
 - Planning: Forest and Fire Management
 - Pursuing authority to issue limited permits to support other Sault Tribe entities (e.g., Housing)
- **Harvest Management**
 - Sault Tribe members' harvests of plants, wildlife, and inland fish are tracked and summarized annually to provide a Harvest and Effort Summary Report
 - Harvest informs quota-setting in inter-agency committees, such as the Wildlife Technical Committee

NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang Wildlife - Key Achievements

Boreal Initiative

- Continued building on the Ishkode Project with the **first prescribed burn** and ceremony in Betchler Marsh, alongside **pre-fire vegetation and cranberry community assessments**, within the Hiawatha National Forest.
- Processed 103 terrestrial laser scans and developed a **fire fuels monitoring** database to support vegetation assessments from forested and marsh habitats.
- Expanded wildlife monitoring through **GPS monitoring of spruce grouse**, processing 250,000 camera trap images **tagging 23,469 wildlife detections**, and capturing and **collaring two martens**.
- NRD advised on **trail development** in Sault Tribe's Hessel property by the Transportation Division.

Coastal Initiative

- Built on invasive species work, **removing 20+ acres** of invasive species, conducting **83 miles of river surveys**, and identifying **100+ new detections** for early response in partnership with CISMA.
- Bolstered wildlife monitoring through marsh bird surveys at **25+ sites**, collecting muskrat carcasses for **disease analysis**, and development of a **mudpuppy monitoring framework**.
- Seeded 1,200 pounds of manoomin** at six sites across the Eastern UP with goal of boosting Tribal harvest opportunities.
- Initiated the development of **standard operating procedures (SOPs)**, prioritizing safety protocols and operational consistency across upcoming spring and summer field activities.

Harvest Reporting

- 2024 Harvest and Effort Summary was completed using member-submitted harvest reports and shared with the parties to the 2007 Inland Consent Decree.
- All five elk tags were successfully filled and reported to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.
- 2025 Harvest Reports began being entered into Law Enforcement database as they are received, and preparations were made for processing new harvest data.



Wildlife biologists conduct cranberry assessment

By JENNIFER DALE-BURTON
On a fine October morning, Natural Resources Wildlife staff and volunteers headed out to a 32-acre cranberry bog to conduct a cranberry assessment as part of the NRD's Ishkode Project studying the effects of prescribed fire on the forest.

NRD wildlife biologists found the cranberry bog within the larger Betchler Marsh area while conducting other vegetation surveys. They invited interested community members to help with the assessment to collect volunteers' cranberry stories and their opinions on the bog as an edible plant source.

Two of the volunteers, Lori Gambardella and Jennifer Dale-Burton, gather wild cranberries to eat, along with other wild edibles. Gambardella helped the biologists identify other plants in the bog. Volunteers Tina Robinson and Cody McLaren helped count cranberry plants and cranberries.

NRD staff assessing the cranberries that day were Wildlife Biologists Clara Leppard, Kali Krupa, Colton Hudak, and Becca Lathrop, and Reporting and Permitting Specialist Emma Carley. Picking out two lines with a long measuring tape, the biologists set down 1-square-meter outlines in which they would count the cranberry plants. These counts will act as a baseline measurement and can be used to estimate overall cranberry abundance in the bog.

They chatted while working, NRD staff listening to stories of where Gambardella and Dale-Burton had picked cranberries. They also sampled a few berries and admired the scenery, especially the vivid red pitcher plants dotting the landscape. Robinson picked a few berries she would later make into a sauce with orange juice and honey.

They found mostly the same plants growing across the bog — bog rosemary, pitcher plants, sphagnum moss, leatherleaf and some grasses growing with the cranberries. Average cranberry coverage was 5.24-9.2%.

