

**APPENDIX I - MEMORANDUM FROM THE ST. REGIS MOHAWK TRIBE REGARDING BRASHER STATE
FOREST AND CULTURAL RESTORATION**

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**St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
Environment Division**

Ken Jock,
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Les Benedict, Env. Division Assistant Director
FROM: Barbara Tarbell, NRDA Program Manager
SUBJECT: Brasher Forest Unit Management Plan
DATE: 8/6/13
CC: Ken Jock, Env. Division Director

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe has partnered with the Department of Interior/Fish and Wildlife Service; NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) collectively as the St. Lawrence Environment Trustee Council (the Trustees). The role of the Trustees is to act on behalf of the public to protect and restore natural resources that have been injured by the release of hazardous materials.

Over the past two decades the Trustees have pursued a resolution to the Natural Resource Damages claim against the responsible parties Alcoa and General Motors. As you know, General Motors filed for bankruptcy in 2011 which ended our cooperative resolution process with them. However, we recently announced a settlement with Alcoa and will soon be implementing an exciting new restoration program. The cultural component of the settlement is on the leading edge of restoration in Indian Country, and compensates for injury to cultural practices attributable to natural resource contamination. The main impact that Akwesasne community members have experienced in terms of usage of the natural resource is the severance of a spiritual, utilitarian, economic, and subsistent relationship with the natural resources. Essentially the goal of cultural restoration is to reinvigorate this relationship and fully support and nurture this knowledge of traditional cultural practices on the land.

The Brasher Forest represents a clean and safe area with special habitat that is necessary in our efforts for restoration. The inherent right to hunt, fish, and gather medicines is essential to the implementation of the Cultural Restoration Program. In re-learning these traditional activities it is intrinsic to Mohawk custom and values that responsible and sustainable methodologies would be practiced and incorporated in the program. The attached information will provide a detailed summary of the goals and objectives of the Cultural Restoration Program including the Apprenticeship Program which will pair up knowledgeable teachers with students for a hands-on learning experience.

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The Brasher Forest Unit Management Plan represents a significant opportunity to open dialogue and create partnerships between NYSDEC and the Mohawk community. There are several instances of successful partnerships to draw from including the Black Ash study and preservation. We are encouraged by the existing partnerships and look forward to future discussions.

Nia:wen/Thank you,

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Cultural Restoration Program**

The release of contaminants into the natural environment has forced Akwesasro:non (people of Akwesasne) to give up traditional resource harvesting activities. As a result they have been denied the ability to provide their families with healthy foods; and denied the ability to fulfill their traditional obligations toward the land, waters, plants and animals; denied the ability to pass on practical, theoretical, philosophical and linguistic knowledge of what it means to be Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk people).

The historical baseline set for resource-based cultural practices relative to ecological conditions "but for" the release of contaminants is 1955. The pre-pollution population (considered in terms of family units) reliant on traditional resources and resource-based cultural practices was 100%. The overall proportion of activities based on cultural practices related to the land, ecosystem and aquasystem of Akwesasne for subsistence at the time identified for the baseline pre-pollution conditions was 95%. Previous to this date the Mohawks of Akwesasne were not detrimentally affected by industrialization and maintained the capacity to adapt to cultural diffusions and changes in the natural environment in ways that were consistent with their values and the responsibilities inherent in Haudenosaunee culture.

It was determined through research that there are four main areas of traditional cultural practices harmed by the release of hazardous contaminants. They are (not in any particular format): 1. Water, fishing and use of the river. 2. Horticulture and basketmaking. 3. Medicinal plants and healing. 4. Hunting and trapping. Language has also been detrimentally affected by the decline of traditional cultural practices and those words associated with these activities are at risk of being lost.

Water, Fishing and use of the River

Life in Akwesasne centered around the rivers, which provided the people with their main sources of protein- fishing as an economic and cultural activity was central to the identity of the people. The rivers also provided the people with a source of clean drinking water, a means of transportation, and a favorite recreation, in swimming. Being cut off from the physical and psychological and recreative sustenance provided to Akwesasro:non by the river has impacted the people negatively in countless ways. People miss the ability to fish and use the water of the St. Lawrence and other rivers. People noticed changes in

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the water quality, including the taste and smell of both fish and the water, and adapted their resource harvesting activities accordingly.

Horticulture, Farming and Basketmaking

The people of Akwesasne relied on traditional horticulture and farming activities to support their subsistence, with further moneys generated through the sale of hand made baskets and locally produced and or collected food items. These activities were important aspects of the people's lives right up to the time when pollution made such activities difficult if not impossible. Until such time, people in Akwesasne were largely self-sufficient. The ability to produce most food items through horticulture and farming (along with that acquired through fishing, hunting and trapping), provided people with autonomy and independence and the power to be in control of the changes to their traditional practices. Until the time of heavy industrialization the people of Akwesasne were able to assert an effective measure of control over the impacts of the outside world; this autonomous existence and balanced organic pattern of change was effectively destroyed by the industrialization of the area and the ensuing effects of its toxic by-products on the environment.

