



# WISCONSIN TRIBAL CONSERVATION:

## *Stewardship for the Future*

Protecting and Restoring Natural Resources  
on Tribal Lands in Wisconsin





Published in cooperation with  
the Wisconsin Tribal Conservation  
Advisory Council.

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*Cover Photos: (Clockwise) Traditional purple corn dried during harvest. Hands together in partnership with Wisconsin Tribes. A close-up of wild rice harvest. Tony Kuchma, Oneida Nation Wetland Project Manager, with Oneida Nation Tribal youth at a restored wetland easement through a WTCAC and NRCS partnership.*

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*Photos: (Top to Bottom) A waterway for small boats leads into the Chippewa flowage lake region of northern Wisconsin. Native American drums hold tribal significance at a Powwow. Traditional Native American harvest foods.*



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Photo: Wild rice grows on tribal land.

# Welcome From the State Conservationist

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) greatly appreciates the partnership and sustained commitment of the Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WTCAC), Tribal leadership and Wisconsin's Tribes in sharing their knowledge and perspective. For over twenty years, the Council and Wisconsin Tribal leaders have assisted the USDA NRCS in creating innovative programs and practices that are more meaningful and accessible to Tribal Nations and Tribal members.



USDA as a department has Federal Tribal Trust Responsibilities, strives to work effectively with tribes and each agency is called upon to *“engage with Tribal Nations in government-to-government consultation and coordination in policy development and program activities, thereby ensuring that tribal perspectives on the social, cultural, economic and ecological aspects of agriculture, as well as tribal food and natural resource priorities and goals are heard and fully considered in the decision-making processes”* (USDA Departmental Regulation 1350-02). The commitment of the WTCAC and the sustained partnership of the Tribal elected leadership makes this partnership possible.

We are grateful to the WTCAC Council for their formal facilitation of government-to-government consultation with Tribal elected leadership. The Council also provides an effective forum for USDA agencies to coordinate with Tribal Nations in policy development and program activities on a frequent basis. This has proven critical to ensure tribal priorities are heard and considered in USDA's decision-making processes.

The NRCS collaboration with the WTCAC has fostered development of three key strategies to ensure NRCS conservation programs work on tribal lands:

1. **Conservation Planning Capacity:** The State Conservationist assigns NRCS conservation planners to work with each tribe. NRCS managers, engineering staff and others also support these efforts. In 2020, to increase the level of tribal conservation implementation, the NRCS entered into agreements with the WTCAC and the Oneida Nation to hire three tribal conservation planners.
2. **Conservation Funding:** NRCS devotes a portion of financial assistance dollars specifically to meet conservation needs on tribal lands. The Wisconsin NRCS commits between \$500,000 to \$1.2 million each year in financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to Tribal conservation projects with all eleven federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin. Five of the eleven federally recognized tribes also participate in the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program.
3. **Better Conservation Solutions:** As a Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, WTCAC shares tribal perspectives on emerging natural resource concerns, conservation solutions and program needs. Past work includes the development of standards for walleye rearing ponds, wild rice restoration and understory plantings in black ash forests.



*Photo: Angela Biggs, NRCS State Conservationist, with Tony Kuchma, Oneida Nation Wetland Project Manager, viewing a recently restored Oneida Nation wetland.*

Tribal Nations in Wisconsin strive to protect the land and natural resources we all enjoy. It is our hope that the NRCS partnership with the Council and tribes across the state will continue to ensure a healthy and prosperous future for generations to come. NRCS is pleased to present this partnership report, highlighting conservation successes with Wisconsin's Tribal Nations.

Angela Biggs  
Wisconsin NRCS State Conservationist

## Boozhoo From the WTCAC President

Boozhoo (Hello), my name is Tina L. Van Zile and I am a tribal member of the Sokaogon, Mole Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and I am currently the President of the Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WTCAC).



As I took time to review our current projects and reports, I was struck by the realization that the visions of past leaders, such as Jean Buffalo-Reyes, still benefit us today. The partnership we have built over the years with the USDA NRCS has proven to be extremely beneficial to all 11 Wisconsin Tribal Communities. We have truly come such a long way over the years. I remember a time not too long ago when a number of current practices were nothing more than ideas on a piece of scrap paper, hastily conceived during one of our monthly meetings. But, we worked hard and more importantly we worked together, and by working together, we were able to develop those ideas into well thought out, tribally specific, practices of great value.

Every year, WTCAC receives an annual allocation from USDA NRCS to fund projects amongst the 11 tribes. Understandably, sometimes the allocation just isn't enough to cover all of our resource concerns for that year. But what impresses me most about this group is their unselfishness. Without fail, a number of tribes will voluntarily delay their projects so that another tribe can successfully complete theirs. This unselfishness and respect for one another is one reason I believe WTCAC has become so successful and its importance cannot be overstated.