The wildlife biologists are interested in how the prescribed fires will affect the cranberries. Most people know fire stimulates new growth in wild blueberries releasing nutrients into the soil and getting rid of pests and other plant competition. The biologists want to know if cranberry plants will also benefit from fire. They also want to know if fire will be good for the bog by pushing back the encroaching forest, and will

Photo by Jennifer Dale-Burton

Natural Resources Wildlife staff and volunteers headed out to a 32-acre cranberry bog to conduct a cranberry assessment as part of the NRD's Ishkode Project studying the effects of prescribed fire on the forest. L-R: Wildlife Biologists Clara Leppard, Kali Krupa, Colton Hudak, and Becca Lathrop; volunteers Lori Gambardella, Cody McLaren, and Tina Robinson. Not pictured, Jennifer Dale-Burton and Reporting and Permitting Specialist Emma Carley.

make other observations. Wildlife staff would be happy to direct tribal members to the bog for future cranberry picking. Call Sault Tribe Wildlife at (906) 632-6132.

SaultTribeGuardian.com

Wild rice (Manoomin) Community seeding

More than a dozen volunteers converged on the Manoomin State Wildlife Management Area on Sept. 4, as part of an annual effort to restore wild rice beds through the St. Mary's River System. "A little over 900 pounds," said Sault Tribe Wildlife Ecologist Mike Whelan of the region and he loped back from the Wine

Earth's Nation in Manoomin. "We're putting it out on five spots along the St. Mary's River."

While Earth's Nation, also anglicized the Bay Mills Indian Community, the Keweenaw Band of Chippewa Indians and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians with seed as efforts continue throughout the

region to re-establish rice beds. "Our long-term hope is to have beds of wild rice that the community can harvest from," said Interim Director and Wildlife Program Manager Emerald Pogoda in a previous interview regarding the ongoing project.

The 2025 was a grueling affair 12 previous years' seasons and labor were employed to float the buckets of rice out into the shallow water for seeding. A stiff northwest wind combined with lower water levels, however, derailed that method of transportation. The initial roughly 150 pounds of seed was conveyed by hand-carried buckets to the planting site after traversing a

foot-beaten trail of tall cattails and thick mud by the crew.

Challenges in an American effort, made two long trips across the mud that delivering a pair of 70-pound bags of seed to the islands where the planters were able to refill their buckets as they were emptied hastening the completion of the project.

Photos by Brenda Austin and Scott Brand



On left to right, Sault Tribe Wildlife Biologists Michael Castagne and Irene Baker were joined by Water Quality Specialist Molly Eggenstein. The yellow water prevented work crews from using the canoe and kayak.

Lori Gambardella offered a prayer and counseling before the rice was planted after visiting with Interim Director and Wildlife Program Manager Gail Pagan.

Above and below, it was tough chugging for the volunteers as they made their way through tall cattails and deep mud to transport the rice to the planting site.

Above, Castagne mangled two large bags of rice seed into the marsh, while below Bailey fills up buckets for transport.

Above, Colton Hudak and Holly Eggenstein scatter rice seed in the shallow.

Photos by Brenda Austin and Scott Brand





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Wildlife - Boreal Initiative: On the Horizon*

- **American marten collaring and spatial capture-recapture** to estimate abundances in Ishkode Project area
- **Grey wolf assessments** to feed population modeling frameworks
- **Analyzing camera trap data** to create multi-species occupancy models for Ishkode Project goals
- Analyzing years of **harvest report data** to get a more detailed picture of the harvesting experience for community members and insights on animal populations

NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Wildlife - Coastal Initiative: On the Horizon

- **Recovering Black Tern populations** at Munuscong through targeted conservation actions and population monitoring
- Protecting Michigan's Species of Concern by **monitoring mudpuppies** and implementing proactive habitat management
- **Tracking secretive marsh bird populations** to inform strategic wetland restoration to support long-term biodiversity outcomes
- **Monitoring bat populations** to assess impacts of White-nose Syndrome
- **Developing a regional manoomin habitat suitability model** in partnership with Loyola University to optimize restoration and expand Tribal members harvest opportunities across the 1836 Treaty Ceded Territory
- **Removing invasive species and reseeding native species (manoomin and bulrush)** to support large-scale river and wetland restoration
- **Evaluating feasibility of dike removal** in Munuscong Bay to improve hydrology and habitat connectivity





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Wildlife - Forestry: On the Horizon

