

Protecting the future for the seventh generation



**JENNIFER MCLEOD,
DIRECTOR, UNIT I**

Aaniin Anishnaabek, last month I spoke to you about the need to focus on the future of our tribe. This month, I am reporting to you that the need to do this is greater than ever. There are three serious issues that pose potential threat to our safety in our homeland, the protection of our treaty rights and potentially even our existence as a tribe. These are 1) Enbridge oil pipeline, 2) State of Michigan surplus land sales (i.e. Graymont) and 3) congressional testimony regarding tribal recognition process.

The first is the Enbridge oil pipeline. Known as Line 5, this pipeline carries nearly 23 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids through it every day. It is 62 years old. It is owned by the Canadian company Enbridge – the same company that had a NEWER pipeline rupture in 2010 spilling 1 million gallons of crude oil into the Kalamazoo River. It was the largest and most expensive onshore oil leak in U.S. history. Five years later, the clean-up continues. Our tribal board chairperson, Aaron Payment, was a speaker for the “Oil and Water Don’t Mix” coalition. He stated that water is the lifeblood of our Mother Earth [and it] is our duty and responsibility as American Indians to protect the environment, so we take this threat that the Enbridge pipeline represents personally, (huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/22/michigan-enbridge-pipeline_n_7308734.html). I couldn’t agree with him more!

This pipeline runs underwater, parallel to the Mackinac Bridge. It is old. In 2013, Enbridge upgraded Line 5’s

pumps, and increased oil flow by 10 percent, an additional 2.1 MILLION GALLONS per day! That amounts to nearly a million gallons per hour. What would a one hour leak look like? This aging pipeline is a potential threat to ALL life that depends on the Great Lakes. As protectors of the earth, we have a sacred responsibility to do all that we can to prevent a disaster.

The next serious issue is (simply put), the State of Michigan. We have a long-standing history of struggles with this government. While there have been some successes, in my opinion dealing with this state continues to be difficult at best. The continued attempts of actions that would diminish our rights as a sovereign nation, runs the gamut from casino gaming operations to tribal fishing operations. Consultations between the federal government and Indian tribes run fairly well, however it is a problematic issue in our relationship with the State of Michigan. What is so difficult about a government-to-government consultation? I do not consider inviting our tribe LAST MINUTE to a public hearing on the wolf hunt as a “consultation” with our tribe. True consultation between our tribe and the state would occur PRIOR to any decisions being made and would be conducted in a respectful manner that gives proper consideration of tribal input, opinion and acknowledgement of our governmental responsibility to our people. I have attended federal consultations, and the State of Michigan has a very long way to go to replicate such an effective model for consultations with sovereign Indian tribes. Currently, we have the State of Michigan selling thousands of acres of “surplus” land to private companies for their private exploitation of the natural resources, with negligible involvement/consultation with the tribes. In the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the state has sold THOUSANDS of acres of land to the Graymont company so that it can conduct mining operations. It will become private land. Even if the Graymont company in its benevolence, allows tribal people on its newly acquired land, the mining operation will result in this land no longer being suitable for the exercise of tribal treaty rights (hunting, gathering etc).

Short story: State wins, Graymont wins, Indians lose.

The third issue is perhaps the worst. On April 22, 2015, at a federal oversight hearing on “the Obama administration’s Part 83 revisions and how they may allow the Interior Department to create tribes, not recognize them,” disturbing testimony was given by attorney Don Mitchell. In it, he mischaracterized the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) process of recognizing tribes as one designed to “CREATE” tribes where none have previously existed. This testimony has shocked Indian Country and could possibly affect many Indian tribes. Tribes are not “created” by the BIA, they are recognized by the Secretary through an arduous recognition process. However, when the nation’s congressional decision makers do not understand that tribal sovereignty existed prior to the “creation of the United States,” that the U.S. government does not GIVE tribes their sovereignty, but merely RECOGNIZES its existence, this lack of understanding could

bring in an era of great difficulty for many tribes. According to Chairman Payment, “if Mr. Mitchell has his way, we will have to face that battle [federal recognition as a tribe] all over again.” Once more, I agree with Chairman Payment.

These three issues may have serious consequences to our tribe and I want you all to know that we are addressing them. Potential oil spills, land destruction and the worry over a possible new Indian termination era threaten us all. How can you help? Call, write or visit your state and federal representatives. Tell them this is not acceptable! I was told once, that in a congressional office, one or two phone calls or letters on an issue receives very little notice. HOWEVER, more than four really gets their attention! Your voice matters!

Help protect our water. Tell them “oil and water don’t mix.” Help protect the earth and the ability for your grandchildren and their grandchildren to go into the woods to hunt, fish or gather as our ancestors did. Tell your

state and federal representatives to STOP selling public lands for private profits. Help protect all tribes, and tell your federal representatives that the United States does not GIVE tribes their sovereignty, the United States merely RECOGNIZES it. Tell them that tribes are ancient people and new tribes cannot be CREATED by an act of government.

All of us working together can make a difference. We all have to stand up and SPEAK OUT so that they will hear, so that they will listen and so that they will understand. If I can be of any help to you in your efforts, please let me know. We must not forget that what we do now, or fail to do, will affect the next seven generations. Let our actions today be such that those future generations will look back upon us with honor.

Miigwetch to all of you!

Anishnaabe gagige (Anishnaabe for always),

Jen

JMcLeod1@saulttribe.net Or
jennifer.mcleod.2012@gmail.

com

(906) 440-9151