As you take the time to peruse through each tribes past projects, you will see a wide variety of NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program practices that may seem fragmented and unrelated. However, when you step back and piece them together, you start to understand the true cumulative impact resulting from the diligent work of this advisory council. What began as a forum for Wisconsin Tribes to have a voice at the table with USDA, has blossomed into so much more. Our monthly meetings have evolved into a platform for sharing, where both federal and state agencies coalesce and exchange information on funding, developing issues of concern, project possibilities and positive working relationships.



*Photo: Tina Van Zile, a member of the Sokaogon, Mole Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, displays a hand-made tribal basket from a community event.*

As WTCAC shifts its eye toward the future, we want to extend our hand and offer help to those entities that need it. It is our wish to see other states and tribes come together to form similar advisory councils to help meet their communities' concerns. Also, through our various agency partners we've secured funding for several student interns. We believe this investment in our future generations will carry the WTCAC well into the future. The experience and opportunities made available to them open many doors for a prosperous career. When we work together, the environment benefits. *Miigwech* (Thank you)!

*Tina L. Van Zile*

Tina L. Van Zile  
WTCAC President

## WTCAC Background

The Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WTCAC) has a long history as the first inclusive and productive Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (TCAC). Formed in response to policy changes in the 1995 Farm Bill, TCACs provided Tribal Nations an opportunity to work directly with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on a government-to-government basis to participate in USDA programs. In 2000, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) changed its GM-410 RD-Part 405 American Indians and Alaska Natives policy to allow the formation of Tribal Conservation Districts (TCDs) under tribal law, as well as the formation of TCACs to provide input on NRCS programs and the conservation needs of the Tribal Nations and tribal producers. For an individual Tribal Nation, the TCAC could be an existing tribal committee or department. A TCAC could also be an association of member Tribal Nations that provide direct consultation to NRCS at the state, regional and national levels to provide input on NRCS rules, policies and programs and their impacts on Tribal Nations. The Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WTCAC) was the first such state level TCAC and provided TCAC and TCD training to over 220 Tribal Nations. Today, there are approximately 17 state and regional TCACs, with even more in development.

Over the course of its 20-year history, WTCAC has worked with the Tribal Nations of Wisconsin to increase their participation in federal programs, improving agricultural practices and conservation activities on tribal lands, restoring natural resources, while also respecting their cultures and traditions. WTCAC partners directly with Wisconsin Tribal Nations, USDA and NRCS to implement conservation. Through a host of federal programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Tribal Nations are improving the health of their lands, from soil and water quality to farms and forests. In fiscal year 2020, through their partnership with the WTCAC, nine Tribal Nations in Wisconsin have completed 21 projects to protect and restore natural resources. In fact, over 97,000 acres of Tribal lands were enrolled in either EQIP or CSP. Through these partnerships, conservation has been installed on the ground, partnerships have been leveraged and increased and WTCAC has had the opportunity to help Tribal Nations realize and implement their conservation stewardship goals.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Pat Pelky, WTCAC Council Vice President and Oneida Nation Division Director of Environmental, Health, Safety, Land & Agricultural Division, walks on a re-stored tribal easement with Tehassi Hill, Chairman of the Oneida Nation. WTCAC works in partnership with USDA agencies and tribes to restore lands through conservation efforts, like this wetland on the Oneida Nation. WTCAC helps restore tribal lands, like this forest at the Oneida Nation, that Tehahukótha, Randy Cornelius of the Bear Clan, visits often to gather mushrooms.*

## Building Partnerships With Tribes

The WTCAC has a unique opportunity to build relationships and partnerships based on tribal trust. The WTCAC is honored to assist tribes at the local level in accessing federal conservation programs, including both technical and financial assistance to implement projects. The WTCAC is also honored to be a facilitator in helping Wisconsin Tribes better realize and implement their sovereign rights as Tribal Nations. Among the most important of these rights, are the rights of tribes to continue to hunt, fish and gather throughout the ceded territories outside of their own reservation boundaries, as they have been doing since time immemorial.

These rights to hunt, fish and gather require more than the mere absence of barriers to the lands and waters where tribes might seek fish and game or berries and rice. These rights also require that the fields, forests, rivers and lakes from which the tribes hunt, fish and gather from be healthy enough to support viable populations of species to subsist on. The health of these lands and waters must not only be supported at present, but into the future for perpetuity. The WTCAC is pleased, with the help of NRCS, to assist the Tribal Nations in Wisconsin by planning and setting goals to conserve and protect the natural resources they depend on for their livelihoods and cultures.

One example of a partnership success with Tribal Nations has been the various aquaculture projects developed to support fish restocking efforts. Through these efforts, fish are reared in tribal hatcheries, then released throughout waters in the ceded territories, both on and off reservation. Other WTCAC assisted projects involving aquatic organism passage, stream crossings and riparian habitats all impact stream health, creating benefits that accrue up and down streams and across watersheds.