Medicine Plants and Healing

The release of contaminants have also had detrimental effects on the medicinal plants that knowledgeable Akwesasro:non gathered in order to deal with many issues from increasing the milk supply of nursing mothers to treating fevers, pain, boils, toothache hair loss and so on. In some cases, the pollution led to the disappearance of medicine plants and in other cases, it changed the appearance or taste of the plants, alarming healers. Medicines also came from animal parts that can now no longer be obtained for similar reasons. While some still travel to distant locations in order to attempt to pick up traditional medicines, much of this knowledge is at risk of being lost given that traditional healing can no longer be practiced without the local availability of medicines. The perception that medicine plants were contaminated have also had an impact on the loss of the traditional activity.

Hunting and Trapping

Along with fishing, horticulture and farming, people also depended on hunting and trapping in order to supplement their diet and income. Hunters and trappers tend to be experts in animal behavior and health. This is not only because of their continuous observation and recording of the health of animals while they skin and process them (including such areas as organ health, normal fat layers, etc), but also

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because of their detailed knowledge of the interdependencies of all plants and animals of the ecosystem they rely on (Feit 1973; Freeman 1992; Berkes 1999; Nadasty 2004; Spak 2001). Hunters and trappers then tend to be “at the front line” of observing environmental change, which often includes an awareness as to why certain animals are becoming sick, given that they know what these animals eat and need in order to survive. It is therefore not surprising that the hunters and trappers of Akwesasne noted changes in the animals and decided against the consumption of their meat before any official advisories had been given.

Language

Mohawk language in Akwesasne suffered since the relationship to the land and river has been severed by environmental contamination. Issues surrounding the serious concern about language loss have been reflected at gatherings and Council meetings throughout the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. A gathering, which included representatives from Akwesasne, was held at the Onondaga Nation in May of 2002 and provided impetus for considering language restoration as an urgent priority. The purpose of the workshop was to determine what should be done to ensure the survival and growth of all Haudenosaunee languages. The case of Akwesasne was discussed as being of particular concern. In spite of the fact that a number of middle aged and elderly speakers still exist in the community, there is an extremely low number of speakers who are willing and able to teach the language. It was made clear at this gathering that the Mohawk language is seriously threatened, since fluency in the language is restricted to those 45 and older. The Mohawk Language was not a written language; it was passed down generation to generation through daily oral use. We have now skipped a generation of Mohawk speakers, and in some families two generations no longer speak or understand the Mohawk language.

Overall Restoration Objective

The community’s ultimate objective is to re-establish the harmed cultural practices to the level at which they were practiced but for the release of contaminants into the ecosystem.

The restoration plan developed seeks to return to traditional practices, where a) these practices are spread among all age groups and throughout the family groups in the community, b) the number of people doing land-based cultural activities is increasing at pace with overall population numbers, c) the practices are diffuse within the social, political and economic life of Akwesasne, d) the practices adapt to the changing culture of the community, and e) the situation is achieved where people again gain the

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level of expertise in these areas that specialized knowledge and the skill level within the community actually begin to increase and the practices evolve further.

General Restoration Framework

The cultural restoration framework focuses on taking urgent action to prevent further loss of knowledge associated with land-based cultural practices, and addresses the immediate needs of the community in terms of identifying and supporting practices, programs and persons in their efforts to ensure the survival of traditional Mohawk cultural life. The focus is on restoring necessary connections, regenerating key cultural practices, and transferring crucial cultural knowledge. In taking this approach to restoration, the patterns of belief and practice that once characterized the Mohawk community can be restored over time and through focused efforts will achieve a regenerating point at which these traditional cultural practices will once again be widespread and self-sustaining and once again be fundamental parameters of existence in Akwesasne. This will ensure the long-term cultural integrity of Akwesasne as an indigenous community, but also promote physical health, serve as a major factor in the recovery of social stability and in the generation of economic self-sufficiency based on traditional practices.

Akwesasne's approach to cultural restoration seeks to restore land-based cultural practices and traditional economic activities within the community. It will do this in two ways. First, it will establish and directly support long-term master-apprentice relationships in the four areas of traditional cultural practice that were harmed by the release of hazardous contaminants, and promote and support the regeneration of practices associated with traditions in these areas:

1. Water, fishing and the use of the river: Restoring traditional community fishing practices and local economy; restoring language use and transmission of knowledge regarding traditional fishing and river practices.
2. Horticulture, farming and basket-making: Restoring traditional and sustainable farming practices that are vital to the local economy; Restoring traditional roles and responsibilities for engaging in farming and other activities, such as basket-making; Provision of access to natural resources for farming or other traditional uses.
3. Medicine plants and healing: Restoration of cultural sites and/or species necessary for the spiritual survival of the community; Restoration of traditional medicine plants, such as sweet

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grass; Regeneration of intergenerational teachings, language, and relationships between Elders and youth regarding medicine plants and healing.

4. Hunting and trapping: Restoration of traditional hunting practices as community livelihood; Restoration of animal habitats and populations; Regeneration of intergenerational teachings and relationships between elders and youth regarding hunting and trapping.