- **Wildland Fire Management** through a cooperative agreement with the BIA, including red carding staff and using fire as a management tool on Tribal lands.
- Develop a **Forest Management Plan** and Forest Product Use Policy
- Expanding pre-fire **vegetation assessments and forest inventory** activities, with plans to hire a forest ecologist to focus on vegetation and forest assessments

NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Consortium for Cooperative Ecological Resilience (CCER)

On June 6, 2023, the Board of Directors approved Resolution 2023-192, directing what was then the Sault Tribe Wildlife Program to seek formal relationships and develop Memoranda of Understanding with universities and federal agencies.

Current Consortium Partners

USFS Northern Research Station

A major focus of CCER is cultivating formal relationships with Federal Agencies, primarily the USFS, USFWS, and USGS. The Northern Research Station (NRS) is the research arm of USFS Region 9. Over the last year, we have developed a Joint Research Venture agreement, which is focused on applied research associated with the Ishkode Project and the Hemiboreal Decision Support Project.

University of Michigan

An MOU was finalized with the School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) and was fully executed on September 17th, 2024. To date, CCER and STNRD have engaged in several projects. We have worked with 12 Master's students on the BIA Funded Regional Manoomin Stewardship Planning Project and the Chase Osborn Land Remediation Project. We currently have a Master's student, Sarah Allen (Sault Tribe Member), working on the Ishkode Project and a PhD. Student, Jason Hagani, that is working on several wolf related projects.





**NRD – Ezhi-
inawendiyang
Consortium for
Cooperative
Ecological
Resilience
(CCER)**

Current Consortium Partners (continued)

Michigan State University

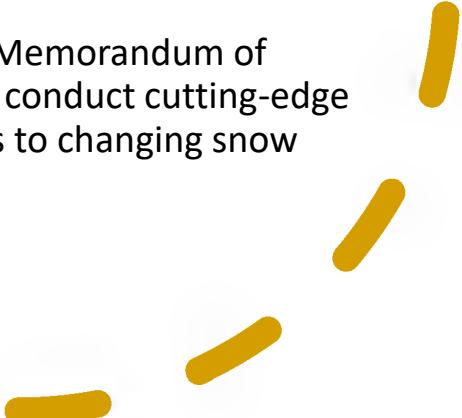
CCER developed a new MOU with Michigan State University early in 2024. We are currently working on several snowshoe hare publications with MSU in addition to engaging Dr. Liberati (the new MSU CCER Lead) on the Hemiboreal Decision Support Project Facilitation Team. We worked with Sault Tribe member Hayden Prpich as an undergraduate researcher on migratory bird occupancy in the St. Marys.

Northern Michigan University

CCER collaborated with colleagues at Northern Michigan University to enter a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and an information-sharing agreement. Short-term objectives are to partner on research to understand gray and red fox distribution across the 1836 Treaty Ceded Territory. Long-term collaboration with NMU is a priority for CCER because they are the only university in the 1836 Ceded Territory that offers a Master's degree in biology.

Ohio University

CCER collaborated with colleagues at Ohio University to enter a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and an information-sharing agreement to conduct cutting-edge research on snowshoe hare genetics and physiological responses to changing snow conditions.



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Consortium for Cooperative Ecological Resilience (CCER)

Ongoing Work

Great Lakes Basin Manoomin Stewardship Plan

CCER is leading the development of a Great Lakes Basin Manoomin Stewardship and Coordination Plan for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Michigan Wild Rice Initiative, and ITC-MI to host the 2025 Great Lakes Manoomin Gathering at the Kewadin Casino and Convention Center November 13th – 14th, 2025. CCER also worked to execute a contract with Compass Resource Management to facilitate the planning process.

Tribal Forest Protection Act Agreement – Sault Tribe – Hiawatha National Forest

Alongside STNRD, CCER has been engaged with the Hiawatha National Forest regarding the Tribal Forest Protection Act work. CCER is responsible for facilitating Adaptive Management Frameworks, developing monitoring and assessment tools, and identifying and implementing key ecological research needs. In the final quarter of 2025, we worked with the Wildlife Program to develop trapping and handling procedures for American marten and collared two marten. We are currently working on developing protocols for wildlife abundance estimates on the east zone of the Hiawatha National Forest.





NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang

Consortium for Cooperative Ecological Resilience (CCER)

Ongoing Work (continued)

Developing Interagency Adaptive Decision Support Processes for Ecological and Cultural Outcomes in Forest Ecosystems in the Lake States (a.k.a., the "Hemiboreal Decision Support Project")

The CCER, STNRD, USFS, and USFWS have formally invited leadership from each agency to contribute to the development of a decision charter for the Hemiboreal Decision Support Project. This charter will serve as a guiding document for the interagency effort, outlining shared goals, roles, and objectives to support adaptive decision-making processes that balance ecological integrity and cultural values across forest ecosystems in the Lake States. We on-boarded project teams of agency staff that will participate in workshops being in quarter 1 of 2026.

Global Land Restoration Fund

CCER and Sault Tribe NRD have been working with CCER affiliates at the University of Michigan and a new non-profit land conservation fund called the Global Land Restoration Fund. The GLRF's mission is to support strategic land conservation investment to facilitate land return to Indigenous communities globally. We are working to make Sault Tribe a flagship project and develop tools to finance large-scale land purchase for conservation and land sovereignty.

First Nations Development Institute – Reimagining Conservation Finance

NRD will collaborate as a member of a cohort to co-design new market(s) that facilitate investment in Ojibwe stewardship and land repatriation to conserve critically important hemiboreal ecosystems in the 1836 Ceded Territory. To accomplish this, we propose to 1) develop capacity in conservation finance, 2) define conservation priorities and monitoring frameworks based on the best tools and knowledges available, and 3) document ecosystem response to Ojibwe stewardship practices and its contribution to collective continuance. As part of this project, we attended the Indigenous Economic Futures Summit in San Francisco, November 4-6.

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Work On the Horizon

Hemiboreal Decision Support Project

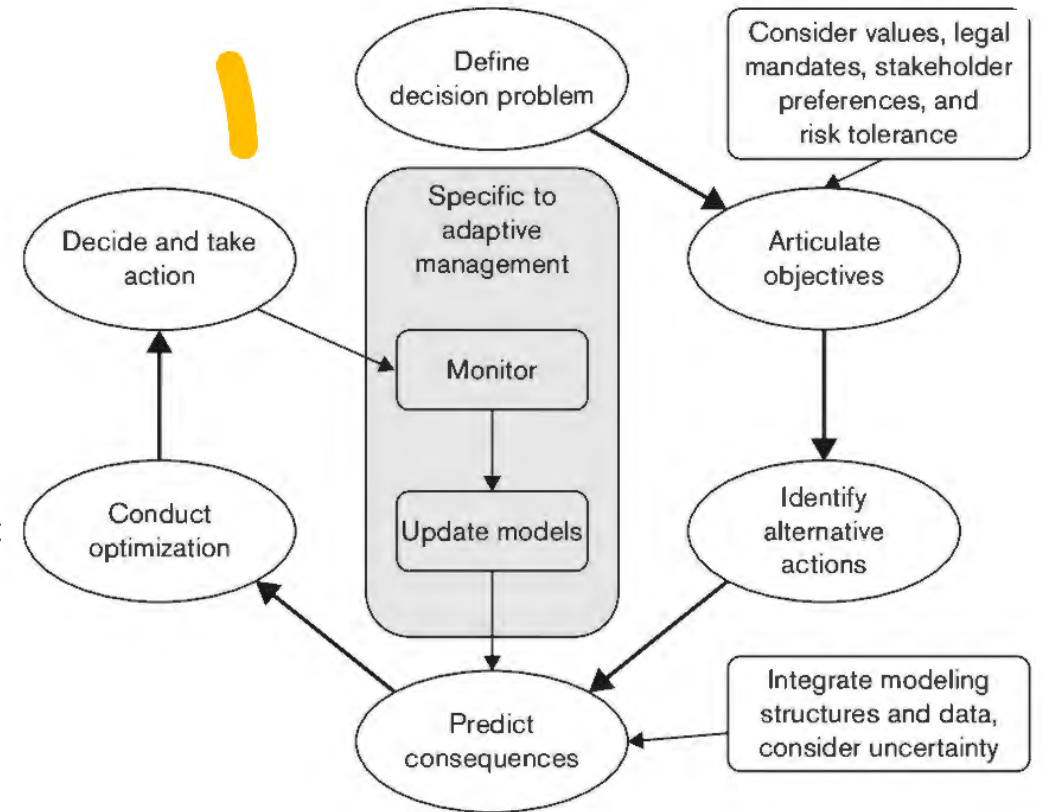
- Phase II of the project will be underway soon, inc decision sketching, rapid prototyping, and the identification of key uncertainties.
- Project teams will be getting underway in March of 2026.