**Photos:** (Clockwise) Through a partnership agreement, NRCS staff learn about a stream-bank restoration on tribal lands from Tribal elders as part of a Working Effectively With American Indians course. Angela Biggs, State Conservationist, discusses tribal implications of the 2018 Farm Bill for a First Nations Tribal Food Sovereignty Leadership Panel. (Left to Right) Alan Johnson, Executive Director, WTCAC; Angela Biggs, Wisconsin NRCS State Conservationist; Pat Pelky, WTCAC Council Vice President and Oneida Nation Division Director of Environmental, Health, Safety, Land & Agricultural Division and Joanie Buckley, Internal Services Director, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin; discuss future conservation implementation on Oneida Nation acres.

## Supporting Tribal Conservation in the Future

In the future, the WTCAC will look at many different opportunities for diverse projects with the tribes, for example, terrestrial projects that extend beyond the borders of tribal reservations. There is ample opportunity for state and national forest land in the ceded territories surrounding tribal lands to also benefit from conservation practices. Diverse animal species move across the landscape without respect to boundary lines. Having state, private, federal and tribal partnerships through the WTCAC enables conservation to take place at the landscape scale. Even diverse plant species that end up rooted in place need well established seed banks and viable dispersal to persist across the landscape.

After supporting tribal sovereignty through the realization of rights for hunting, gathering and fishing, the most significant impact the WTCAC has had partnering with Tribal Nations has been the incorporation of conservation practices and solutions based on traditional ecological knowledge into the NRCS EQIP. Intended to be a guide for addressing natural resource concerns for agricultural producers and forest landowners, the EQIP contains numerous conservation practices that can be applied in conjunction with each other and across a multitude of scenarios. As versatile as these practices are for preventing or mitigating negative impacts on soils, water, air, animal and human health when applied, there are still some gaps between those practices and the needs of individual landowners based on their circumstances.

In the case of the Tribal Nations in Wisconsin, they are often able to fill in these gaps with innovative solutions of their own design. These traditional ecological knowledge-based solutions have proven effective to the point that they are now considered within the set of standard EQIP practices. To date, over 20 EQIP practices have been developed by Wisconsin Tribal Nations for general use. Many of these innovations are related to the establishment and care of wild rice beds and aquaponics for producing trout and walleye. The WTCAC is working with the NRCS and other partners to develop climate change mitigation strategies. Partners are currently working on developing technical recommendations and EQIP financial incentives for reforesting riparian areas dominated by herbaceous species due to poor past logging practices and understory planting of non-ash species in monotypic black ash stands.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Kakahunike, Vickie Cornelius, of the Bear Clan, Oneida Nation, supports conservation education by sharing her passion with Tribal youth. Tribal youth visit a restored Oneida Nation wetland in partnership with the NRCS and the WTCAC to identify plant species and spread local, native seeds. Kakahunike, Vickie Cornelius of the Bear Clan, Oneida Nation, partners with the WTCAC to increase conservation awareness in an Oneida Nation forest.*



## Growing Federal Partnerships From the Ground Up

The NRCS is one of seven USDA agencies who have benefited from having a working relationship with the WTCAC. Other USDA agencies participating in the WTCAC include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Farm Service Agency, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Risk Management Agency, Rural Development and the U.S. Forest Service. These agencies are better able to reach out and collaborate with Tribal Nations providing programmatic and financial assistance by working jointly with the WTCAC.

A recently launched Conservation Collaboration Grant with NRCS enabled WTCAC's capacity to extend federal programming to Tribal Nations with the recent hiring of a Civil Engineering Technician (CET) and a Resource Conservationist. These new hires function similarly to their NRCS affiliated counterparts, but are dedicated to working with Tribal Nations in Wisconsin. Working with the WTCAC's CET and Resource Conservationist can offer a more streamlined and direct approach to technical and financial assistance. This will improve the implementation of conservation and agriculture related federal programming, while also allowing federal agencies to better meet their trust obligations to the Wisconsin Tribal Nations.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Tom Melnarik (right), new WTCAC CET, meets with Chris Borden (middle), NRCS State Tribal Liaison, and a Lac du Flambeau Tribes member (left) next to newly installed aquaculture ponds. Tom Melnarik (middle), WTCAC CET, does site surveying during installation of the Lac du Flambeau aquaculture ponds. Jonathan Pruitt, WTCAC Resource Conservationist, (left) assists with upgrading the Copper Falls TSCAN weather station during the pandemic (masks and social distancing were followed).*



## Tribal Nations Project Highlights

The WTCAC is pleased to highlight work done in partnership with Wisconsin Tribal Nations to show the impact they have had on natural resources across the state. Much work has been done and the WTCAC looks forward to continuing to partner with Wisconsin Tribal Nations to achieve conservation results. The following pages are highlights of conservation work completed in partnership with Wisconsin Tribes.

