

Director Sorenson: We are having far too many cancelled/non-productive meetings



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In July, the Great Lakes Conservation Committee and board of directors met with attorney Bruce Greene and staff about the coming 2020 consent decree. We want to be proactive in getting this process moving and gathering all input from fishermen and members. We will be setting up more input sessions in the near future.

The Sault Tribe hosted the Michigan Indian Elders Association conference at the Kewadin Sault Convention Center on July 14-16. Many of our elder committee members were in attendance and enjoyed themselves. These opportunities also fill our hotel rooms and get people on the gaming floor.

On July 22, we held a meeting in Manistique and had no members in the audience. I am not sure we have ever had that happen, at least since I have been on the board. Director McLeod

had added to the agenda to do a JKL presentation to the board, but the chairman said he didn't know what she was presenting and it should be seen by the JKL committee first, so he had enough votes to not allow her to present even though she is the chairwoman of the JKL Fiduciary Committee. This kind of behavior makes me sick.

Once again, the board voted at the special meeting on July 8 to cancel the Aug. 5 meeting in Kinross. I can't even express how disappointed I am that the board continues to support changing or canceling the meetings around the chairman's schedule. It could have been the reason no members attended the Manistique meeting because it is hard for members to keep track of the constant schedule changes.

We are only having one meeting this month, which will be Aug. 19 in Marquette. Board workshops have also been canceled on Aug. 5 and 12. The chairman and Director McKelvie were going to be gone to Minnesota for training. Denny will be proceeding on to a veteran's training in South Dakota. The following week there is a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) conference in Traverse City and also a Midwest Allegiance of Strategic Tribes meeting following the CDC.

The craziest issue with all these cancelations is that the board has yet to even look at the 2015 budgets. They were ready in June and the executive

staff had just recently reviewed them. Some of the budgets start Sept. 1. I personally believe this is all a game for the budgets to be pushed through at the last minute, since that has been the game for the last two years. The first year we were coerced to pass the budgets and then make adjustments, last year we had a continuing spending resolution passed with last minute meetings scheduled. I do not blame this on the staff, but rather games from the chairman. I believe he will be calling special meetings for the last week of August. I hate to be backed into a corner, but without the board standing their ground the games continue to be played.

The staff gets caught up in this tug of war and it is frustrating for them. We continue to change the schedule so they can't get in front of the board with their presentations and concerns. If we could stick to a time line and not the constant "when I left office" and "when Bernard was chair," we maybe could take care of business.

I have no problems with meeting multiple days a week but when we just meet without accomplishing things it is ridiculous. Myself, I schedule things out ahead of time and, when we constantly change things, it takes away from things in our communities and spending more time with our members.

As for the casinos, I am becoming very disappointed. I try to bring things forward as concerns from our team members

and because the chair does not like me, he blows it off. He even told me it is not my job. I told him it is my job to bring concerns forward, that is why I was voted in and I told him I would let the members know what his opinion is. All the promises of working with directors at the installation, was just that — empty promises. Teamwork is not in his vocabulary.

During the last week, we have run out long-term staff at the casinos that I am not happy about. We have also changed our eatery menus and raised the prices. First of all, in my opinion, you should make changes at the beginning of the year or season. You study your competition and market and see what increases the market can bear. I do not mind paying a higher price for a good quality meal, and I don't think many others mind if you get a good product and service.

I feel like all we are doing is cutting jobs, promotions and benefits and raising prices to compensate for our declining \$1 million plus in revenues. Our customers are not happy. We need to listen to them and do our homework, or better yet, listen to the front line staff who hear it all. A couple of weeks ago, the Shores promotion of two for one Tuesday breakfast was cut as the usual weekly promotion. There was no notice given to staff or customers. Many tables left. Why didn't we apologize to the customers and give it to them that day but let them know it was

being discontinued? Instead, the front line staff get confronted by the customers. Can you as a member see why the morale is low and customers are going elsewhere?

We continue to go all out on things and cut things back the next time. Things have to change soon. I have seen good team members put in their notice and management not say, "Why are you leaving? Is there anything I can do?" Some people believe everyone is replaceable. The fact is, yes, in the physical form anyone can be replaced, but not their customer service, dedication, honesty, etc.

I hate to sound negative, but I want to be honest with what is going on in this tribe. I have always been an advocate for the casinos and want them to succeed, but we need to change the way we have been doing business. Management needs to be more involved and communicate with staff. Team members feel like nothing will ever change and why bother talking to someone. Things cannot improve under these circumstances. Maybe they could resort to a situation similar to undercover boss to get closer to the action. We know the market is becoming saturated, so we need to be number one. We need to be unique and offer a great memorable experience.

As always, please contact me with questions or concerns at bsorenson@saultribe.net, my office (906) 643-2123 or cell 430-0536.