Conservation Finance and Strategic Land Acquisition

- CCER will be working with NRD, the Global Land Restoration Fund, and the First Nations Development Institute to advance strategic land acquisition prioritization targeting hemiboreal ecosystems and ecosystem resilience accounting with a focus on the Shingle Bay Preserve.
- CCER and the NRD began working with a new cohort of Masters Students from UM-SEAS to develop strategic conservation and land acquisition tools.

Applied Wildlife Research

- American marten assessments space use and density estimation on the east zone of the Hiawatha National Forest
- Cooperative moose research with KBIC, MDNR, and NMU



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Grant Partners and Funding Agencies

NRD collaborated with and/or submitted applications for and received competitive funding from the following agencies on grant proposals and awards in 2025:

- BIA: Bureau of Indian Affairs
 - BIA RPI, BIA TPA, BIA TYI, BIA Hatchery Maintenance, BIA Trust Land Natural Resources
- BIA – GLRI: Bureau of Indian Affairs – Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- EPA: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- FNDI: First Nations Development Institute
- FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- NFWF: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- TNC: The Nature Conservancy
- USFS: U.S. Forest Service
- USFWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



NRD – Ezhi-inawendiyang *Budgets*

Revenues and Expenditures

- In 2025, NRD managed **59 cost centers** with funding from federal agencies, private-federal collaborations, and tribal support.
- Only **1** cost center is funded by Tribal support.

Indirect Expenses

- FY25 budgets included **\$262,227.01 in indirect expenses to be paid to the Tribe.**

Reduction in reliance on tribal support

- Acquisition of new external funding and restructuring of staff time has allowed us to remove tribal support and extend secured funding for staff into FY26.
- Reporting Period Grant Activities
 - Submitted 5 complete grant applications.
 - Were awarded 10 new grants for a total award amount of \$2,492,620
- Completed grant management (staffing, project management, budgeting, financials, reporting, etc) for the other 48 NRD grants which provided \$5,093,351 in grant funding with no tribal support.
 - These funds generated \$262,227 in indirect revenue during 2025



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Challenges & Opportunities

Opportunities

- New NRD Building: Expands collaboration capacity, staff coordination, and knowledge sharing.
- Funding Success*: 94% of operations supported by external grants and agreements, sustaining 26 staff.

Challenges & Solutions

- *Uncertainty of Future Funding: Under the current federal administration, many natural resources funding programs have been de-prioritized and/or eliminated. This is likely to have effects on success obtaining federal funding in the future.
 - Plan: Diversification of funding streams, sustainable and/or limited program growth in the face of uncertainty, identify revenue-generating activities.
- Administrative Burden: Managing multiple single-purpose grants is time-and resource-intensive.
 - Solution: Streamline processes; increase admin and internal accounting support (e.g., purchasing and expense tracking); pursue multi-year funding.
- Unfunded Responsibilities: Frequently called on for land, timber, and environmental issues beyond current funding by other Tribal entities.
 - Solution: Establish clear land development and management processes; pursue intra-governmental agreements; seek flexible funding.
- Staff Capacity: Administrative load limits strategic and policy work.
 - Solution: Identify funding to hire Office Manager and Assistant Director to strengthen operations and leadership capacity.



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