Tribal Nations supporting the WTCAC Council include:

- Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians
- Forest County Potawatomi
- Ho-Chunk Nation
- Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- Oneida Nation
- Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
- Sokaogon Chippewa Community
- Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians



*Photos: (Clockwise) Participants attend a forest habitat type training at the Bad River Reservation. Student volunteers assist with streambank repair by hand at the Red Cliff Reservation's Spirit Island location. Training participants in the forest habitat type class at Bad River review a proposed reed canary grass stand reforestation site.*

## BAD RIVER BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR TRIBE OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS

The oral history of the *Anishinaabeg* (Chippewa/Ojibwe) tells us that long ago, the *Mashkiibiizing Anishinaabeg* (Bad River People) lived far east of the Great Lakes on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. A vision to journey back east to their original home was followed to find ‘the food that grows upon the water.’ And so, the Tribe’s people began moving westward from the coast, tracing a path along the rivers and shores of the Great Lakes until they found the food that they had been promised, the *manoomin*, or wild rice, of the Kakagon and Bad River Sloughs Complex, on the southern shore of *Gichigami* (Lake Superior) where today, the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa are located.

Today, the Kakagon and Bad River Sloughs Complex is home to one of the largest naturally occurring *manoomin* beds in the entire Great Lakes basin. The *Mashkiiziibiing Anishinaabeg* who have lived in these lands for generations gained an intimate knowledge from their relationship with wild rice, tending, harvesting, processing and eating the grains of the plant, season after season. It is from this deep well of traditional ecological knowledge that the Tribe was able to draw from and help establish the NRCS guidelines on the seeding of wild rice beds and treating invasive species within those rice beds.

In May 2019, the Tribe partnered with the NRCS to install a Tribal Soil Climate Data Network (TSCAN) weather station in Copper Falls State Park. Data gathered by this station includes indicators of air quality, which will be used by the Tribe’s *Mashkiibizii* Natural Resources Department to monitor and enforce air quality standards on the Reservation. The station will also help predict flooding events using a combination of precipitation and soil moisture data. Data gathered by the station can also be used to monitor drought development, especially regarding climate change, predict the long-term sustainability of crop systems, watershed health and changes in crop, range and woodland productivity. Having access to this information, both at Copper Falls and elsewhere in the TSCAN network, will allow the Tribe to better plan and adapt to the effects of climate change in the future.

**Photos:** (Clockwise) The northeast Slough is one branch of the Kakagon and Bad River Sloughs Complex, a place of cultural and sovereign importance to the Bad River people and a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. Bad River Tribal members and volunteers harvest wild rice. Chris Borden, NRCS State Tribal Liaison (second from left), meets with Bad River tribal staff (left to right), Dan Wiggins Jr., Eric Andrews and Nathan Kilger to view the new weather station installed at Copper Falls State Park.



## FOREST COUNTY POTAWATOMI

In 2017, the Forest County Potawatomi started a tribal run farm, *Bodwewadmi Ktegan*. With a bevy of operations that include pasture raised chicken, pigs, cattle and bison, traditional row crops, hoop house production and an aquaponic system, *Bodwewadmi Ktegan* supplies a diverse range of food products for both members of the tribe and patrons to its casino restaurants. The NRCS partnership, through EQIP funding was used for the construction of eight hoop houses and 30,000 feet of fencing, encompassing 40 livestock paddocks to complete a managed rotational grazing system. There are also plans in the works to build water lines out to paddocks and pastures in the future, through the NRCS EQIP assistance. *Bodwewadmi Ktegan* has also been awarded a USDA Value Added Producer Grant, which has helped them process, label and package meats in-house that are raised on the farm.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Pasture-raised beef cattle on the Bodwewadmi Ktegan Tribal farm. Tribal youth views pasture-raised pigs on the Bodwewadmi Ktegan Tribal farm. Fresh farm vegetables, like the ones seen here, are grown each season.*

## HO-CHUNK NATION

The Ho-Chunk Nation are known as the People of the Sacred Voice. Their Tribe is a Nation of over 7,800 members. Their traditional cultural ways, songs and stories guide their values of how to respect the land and animals, and how to live in balance with nature. The Tribe has around 15,000 acres of land in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois and they are working with partners, including the NRCS and the WTCAC, to keep that land flourishing.

Based in Southwest Wisconsin where the landscape is often composed of prairie, the Ho-Chunk Nation have focused their conservation efforts on grassland and savanna restoration. Utilizing the NRCS EQIP practices, such as prescribed burns, brush management and the pollinator program, the Ho-Chunk have worked to restore grassland habitat on a 1,500-acre former army site near Baraboo, Wisconsin. This restoration benefits grassland birds by building habitat for nesting, feeding and resting.



*Photos: (Clockwise) A Red-headed Woodpecker thrives in its natural habitat due to conservation efforts. The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program practice, prescribed burn, is completed on Ho Chunk Reservation land. A Meadowlark is seen perched in restored grassland habitat.*

## LAC COURTE OREILLES BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA INDIANS

The Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians completed construction on a series of four 0.6-acre walleye rearing ponds. Upon reaching sufficient size, walleye will be released into waterways throughout the ceded territories. Over the years, the Tribe has worked with the WTCAC and the NRCS to amend numerous EQIP practices related to aquaculture. More than 25 changes have been made to the EQIP aquaculture practice scenarios based on tribal experiences with project construction costs.

The Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe has also been influential in the practice of wild rice restoration, working with the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and other Chippewa/Ojibwe Tribes to develop the standard by which wild rice restoration is done throughout the Great Lakes Region. As of 2020, the Tribe has seeded 75 acres of wild rice on its reservation.



*Photos: (Clockwise) The Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe releases walleye reared from their aquaculture ponds, like the one seen here caught by a fisherman. Wild rice restoration on Lac Courte Reservation waters. A wild rice bed thrives on reservation waters.*

## LAC DU FLAMBEAU BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA INDIANS

The Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians partnered with the WTCAC and the USDA NRCS to restore forest habitat. Logging has been a prominent economic endeavor throughout northern Wisconsin from the 1800s to today. The composition of the forests we see today are reflective of that continued activity. The forests of the lands which now form the Lac du Flambeau Reservation are no exception and aspen stands are a prominent feature across the landscape. While aspen stands do have their place in the habitat mosaic of the northwoods, a history of logging clear cuts and aspens tendency to form dense, clonal stands as they regenerate, has led to an overall decrease in habitat diversity. These monotypic stands are beginning to dominate many parts of the forest.

The Lac du Flambeau Band have been actively working to restore habitat diversity on their land by using the practice of timber stand improvement. This will help shift their forests toward a composition where sugar maple, white birch, red oak and white pine are dominant. Removal of aspen and other trees near saplings of desired trees helps ensure that the remaining sugar maple, white birch, red oak and white pines will become well established in the future. Where the naturally occurring seed bank isn't sufficient to furnish the desired tree species, a shallow trench is dug and planted with seeds and seedlings. The wetter, cooler microclimate within the trench helps give these growing trees a better chance at surviving and thriving over time. Since 2001, the Lac du Flambeau Band has enrolled around 5,000 acres of forest into timber stand improvement, which is over 5% of their 86,600-acre reservation.

The Lac du Flambeau Band is also active in rearing fish to stock nearby lakes. Beginning in the fall of 2014, the Tribe began collaborating with the WTCAC, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), the NRCS and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to upgrade and expand their existing aquaculture facility. Funding was provided by the NRCS EQIP practices allocated through WTCAC, as well as the WDNR's Walleye Initiative. Technical assistance was provided by the NRCS and WTCAC staff. The project was completed in November 2015. The upgraded facility consolidated 13 small fish ponds into 6 larger ponds covering an area of seven acres. A sediment tank where excess fish waste is collected before water is released to an adjacent wetland was installed. An improved water supply system and gravity flow fish passage to a pair of collection kettles where fish can be harvested when they are ready for release into the wild was also installed. In its first year of operation, the new facility produced more than 196,000 summer fingerlings and nearly 28,000 fall fingerlings of walleye and muskellunge. The Lac du Flambeau facility has continued to rear and release fish into lakes and flowages, both on and off the Reservation, helping ensure both tribal and non-tribal anglers will continue to enjoy a healthy catch for years to come.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Lac du Flambeau forest habitat restored. Lac du Flambeau aquaculture ponds during construction. Lac du Flambeau aquaculture ponds in use after construction completion.*

## MENOMINEE INDIAN TRIBE OF WISCONSIN

The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin partnered with the NRCS and the WTCAC to restore a naturally occurring stream channel that had previously been embanked to create a series of trout ponds. Once the earthen embankments were removed, the stream was free to carve out its natural channel through the remaining sediment.

Tube rafting on the Wolf River, which runs through the Menominee reservation, is a popular pastime with locals. Continuous foot traffic along the same paths down to the river, over time, led to growing levels of erosion and sedimentation into the river. To prevent conditions from worsening, while still allowing foot traffic access for tubing, rocks have been installed along the banks and access landings to provide stabilization and help prevent further erosion.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Menominee waters, like the beautiful ones shown here, are used for recreation. The Wolf River runs through the Menominee Reservation and is home to many species that benefit from the Tribes conservation work. The Menominee Indian Tribe worked to restore naturally occurring stream channels to create habitat for trout species, such as the brown trout shown here.*

## ONEIDA NATION

A major recent undertaking by the Oneida Nation has been the expansion of their managed grazing program for cattle. Through an NRCS partnership, additional acres of regular grazing were added and managed rotational grazing was implemented on more tribal acres. The introduction of managed rotational grazing at the Oneida Nation farm operation introduced many benefits from both an ecological and economic standpoint.

