

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Aaron Payment,

906-635-6050

Sault Tribe leadership applauds Michigan environmental restructuring

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the largest tribe located within the borders of Michigan and a signatory to the 1836 treaty that allowed Michigan to come into existence as a state in 1837, today applauded Governor Whitmer's restructuring of environmental policy for the state.

The Governor today signed three executive orders, which when taken together indicate a refocusing of the environmental responsibilities of the Michigan government. The orders establish a response team to deal with PFAS emerging contaminants, commit Michigan to take action toward the goals of the Paris Accord, and restructure the Department of Environmental Quality as the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

Aaron Payment, chairperson of the Sault Tribe, welcomed this commitment, saying, "The Anishinabe and Indigenous people of the Michigan territory carry our responsibility to protect our Aki (Earth Mother) as sacred and life-sustaining. Our enduring treaty rights to hunt, gather and fish are perpetual. I am so grateful we now have a Governor who respects our environment and realizes our existence is predicated on our sustainable lifestyles."

Sault Tribe government had responded to the situation in Flint, when a number of tribal members living in the lead-affected area received outreach services. "The newly restructured Department establishes an Office of the Clean Water Public Advocate, which will work towards preventing the kind of problems that developed when public officials did not take Flint residents' concerns seriously," Payment added.

"Furthermore, we are delighted to see that the Governor is establishing an Interagency Environmental Justice Response Team. It shows how seriously Governor Whitmer takes the situation where disadvantaged people are made to accept unfair burdens of environmental contamination," Payment said.

The new department includes responsibility for promoting renewable energy development to help Michigan meet Paris targets, while moving the responsibility for energy permit approvals, and regulation of public utilities, to another government department.

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