



## **Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians 2026 Election Cycle End Report**

This 2026 election cycle end report is a summary of the 2026 Primary and General Election. It includes Ballot Summary, Unit Voting Summary, Incident Summary, and Financial Summary. This information is being furnished to the Board of Directors pursuant to Chapter 10.104(8)(n) and shall be published to the Tribe's website.

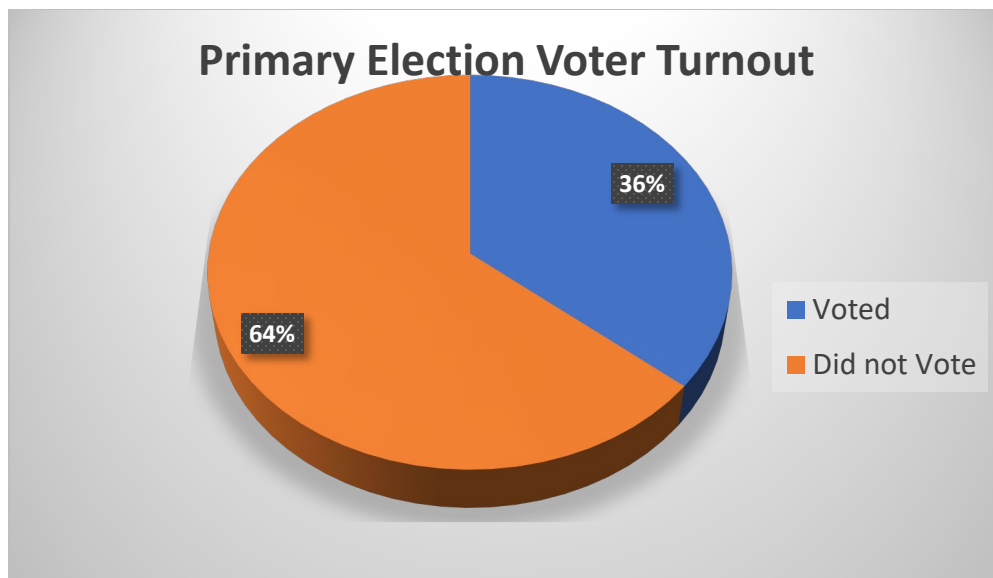
### **2026 Primary Election Report**

#### **Ballot & Voter Summary**

| <b>Unit</b> | <b>Total Voters</b> | <b>Ballots Mailed</b> | <b>Ballots Received</b> | <b>Return %</b> |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1           | 8375                | 8375                  | 2679                    | 31.99           |
| 2           | 2413                | 2413                  | 824                     | 34.15           |
| 3           | 3159                | 3159                  | 1512                    | 47.86           |
| 4           | 2845                | 2845                  | 940                     | 33.04           |
| 5           | 0                   | 0                     | 0                       | 0               |
| UN*         | 0                   | 0                     | 0                       | 0               |

\*UN denotes Undeclared at large voters. These voters were automatically registered pursuant to 10.110 but did not choose (declare) a Unit to vote in. They were by law only allowed to vote for the Chairman race pursuant to 10.110(6).

In Unit Voters: Based on the Ballot and Voter Summary above a total of **16,792** ballots were sent to in-unit voters and a total of **5,955** ballots were returned for a return percentage of **35.46%**. Unit 5 only had two candidates for one open seat, a primary was not necessary. Additionally, as the 2026 Election was only for Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, and Unit 5 no ballots were mailed to the Undeclared at large voters as they were ineligible to vote.



#### **Clear Ballot**

The 2026 Primary Election was the first election the Election Commission used Clear Ballot design software and Clear Ballot tabulation software and hardware. The design software allows the Commission to include additional security measures to the ballots to ensure that only 2026 Primary Election ballots are tabulated. The tabulation software and hardware allow for a review batch of ballots as soon as any issues with the batches are detected. It also enables the Commission to adjudicate any ballots the system deemed questionable or unreadable, which was done after all other ballots were counted. The Commission adjudicated those ballots in front of the membership at the ballot count.

#### **Spoiled Ballots**

A spoiled ballot is a ballot that is blank, does not clearly express a choice or preference, or is a ballot that does not comply with security measures adopted by the Election Commission. The Commission had 24 primary ballots to adjudicate. The Commission reviewed each ballot and deemed 21 were good ballots to be counted which Clear Ballot software can complete at the time of the Commission's vote. There were 3 ballots that the Commission deemed spoiled.