Rotational grazing is a management strategy used to maximize forage growth and encourage desirable plants and plant parts. It involves dividing a larger pasture into several, separately fenced paddocks and rotating animals among the smaller paddocks. This practice has led to improved water quality on an adjacent stream by reducing pollution and runoff. Rotational grazing also improves soil health by building drought resistance, increasing soil organic matter, increasing nutrient availability for plant growth and much more. It's also provided an economic benefit by replacing some of the expense of grain for cattle feed with grasses that grow on the Oneida Nation farm. Shifting to rotational and other forms of pasture grazing is quickly becoming more economically viable than using feed for cattle operations in Wisconsin.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Oneida Nation beef cattle graze on reservation lands. Oneida Nation managed rotational grazing State Farm fence layout. Oneida Nation buffalo graze on reservation lands.*



## RED CLIFF BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA

The practice of aquaculture has returned to the Red Cliff Band with the reconstruction of three extended growth walleye rearing ponds capable of holding up to 5,000 walleye each. With help from the NRCS engineers and technical assistance staff, construction began in the fall of 2017 and was completed by the summer of 2018.

Another major project the Tribe took on was completing streambank stabilization on Spirit Island to address concerns of sediment from the bank flowing to wild rice beds downstream, which could have an adverse effect on not only the rice beds, but on habitat for fish and wildlife. Sedimentation is especially harmful for fish spawning beds; fine particles of sand and silt can settle onto fish eggs and smother them. More than a football field length of streambank (335 feet) was stabilized using a combination of staked biologs, logs made of 100% biodegradable fibers bound by high strength twisted netting. Once in place, the biologs reduce wave energy and buffer fluctuations in stream flow velocities, while allowing sufficient time for regrowth and vegetation. The Tribe also planted more than 12,000 seedlings above the streambank, with many of the plants germinating from seeds that were gathered on the island.

This practice is worth encouraging across Tribal Nations as a means of preparing for shifts in forest composition due to climate change. If trees need to be planted, it would be beneficial to use seeds from local trees adapted to local conditions, as opposed to seeds from nurseries outside of the Reservation. Drawing on the cultural significance of Spirit Island to the *Anishinaabe*, Red Cliff hosted a week-long Connecting the Land and People: Working Effectively with American Indians course for NRCS staff in 2018 and plans to host more courses in the future. In addition to learning about how tribal government functioned, treaty rights and U.S. federal trust responsibilities, the NRCS attendees also learned about *Anishinaabe* values and culture.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Before and after (Left to Right) of the Spirit Island streambank stabilization project. An NRCS Tribal training group tours the Red Cliff Walleye Rearing Pond. Red Cliff Tribal Natural Resources staff (left) with Gary Haughn (right), NRCS District Conservationist, discussing sediment reduction at Frog Bay Tribal National Park.*



## ST. CROIX CHIPPEWA INDIANS OF WISCONSIN

The St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin have been engaged in aquaculture since 2012 when they first began rearing walleye for release. In that time, with the help of the WTCAC and the NRCS, St. Croix initiated 10 scenarios related to aquaculture which are now included in the EQIP Cookbook. Federal program participants, including Tribal Nations, are now eligible to receive federal funds to implement these practices.

The St. Croix Tribe is also working on a project for *giizhik*, or northern white cedar regeneration, which is now included as a part of the EQIP and CSP practices also eligible for federal funding. White cedar holds special significance for the *Anishinaabe*, as it is one of four sacred plants, along with tobacco, sweet grass and sage. These plants are used for St. Croix Tribal ceremonial/cleansing purposes. Offering funding to support white cedar regeneration helps ensure that these important cultural traditions will be able to continue for future generations.

The St. Croix Tribe has also been working on utilizing prescribed burns to foster the regeneration of lowbush blueberry. Tribal Nations throughout North America have utilized fire to alter and influence their surrounding landscapes for a variety of reasons, from creating suitable grazing for game, clearing brush to make travel easier, to inducing desired plants to grow better. The NRCS EQIP enables using fire as part of a Forest Management Plan for eligible participants.



**Photos:** (Clockwise) Extended growth walleye is seen being released into tribal waters. White cedar seedlings arrive to be planted on tribal lands to regenerate forests. Lowbush blueberry ripens after regeneration due to prescribed burn.

## SOKAOGON CHIPPEWA COMMUNITY: MOLE LAKE BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA

The Sokaogon Chippewa Community Mole Lake Band of Lake Superior Chippewa partnered with the WTCAC, the NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service to complete a wetland restoration on the Mole Lake Reservation, located in the Town of Nashville, in Forest County. The Tribe partnered to use black spruce seeds to produce 300 seedlings, of which 100 were planted at the site of an old fish hatchery. Since the project's inception, the Mole Lake Tribe has planted over 1,500 cedar, tamarack, black spruce and balsam fir trees in riparian areas impacted by poorly placed and perched culverts that have since been replaced.

The Sokaogon Chippewa Community also hosted a unique hoop house project, blending traditional indigenous knowledge with a modern agricultural practice. Hoop houses are essentially collapsible greenhouses that can be used to extend the growing season for fruits and vegetables into late fall and early spring. Because they are not permanent structures, hoop houses can be disassembled, moved and reassembled as needed. Typically, hoop houses are made of clear or semi-transparent plastic stretched over a frame made of metal ribs.