Cultural Restoration Plan

The restoration effort will have four main elements, each addressing a significant need. The four main components of cultural restoration include 1) Apprenticeship program, 2) Language promotion, 3) Institutional Funding, and 4) Provision of access to necessary natural resources.

Apprenticeship Program

The Master Apprentice Program will provide opportunities for people who are interested in learning traditional cultural practices (Apprentices) to work with knowledge holders in the community (Masters). The program objective is to provide a viable plan of action for the continuance of traditional cultural practices through the transfer of knowledge between the Masters and Apprentices and future generations. These “masters” will be equipped as necessary with tools, supplies and support and connected with an appropriate number of “apprentices” (varying according to specific practice and based on the teaching capacity of specific masters) drawn from an established pool of younger Akwesasne individuals who have expressed interest and demonstrated commitment to learning cultural practices under this teaching model. It is anticipated that there will be sufficient numbers of masters and apprentices available to create numerous small-group teams in all four areas of harm. Financial support will be provided to both the masters and apprentices to allow full-time participation by both teachers and learners for the period of time required for apprentices to gain a level of cultural knowledge and language fluency which allows them to practice autonomously and to take on a mentoring role for the next generation of learners.

The master-apprentice model is most appropriate to the objective of restoring harmed land-based cultural practices because it is a structure and a relationship which allows for the integration of an Indigenous learning-teaching approach. The goal of the process over time is to bring the apprentice to a point where he or she possesses the skills of the master and the confidence to assume a teaching role to others. An important measure of the program is through recognition by the community; most commonly apprentices are “certified” legally, but in the Cultural Apprenticeship Program, beyond the awarding of a

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certificate, will require that apprentices take part in annual traditional knowledge community conferences to demonstrate their growing skill level, and be recognized publically to ensure their credibility and to promote them as cultural resources and sources of knowledge accessible to the community as a whole at the conclusion of the program.

Language Promotion

A capacity for promoting and supporting the restoration of *Kanien'keha* (the Mohawk language) through both the Master-Apprentice relationships and the existing institutional activities is a core feature of the overall restoration plan. This aspect of the plan addresses the language deficits in terms of number of speakers in the community and the depth and complexity of the language itself, both of which were detrimentally affected by the community's disconnection from the land-based and riverine cultural activities. Initiatives to maintain the transmission of language and important technical focal vocabulary embedded in traditional resource harvesting practices are an important aspect in the effort to restoring the health and vitality of the people.

The goal of this aspect is to increase the number of language speakers by having all participants in the Master-Apprentice program and all of the main participants involved in institutional projects recover fluency in Kanienkeha. A community wide strategy will also be supported through this program, with emphasis on working with other organizations and agencies to saturate Akwesasne with Kanienkeha using all available print and broadcast media (radio, newspapers, print, video, street signs, education materials, etc).

Access To Resources

There are natural resource needs specific to each area of cultural practice, and where resources are lacking or where the existing resources in Akwesasne are not safe or usable, measures will be taken to provide Akwesasro:non access to the necessary resources in the upstate New York or southern Ontario/Québec region. The main areas of need in this respect are for fishing, natural foods and medicine gathering, and hunting and trapping.

Over the past decade, realizing the effects of contamination on the local water surrounding Akwesasne and in order to maintain their cultural practice, Akwesasne fishers have shifted their practice to locations away from Akwesasne. One main area of use is located one hour north-west of Akwesasne. The relationship between Akwesasne and its sister community benefits a few Akwesasne residents, but due to the fact that only those who are invited can participate in that fishery, most Akwesasro:non are denied

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the ability to continue their practice in this manner. There is also an Algonquin community with close cultural and familial ties to the Mohawk Nation, which is located near Maniwaki, Quebec, three hours north-east of Akwesasne, and offers some Akwesasne-like similar by-invitation opportunities for hunting moose and bear in Algonquin territory. There are also abundant trapping resources in the area as well as a choice berry picking site.

These activities are a clear indication of the adaptation and direct cultural change resulting from the health concerns surrounding the St. Lawrence fishery and abandonment of local hunting and trapping practices. The acquisition of property or partnerships created to access and utilize natural resources in the vicinity of Akwesasne is necessary to fulfill the objectives of the Cultural Restoration Program.

Conclusion

The cultural restoration plan, is a way of taking urgent action to prevent further loss of knowledge associated with natural resource-based cultural practices, and addresses a range of immediate needs in the community in terms of identifying and supporting practices, programs and persons in their efforts to ensure the survival of traditional Mohawk cultural life. Our focus is on beginning the work to restore necessary connections, regenerate key cultural practices, and transfer crucial cultural knowledge. In taking this approach to restoration, we believe that the patterns of belief and practice that once characterized the Mohawk community can start to be restored and that over time through our focused efforts we will achieve a regenerating point at which these traditional cultural practices will once again be widespread and self-sustaining and once again be fundamental parameters of existence in Akwesasne. This will ensure the long-term cultural integrity of Akwesasne as an indigenous community; serve as a major factor in the recovery of social stability and in the generation of economic self-sufficiency based on traditional practices.