



# The Minnesota Chippewa Tribe

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 26, 2018

### **Tribal Wild Rice Task Force Submits Findings Report to Governor**

*Tribes urge the state to invest in wild rice monitoring, protection and restoration using all available regulatory and non-regulatory approaches*

CASS LAKE, MINN. – The Tribal Wild Rice Task Force (TWRTF) announced today that it has submitted its 2018 Tribal Wild Rice Task Force Report to the governor, as outlined by the Governor's Executive Order 18-08 and Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT) Resolution 107-18.

The TWRTF consisted of 15 Tribal experts and specialists appointed by their respective Minnesota Tribal Nations, as well as other contributors with expertise in their respective fields. Members of the TWRTF were appointed by Tribal leaders from 8 out of the 11 federally recognized Tribes in MN. The task force and its report were approved by MCT and supported by the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council that included 10 out of the 11 Tribes. Unlike the makeup of the TWRTF, the Governor's Task Force on Wild Rice was heavy on industry representation who are biased against developing Clean Water Act-compliant regulatory recommendations; more importantly, they lacked expertise in wild rice ecology, management, harvest, restoration, or protection.

The TWRTF report is based upon tribes' extensive experience in sustainably managing this critically important cultural resource, and overcoming/ mitigating the damage and degradation that has occurred since widespread agricultural and industrial development. Tribes have long-standing expertise protecting wild rice through regulatory programs, have partnered with academia in comprehensive research projects, and have shared traditional knowledge and best practices with state agencies.

Multiple lines of evidence from tribal, state and academic research confirm the need to protect wild rice from excess sulfate pollution. MPCA's preliminary analysis of potentially affected dischargers overstates the number of municipal wastewater treatment facilities that could be subject to a sulfate limit and requirement for expensive treatment technology. The tribal analysis clearly demonstrates that the number of potentially affected dischargers is much reduced, and generally limited to industrial dischargers in the St. Louis River and Mississippi River watersheds. Further, there are clear disparities in state permitting compliance and oversight between domestic and industrial dischargers, even though industrial dischargers release effluent with substantially higher volumes and higher sulfate concentrations.



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The practices of harvesting, processing, eating, sharing and gifting manoomin/psin, and the language associated with these practices and ceremonies that celebrate wild rice are central to the health of tribal communities. Despite its cultural significance, Minnesota tribes have experienced challenges in raising public awareness about impacts to community health, social cohesion, and access to healthy food as wild rice resources are being degraded and diminished.

Tribes have long advocated for cooperative monitoring and surveys of wild rice waters across the state, and establishing a coordinated management, protection and restoration program for off-reservation treaty protected wild rice waters in Minnesota. This coordination should include both MPCA and MNDNR and Minnesota tribes; as well as potentially state ricers and NGOs with a conservation mission that includes wild rice (e.g., Ducks Unlimited). It should not include the regulated community.

The tribes continue to urge the state to invest in wild rice monitoring, protection and restoration using all available regulatory and non-regulatory approaches, and in close collaboration with the tribes. Protecting remaining stands of manoomin/psin should be a priority; we share this obligation to future generations. Hand-harvested wild rice is a vital part of the state's tribal and local economies. Although the cultural values of wild rice are beyond economic measure, there is a strong economic case for protecting wild rice and preserving its cultural and nutritional benefits for future generations.

The TWRTF will make the full report available on January 2<sup>nd</sup>.

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