

Wild Rice MOU Meetings Key Ideas  
Mille Lacs – Nov. 12, 2014      White Earth – Nov. 17, 2014

**Introduction**

Following on comments for greater ongoing participation at the close of the 2013 Nibi and Manoomin Symposium, it was decided to host two community-based conversations regarding the possibility of creating a memorandum of understanding between the tribes and the University of Minnesota regarding potential wild rice research conducted at the university. These meetings offered an opportunity for community members to learn about and comment on the efforts to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University of Minnesota and Minnesota's Anishinaabe tribal communities.

Our goal at this stage was not to develop criteria, but to gain additional insight into the possibility of developing an MOU that would reflect the interests of the tribes as university scientists propose research directly involving wild rice. We wanted to better understand what principles should underlie such a document from a tribal perspective.

All attendees of the 2013 symposium who identified the "Wild Rice MOU" breakout session as a session choice were invited to attend. Following introductions and a brief refresher on the issues, tribal community members shared a variety of views concerning wild rice, knowledge, research, the University of Minnesota and drafting such a document.

There were many individual comments shared by participants. Below are some of the key points that emerged during the meeting organized by topic. Participants stated that they only spoke for themselves and needed time to speak with other community members and elders. *We agreed to come together again in the spring*, allowing time over the winter for further consultation.

**Key ideas shared**

***What is needed (in a MOU and with respect to wild rice research in general)?***

- Research to protect or restore natural stands.
- A process whereby the tribes have more voice in research involving wild rice.
- Research to understand what could potentially negatively impact natural stands, such as sulfite.
- Should it be a memorandum of understanding or a memorandum of agreement?
- Must begin with a statement of the importance and relationship of manoomin to the tribes—and acknowledge its unique role in the treaties.
- The university must recognize that the tribes have a responsibility to protect and preserve wild rice – a responsibility given to them by their ancestors and that extends to future generations. They do so with and for all their relatives in the extended environment.
- No one invites Indians to the table [for these discussions]. That should change.
- Require a strong process of accountability within the document – all treaties have been broken, why expect that this MOU would be any different? There must be a commitment to respect the document.

- Employ collaborative research methods that acknowledge the need for consent, consultation and reciprocity.
- Review processes that have emerged in anthropology and archeology relative to appropriate research methods and protocols when working on issues sensitive to tribes on tribal and treaty impacted lands
- Recognition that tribes differ in traditions and may have differing opinions on valid research they may be willing to consider. Individual tribal interests must be understood and taken into account. That may mean speaking directly to the tribes most directly impacted by a specific research proposal—depending on the lake or river and ricing communities involved.
- Recognition and acknowledgement of the cost and potential harm (irreparable cultural damage) to Native nations and their communities should the rice be damaged or lost.
- Transparency and information sharing concerning what research is being done is essential
  - At least, then, the tribes will know and be able to respond to and assess potential impacts for wild rice and their people
- Education and outreach with researchers
  - Interaction with researchers could be an effective way for them to learn about and appreciate tribal communities relationship with wild rice.
  - Include the need for faculty cultural sensitivity training in working with Native people and wild rice
  - Make people wanting to do research on wild rice write a report on (or receive training in) Native American perspectives on wild rice
    - Need to understand the importance of wild rice to native communities
    - Need people to understand the different ways of relating to wild rice
- Review or feedback process for wild rice research
  - Consider creating an “Internal Review Board like” process that includes tribal perspectives for the review of proposed wild rice research projects

***What needs to be avoided?***

- Research seeking to alter, improve, patent, or own wild rice
  - Tribal relationship with wild rice is based on responsibility, respect, spirituality, and care
- Actions based on profiting from wild rice to the detriment of the tribes, or from the harm and destruction of the wild rice.
- Actions with the strong potential to harm wild rice in its natural environment.
- Actions that undermine trust in sustaining such an agreement.
- Assuming that one tribe speaks for all.
- Treating traditional knowledge around wild rice with disregard or disparagingly.
- An MOU or tribal review process that implies tribal acceptance of research:
  - One band cannot speak for all bands
  - A review process is not necessarily an approval process
  - To discuss research opportunities and potential does not imply tribal support, or that there were adequate avenues of inclusion, etc.

***... Sample of comments from attendees***

- Nobody asks Native people to the table to have these discussions.

- There is a lack in recognizing and respecting the knowledge and knowledge gathering traditions of tribal communities concerning wild rice.
- Wild rice is like a canary in a coal mine, if it is doing poorly there are broader issues in need of addressing.
- Researchers at the University of Minnesota proposing to work on wild rice should be asked to complete an introduction to the importance of wild rice for Anishinaabe people, appreciate the history of university tribal relations around wild rice and undergo cultural sensitivity training.
- There is a role for an agreement or MOU, the *right* agreement.
- The university should reflect on the limit of academic freedom. Freedom is always in relationship to responsibility. What responsibility do researchers have to community wellbeing when it comes to wild rice?
- Research should be conducted in a spirit that supports manoomin as well as community restoration and vitality.
- When this kind of work happens without consultation, it seems as if someone is not being honest, not providing full disclosure.
- Include people from the 1855 treaty group to participate.
- Research ideas should be brought to the MCT for review or the Voigt Task Force, or CORA.
- Could follow a process similar to EIS -- requiring tribal consultation or [Section 7 which requires THPO consultation]
- We will need to consider what level of organization is best suited to a supporting a review process: tribal, intertribal, MCT appointed body...?
- There is an opportunity to do good science, to do good research that benefits everyone. But it requires effective consultation and shared learning.
- Concerning research legitimized under the guise of “feeding Africa”
  - Tribal communities should be involved in discussions about this research even if they agree that the ends (of helping alleviate hunger in Africa) are well intended.
  - “Good ends” do not imply that any research is acceptable.
  - Much of this research could still come back to be used in ways that are harmful to natural wild rice stands. The current grant specifically states that results from Gates funded research can be used for other purposes. In many contexts, such as in anthropological research, knowledge gained may remain with the community and its dissemination only at their discretion.
  - The tribes should connect with the Gates Foundation and let them know that the research is potentially harmful and offer a tribal perspective on the matter.

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