

/ Contact, Cooperation, and Consultation With Indian Nations

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

DEC Policy

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I. Summary

This policy provides guidance to Department staff concerning cooperation and consultation with Indian Nations on issues relating to protection of environmental and cultural resources within New York State. Specifically, this policy (i) formally recognizes that relations between the Department and Indian Nations will be conducted on a government-to-government basis; (ii) identifies the protocols to be followed by Department staff in working with Indian Nations; and (iii) endorses the development of cooperative agreements between the Department and Indian Nations to address environmental and cultural resource issues of mutual concern.

II. Policy

It is the policy of the Department that relations with the Indian Nations shall be conducted on a government-to-government basis. The Department recognizes the unique political relations based on treaties and history, between the Indian Nation governments and the federal and state governments. In keeping with this overarching principle, Department staff will consult with appropriate representatives of Indian Nations on a government-to-government basis on environmental and cultural resource issues of mutual concern and, where appropriate and productive, will seek to develop cooperative agreements with Indian Nations on such issues.

III. Purpose and Background

A. General

Nine Indian Nations reside within, or have common geographic borders with New York State: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tonawanda Seneca, Tuscarora, Unkechaug, and Shinnecock. The United States formally recognizes all but the Unkechaug and Shinnecock Nations. The State of New York recognizes all nine Nations.

The Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tonawanda Seneca, and Tuscarora are known as the Six Nations or Haudenosaunee. Relations between the Department and the Haudenosaunee will be conducted in the spirit of Peace and Friendship established in the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua.

All nine Indian Nations and their diverse governments and governmental entities may share mutual interests with the Department concerning environmental and cultural resources. For the purposes of this policy, the Department will communicate with representatives from any Indian Nation government where there are environmental or cultural resource issues of mutual concern.

The Department interacts with Indian Nations in two critical areas of mutual importance: the environment (including air, land use, water, fish and wildlife) and cultural resources (including sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, artifacts, ancestral remains, cultural items, and pre- and post-contact historic sites). It does so in several capacities, including, but not limited to, permit application review, site remediation, hunting and fishing regulation, and the development, implementation, and enforcement of regulations.

It also has care, custody and responsibility for 13 percent of the State's land area, and, as such, is its largest single steward of archaeological resources. The Department wishes to ensure that its actions with respect to the environment and cultural resources are sensitive to the concerns of Indian Nations, and that the perspective of the recognized Indian Nations is sought and taken into account when the Department undertakes an action having implications for Indian Nations or their territories.

B. Consultation

Close consultation ensures that the Department and Indian Nations are better able to adopt and implement environmental and cultural resource protection policies and programs in a manner that is cognizant of shared concerns and interests. Additionally, mutually beneficial cooperation and the appropriate resolution of occasional disagreements or misunderstandings can best be achieved if there is a commitment to regular consultation on environmental and cultural resource issues of mutual concern. While successful intergovernmental communication and cooperation are not guarantees of agreement on every issue, communication and cooperation will ensure a durable, effective working relationship between the Department and Indian Nations.

Communication between the Department and Indian Nations should be direct and involve two-way dialogue and feedback. Meetings between Indian Nation representatives and Department policy and/or technical staff, as appropriate, can increase understandings of any proposed actions and enhance the development of effective outcomes and solutions. Face-to-face meetings are generally desirable; however, phone calls, correspondence, and other methods of communication are also encouraged.

Identifying the need for consultation and making the decision to consult may be difficult to determine in some cases and will vary among the diverse Indian Nation governments. The main guide, though, and one that requires further delineation, is that consultation is required for any Department decision or action which could foreseeably have Indian Nation implications. Consultation can be initiated by either the Department or an Indian Nation. The Department understands that its planning and permitting processes may not be familiar to the Nations and shall take that into account when initiating consultation. To ensure sufficient time for input before decisions are made and actions taken, early involvement of Indian Nations is essential.

Good faith efforts should be undertaken to involve Indian Nations. The Department

should strive to ensure that appropriate communication and response for any particular Indian Nation government or governmental entity is provided to any request for consultation.

C. Protection of Environmental Resources

Since all the natural world is interconnected and interrelated, environmental issues transcend geographic boundaries. As such, there are numerous unexplored opportunities for the Department and Indian Nations to pursue programs and policies through partnership for the betterment of all of our communities and citizens.

The Department and Indian Nations share key roles in protecting and preserving natural and cultural resources important to all citizens, and early consultation and cooperation between the Department and Indian Nations will foster more comprehensive protection and preservation of those resources.

D. Protection of Cultural Resources

The preservation of Native American sacred sites, pre- and post-contact historic sites, and traditional cultural properties, and the preservation, disposition, and repatriation of Native American ancestral remains, funerary objects, artifacts, cultural items, and cultural property (“Native American Sites and Objects”) displays respect for Indian Nations, and preserves the historical, ancestral, and cultural heritage of Indian Nations and all New Yorkers. Actions approved, undertaken, or funded by the Department may have the unintended and inadvertent result of disturbing or adversely affecting Native American Sites and Objects. Accordingly, early consultation with Indian Nations connected to such Native American Sites and Objects is necessary to ensure proper and respectful treatment and to avoid any irreplaceable loss.

The careful consideration of the preservation, disposition, and repatriation of Native American Sites and Objects is consistent with the State Historic Preservation Act, State Environmental Quality Review Act, the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act.

IV. Responsibility

The Department’s Office of Environmental Justice in the Office of General Counsel will provide oversight to ensure compliance with this policy. It shall assess the policy's effectiveness and initiate changes as needed, and shall appoint an individual to serve as Indian Nations Affairs Coordinator for all matters concerning this policy. The Office of Environmental Justice will maintain a list of current contacts for each Indian Nation, and will provide the contact list and any updates to the list to regional and central office staff.