At Sokaogon, youth participants in a summer program used a different approach. To begin, Environmental Director Tina Van Zile gave a cultural teaching on the importance of providing an offering of tobacco as a showing of gratitude for the resources mother earth provides. Once the proper observances had been made, participants then began to gather ironwood saplings, stripping their bark and sanding them smooth. After anchoring the ironwood poles in the ground, they bent and lashed them together, forming a wooden lattice structure in the same manner used when constructing *medewiigwam*, or traditional medicine lodges. Once the wooden frame was assembled, the plastic sheeting was stretched over and then secured to the frame, completing the hoop house.



*Photos: (Clockwise) The unique hoop house built as part of a Sokaogon Chippewa Community agriculture project. Tribal youth volunteers learn hoop house construction during a Sokaogon Chippewa Community agriculture project. Black spruce, like the tree shown below developing pine cones, were grown from seedlings and planted on reservation lands.*



## STOCKBRIDGE-MUNSEE BAND OF MOHICAN INDIANS

The Stockbridge-Munsee Nation partnered with the WTCAC and the NRCS to complete forestry, wetland and riparian conservation practices. One project crossing over into all practice categories was seeking a viable replacement for black ash along riparian zones. Black ash are highly vulnerable to being killed by damage caused by the larvae of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), an invasive insect. Because black ash are common in riparian zones, often to the point of monoculture stand dominance, their die-off, due to the effects of EAB, can have major negative impacts on stream health. Without trees along streams providing bank stabilization, shade and inputs of woody debris, stream quality and aquatic organism health suffers, especially in trout species. Finding suitable replacements for ash trees before riparian forests transition to shrub/scrub or herbaceous cover is vital in preserving the health of stream ecosystems for the future.

The shading provided by a full canopy of trees will be vital as the projected effects of climate change are likely to raise surface water temperatures already. Challenges with another prominent invasive species, reed canary grass, are also being addressed. This grass typically grows in dense monocultures and is costly to treat, generally requiring a combination of mowing, burning and/or pesticide application. The Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe has also been experimenting with low-cost alternative treatments using planted tamarack seedlings. Thus far, planted trees have been unaffected by the surrounding reed canary grass and are expected to continue to grow, eventually reaching a point where the trees will shade out the invasive canary grass. If replacement of black ash in riparian zones and use of tamaracks to combat reed canary grass prove to be successful, there is great promise in turning these innovative practices into future EQIP scenarios for other landowners and tribes to benefit from. Other conservation projects underway with the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe include shifting single-age class forest stands to multi-age forest stands for greater ecological and forest use benefits.

*Photos: (Clockwise) Stockbridge-Munsee riparian zones are restored through conservation practices. Tribal conservation staff assess riparian habitat on Stockbridge-Munsee lands. Trout species, such as the brook trout show here, thrive in Stockbridge-Munsee Reservation waters due to conservation in riparian zones.*



## Partner Highlights

Tribes extend their conservation resources by working with the WTCAC and various federal agencies, state and private partners. Below are highlights from key partners in how working with the WTCAC and Wisconsin Tribes extend natural resources on the landscape.

### USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

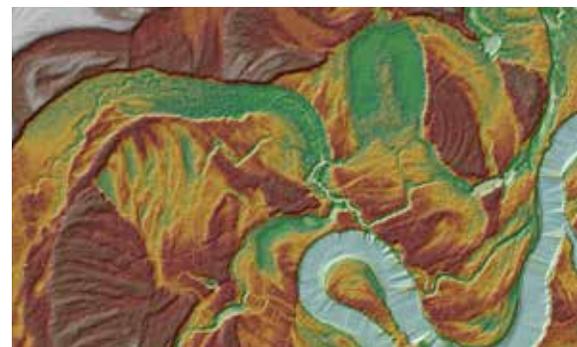
The NRCS has two existing agreements with the WTCAC. The objectives of the agreements are to facilitate an efficient means for the Wisconsin NRCS to consult with tribes on program policy and conservation practice standards to increase tribal participation in NRCS programs. The partners have a mutual interest in helping to bring about the conservation and wise use of land, water, wildlife and related resources on tribal lands in the Wisconsin. The partners also have a mutual interest in the furtherance of the USDA Farm Bill conservation programs.

These agreements enhance WTCAC's ability to meet the goals and objectives outlined in the WTCAC Strategic Plan, and each tribe's ability to effectively meet the resource concerns addressed within their tribal Integrated Resource Management Plans (IRMP). Consultation with tribes regarding program policy and conservation practice standards, made possible through funding provided by this agreement, will allow the NRCS to increase tribal participation in, and collaboration on conservation programs. The agreements will also address environmental quality issues on tribal lands. This will result in reduced soil erosion, improved soil health, improved water quality and quantity and enhanced wildlife habitat.