#### **Undeliverable Ballots**

Following the contest period, the Election Commission retrieved the second ballot box. This box is the "undeliverables" as determined by the Post Office. The Commission kept the second box at the post office until after the contest period as to not allow access to additional ballots. The undeliverable data will be submitted to Enrollment to update records.

During this primary election 796 primary ballots were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable for multiple reasons however in review of the address and reasons for not being able to be delivered the Commission is unsure if that is accurate.

## Issue Summary

We had several issues regarding the Primary Election. Listed below were the issues and how the Election Commission addressed them:

*Nominating Petitions.* During the review and validation of the nomination petitions, the Election Commission concluded two potential candidates did not receive the number of required valid signatures. Those individuals filed contests to those decisions. The Commission went through the nomination petitions again and found that many of the addresses were the street addresses and not the PO Boxes listed with Enrollment. The Commission used alternative methods to validate the address, including using multiple counties tax records. After that review the two individuals were found to have the required number of valid signatures and were deemed eligible to seek office.

*Unit 4 Recount.* A contest was submitted to recount Unit 4. A recount took place and the results remained unchanged.

### Contest & Complaints

Each election cycle the Election Commission receives complaints and contests. Following are several to note:

*Campaigning.* Several complaints were received on campaigning. The Election Commission determined that one member of the Board of Directors had violated the campaigning provisions of Chapter 10. That decision was later overturned by the Tribal Court.

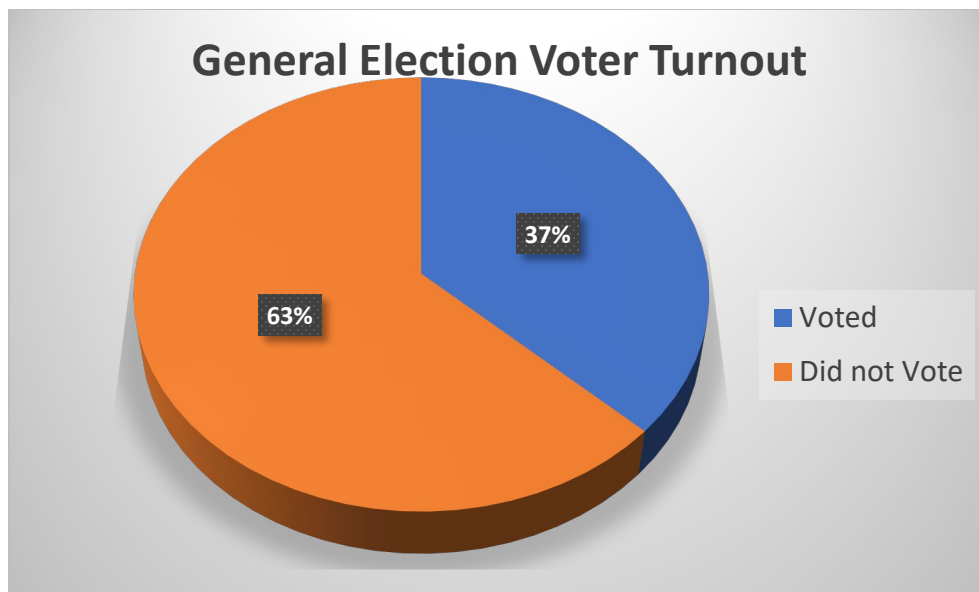
## 2026 General Election Report

### Ballot & Voter Summary

| Unit | Total Voters | Ballots Mailed | Ballots Received | Return % |
|------|--------------|----------------|------------------|----------|
| 1    | 8372         | 8372           | 2739             | 32.72    |
| 2    | 2415         | 2415           | 876              | 36.27    |
| 3    | 3166         | 3166           | 1507             | 47.66    |
| 4    | 2852         | 2852           | 957              | 33.56    |
| 5    | 1395         | 1395           | 523              | 37.49    |
| UN*  | 0            | 0              | 0                | 0        |

\*UN denotes Undeclared at large voters. These voters were automatically registered pursuant to 10.110 but did not choose (declare) a Unit to vote in. They were by law only allowed to vote for the Chairman race pursuant to 10.110(6).

In Unit Voters: Based on the Ballot and Voter Summary above a total of **18,200** ballots were sent to in-unit voters and a total of **6602** ballots were returned for a return percentage of **36.27%**. Additionally, as the 2026 Election was on for Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, and Unit 5 no ballots were mailed to the Undeclared at large voters were not eligible to vote.