All the Department's divisions and regional offices will fully cooperate and work closely with the Office of Environmental Justice in the implementation of this policy. Each division and regional office will appoint a single point of contact for Indian Nation matters; and each will identify that individual to the Office of Environmental Justice. Each division and regional office may issue its own guidance to further the implementation of this policy. Such guidance shall be developed in consultation with the Office of Environmental Justice to ensure consistency with

this policy and uniformity of application throughout the Department.

The Commissioner and Department staff will strive to meet with representatives of each Indian Nation on an annual basis to continue to foster this cooperative, government-to-government policy.

V. Procedure

This policy is intended solely for the purpose of facilitating intergovernmental cooperation between the Department and recognized Indian Nations and may not serve as a basis for any legal claim against the Department or its employees, agents, or contractors. Nothing in this policy shall or is intended to modify, diminish, or alter any rights and is not intended to create any right, benefit, obligation, or cause of action, whether direct or indirect, for any person or entity.

A. Contact

Department staff are encouraged to engage in regular contact with representatives of Indian Nations, especially program counterparts, in order to facilitate a cordial and cooperative working relationship. Informal contacts (e.g., telephone calls and in-person meetings) should be conducted on an as-needed basis, without the necessity of prior review or approval. Formal written contacts or contacts resulting in commitments should be coordinated with the appropriate Department executive, Office of Environmental Justice and, if deemed necessary, legal staff.

B. Consultation

Department staff shall consult with appropriate Indian Nation representatives on a government-to-government basis regarding matters affecting Indian Nation interests, with the goal of creating durable intergovernmental relationships that promote cooperative partnerships on environmental and cultural resource issues of mutual concern. As used herein:

“Consultation” means open and effective communication in a cooperative process that, to the extent practicable and permitted by law, works toward a consensus before a decision is made or an action is taken. Consultation should begin as early as practical, and, where appropriate, consultation should continue through the implementation of such decision or action. Consultation means more than simply informing affected Indian Nations about what the Department is planning. Consultation is a process, not a guarantee of agreement on outcomes. Consultation should not be limited to specific issues or actions, but applied broadly in order to achieve mutually beneficial priorities, programs and interests.

- “Affecting Indian Nation interests ” means a proposed action or activity, whether undertaken directly by the Department or by a third party requiring a Department approval or permit, which may have a direct foreseeable, or ascertainable effect on environmental or cultural resources of significance to one or more Indian Nations, whether such resources are located on or outside of Indian Nation Territory.
- “Indian Nation Territory” means all lands within the exterior boundaries of any

Indian reservation and all lands held in trust by the federal government for any Indian Nation.

It is expected that Department staff will work with each Indian Nation to identify categories of actions or activities that will likely require consultation. As this policy is implemented, the Department will cooperatively establish with affected Indian Nations the manner and time frame for consultation, and will strive to accommodate the differences in deliberative processes. When a regulatory or policy change is planned that may affect Indian Nation interests, the Department will invite interested Indian Nations to consult on a government-to-government basis. The Department will be receptive to requests from Indian Nations for intergovernmental consultation on actions, policies, and issues within the Department's authority.

To further achieve proper contact and consultation the Department will develop and conduct sensitivity training of all staff who will or may implement this policy. To the extent that it is achievable, the development and conduct of such training shall include Indian Nation representation.

C. General Consultation Subjects

1. Environmental Resources

The Department is committed to working cooperatively with Indian Nations to address issues of mutual concern involving environmental resources, whether located on or outside of Indian Nation Territory. The Department recognizes that environmental resources transcend these boundaries, and that protection and preservation of those resources requires close cooperation between the Department and Indian nations. The Department also recognizes that environmental impacts transcend these boundaries and remediation and reduction of impacts should be addressed cooperatively.

Where appropriate, the Department may consider entering into a written cooperative agreement or agreements with one or more Indian Nations where it will achieve protection, preservation, or remediation of such environmental resources. With respect to environmental matters occurring wholly or partly on Indian Nation Territory, the Department shall seek to achieve protection, preservation or remediation of such resources through development of a cooperative agreement or agreements with that Indian Nation.

2. Hunting, Fishing, and Gathering

The Department recognizes that hunting, fishing, and gathering are activities of cultural and spiritual significance to the Indian Nations. The Department is committed to collaborating with Indian Nations to develop written cooperative agreements that protect the rights of such Nations to engage in these activities consistent with the Department's interest in protection and management of the State's natural resources.

3. Cultural Resources

The Department recognizes the importance of Native American Sites and Objects to Indian Nations. Specifically, for example, the Department recognizes the profound connection Indian Nations and their citizens have with their ancestors and their preeminent desire, therefore, to protect them from disturbance. The Department also recognizes that there are locations within the State that have great cultural and pre- and post-contact historical significance to Indian Nations that require similar protection.

The Department, in consultation with each Indian Nation and with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, will develop a map showing the area of aboriginal occupation of each Indian Nation within the State. When the Department undertakes an action that might affect a Native American Site or Object, including but not limited to a known or potential burial, or pre- or post-contact historic site, or traditional cultural property or sacred site, it will use this information to notify and consult with any Indian Nation claiming interest in the site location. Similarly, the Department will consult with the Indian Nations before it takes any action with respect to any law, regulation or policy that relates to Native American Sites and Objects.

VI. Related References:

- State Historic Preservation Act [Article 14, Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law]
- National Historic Preservation Act [16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*]
- State Environmental Quality Review Act [ECL Article 8]
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [25 USC 3001 *et seq.*]