### Clear Ballot

The 2026 General Election was the second time the Election Commission used Clear Ballot design software and Clear Ballot tabulation software and hardware. The design software allows the Commission to include additional security measures to the ballots to ensure that only 2026 General Election ballots are tabulated. The tabulation software and hardware allow for a review batch of ballots as soon as any issues with the batches are detected. It also enables the Commission to adjudicate any ballots the system deemed questionable, which was done after all other ballots were counted. The Commission adjudicated those ballots in front of the membership at the ballot count.

### Spoiled Ballots

A spoiled ballot is a ballot that is blank, does not clearly express a choice or preference, or is a ballot that does not comply with security measures adopted by the Election Commission. The Commission had 19 primary ballots to adjudicate. The Commission reviewed each ballot and deemed 17 were good ballots to be counted which Clear Ballot software can complete at the time of the Commission's vote. There were 2 ballots that the Commission deemed spoiled.

### Undeliverable Ballots

Following the contest period, the Election Commission retrieved the second ballot box. This box is the "undeliverables" as determined by the Post Office. We kept the second box at the post office until after the contest period as to not allow access to additional ballots. The undeliverable data will be submitted to Enrollment to update records.

During this general election 861 general election ballots were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable for multiple reasons however in review of the address and reasons for not being able to be delivered the Commission was unsure if that is accurate.

## Issue Summary

We had some issues regarding the General Election. Listed below were the issues and how the Election Commission addressed them:

### Contest & Complaints

Each election cycle the Election Commission receives complaints and contests. There were none to note during 2026 General Election.

### Volunteers

After the difficulties of finding volunteers to assist in the tabulation of the ballots, the Elections used both internal communications (email and intranet) and external communications (website and Facebook) to solicit volunteers. It seemed to improve the volunteer turnout. However, the 2026 Election was only for unit directors and did not include the Chairperson election.

### United States Postal Services

The 2026 Election again saw multiple issues with the mailing of the election ballots for both the primary and general. Time of delivery and receipt for the ballots which falls on the United States Postal Service. The fact the Commission has knowledge that some individuals who receive primary ballots at a specific address but did not receive the general ballot at the same address with the return mail stating no such number.

## **Financial Cost**

Total expenses to date, for this election cycle totaled **\$85,345.02\***. The greatest expense is attributed to an increased cost of mailing. There was also a significant amount spent on the printing of the ballots because there are now two side. The 2026 Election cost was about 30,000.00 less than the 2024 Election, again this was a unit only election. The 2024 Election was also to elect the Chairperson, which will include mailing ballots to Undeclare at large voters.

\*This amount does not account for the staff time involved in running our elections. It also does not include the upgrade of design and tabulation software and hardware.

## **Conclusion**

The 2026 Election has brought up many concerns about the current election process:

1. One of the bigger issues is the United States Post Service (USPS) and the timely delivery of the ballots.
  - a. One example is during the general election some postal routes delivered the ballots a week apart. This was one issue the Commission heard about, but the Commission is sure there were similar situations. During the primary, an individual received their ballot two days before the primary ballot count.
  - b. The Commission knew there were previous issues with members receiving ballots with not enough time to return them, so the Commission expanded and

shorten some timelines for specific processes to allow more time for the mailing process. This did not work as we anticipated, as the Commission found 129 Primary Ballots were received after the Primary Count and 315 General Ballots delivered after the General Election Count.

- c. The Commission also tracked on the returned mail that was deemed by the USPS as “undeliverable”. Upon review of the reasons for the ballots not being delivered, there were many that stated no such number or street however one such address was for Osborn Commons.
  - d. After retrieving the return mail box, the Commission found mail for two different box numbers. One of those other postal boxes was that of National Office Products. This is another problem that does affect the membership being able to vote.
2. Another issue raised was that over 300 voters being added to the voter list in Unit 4 after the primary. Please see the table below for actual numbers of the change in eligible voters:

| Unit No. | Primary | General | Difference |
|----------|---------|---------|------------|
| 1        | 8375    | 8372    | -3         |
| 2        | 2417    | 2415    | -2         |
| 3        | 3159    | 3167    | +8         |
| 4        | 2841    | 2852    | +11        |
| 5        | 0       | 1395    | N/A        |

This issue is a pure rumor and not based on facts.

The Election Commission feels that the current process of conducting elections strictly by mail is not the most efficient way of conducting our elections. As the membership continues to become more efficient with technology and continues to grow with open enrollment, the Commission thinks that the Sault Tribe needs to find a way to have a secure membership portal that allows members to vote online for those who choose to do so. The Commission agrees that some elders or those who wish should still have the ability to vote by mail. The use of the portal for voting would be a more efficient voting method and it will save costs by reducing the number of ballots to be printed and mailed.

Sincerely,



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Election Commission Vice Chairperson  
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