The cooperative agreements also increase staffing capacity to address natural resources concerns and priorities and enables the WTCAC to work with the eleven Wisconsin Tribes to implement trainings for tribal staff, increasing each tribe's capacity to complete natural resources, wetland and forestry planning. Through the NRCS partnership, the WTCAC is also enabled to provide technical assistance to the tribes to complete natural resource conservation plans and implement conservation and forestry practices. Finally, the agreements also leverage federal and non-federal financial and technical resources to address tribal natural resource concerns and priorities. NRCS conservation programs have improved significantly since 2001, when the Tribal Nations in Wisconsin worked collaboratively to form a Tribal Conservation Advisory Committee (TCAC).



*Photos: (Clockwise) Over 40 NRCS staff attended a tribal training hosted by the Red Cliff Band, seen here viewing the Spirit Island streambank stabilization site. Michelle Komiskey (left), NRCS District Conservationist, views a prairie restoration planting with Tribal staff at the Oneida Nation. Chris Borden (left), NRCS State Tribal Liaison, views construction at the Lac du Flambeau aquaculture ponds. LiDAR images, like the one shown of the Bad River floodplain, are an NRCS engineering tool tribes and conservation planners can use to plan plantings and other conservation practices on the landscape.*



## USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (CONT.)

Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils are crucial to improving NRCS programs in the following ways.

- TCACs provide info, analysis and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and programs;
- identify emerging natural resources concerns and program needs;
- recommend conservation practice standards and specifications;
- recommend state and national program policy based on resource data;
- assist the NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and
- identify tribal educational and producer training needs.

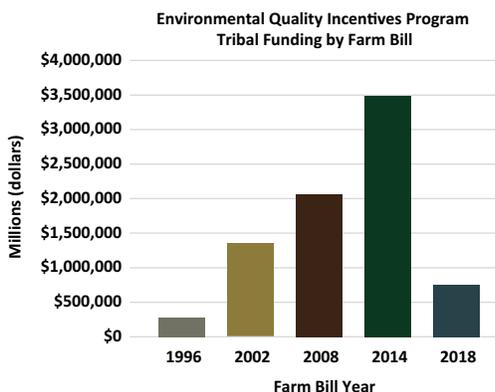
The WTCAC members have developed a detailed understanding of how the NRCS conservation programs work. This makes it possible for the Wisconsin NRCS to routinely incorporate specific suggestions from tribal staff to improve programs based on tribal concerns and perspectives.

The WTCAC's perspectives and technical expertise lead to the creation of standards and incentives for wild rice restoration and reintroduction of large woody materials to lakes. The tribal staffs then worked together to help the NRCS develop standards and incentives for building walleye rearing ponds to sustain the ecosystems of lakes in the Ceded Territories. The WTCAC and their partners are now working with the Wisconsin NRCS to incorporate climate change adaptation strategies to make NRCS programs more meaningful in improving the sustainability and resilience of ecosystems. Tribal Nations are planning to improve riparian forests and road stream crossings to adapt to future conditions. Increases in temperatures, larger storm events and the loss of riparian black ash riparian forests are expected to negatively affect cool and cold-water ecosystems.

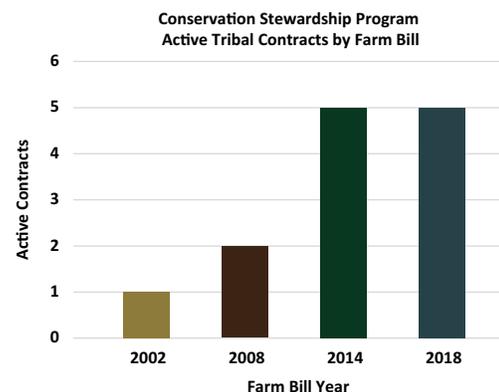
The WTCAC's focus on black ash is a good example of Council impact. In 2018, the WTCAC helped the Wisconsin NRCS develop EQIP standards and financial incentives for understory plantings in riparian black ash forests. The Stockbridge-Munsee Band staff carried out understory planting demonstrations, provided cost data for the development of the NRCS EQIP financial incentive and continues to monitor tree species survival.

The NRCS is working with the WTCAC to also promote Tribal use of the NRCS CSP. The NRCS has seen an increase in tribal participation of this program with each new Farm Bill. See Figure 2. The CSP is helping tribes build upon their existing conservation efforts while strengthening their operations. The program enhances resiliency to weather and market volatility, decreases need for agricultural inputs and improves wildlife habitat conditions.

The Council also invited the NRCS into their network of partners focused on the broader impacts of EAB. The NRCS is learning resource assessment and planting techniques from researchers. The NRCS also promotes availability of EQIP funding and NRCS conservation planning tools, like the use of LiDAR to identify favorable micro topographic sites for tree planting. The WTCAC has done an outstanding job and serves as a model for how Tribal Nations and USDA agencies can work together to improve programs and make them more meaningful and accessible to Tribal Nations.



**Figure 1.** The NRCS Wisconsin EQIP funding by Farm Bill year for Tribal Nations in Wisconsin. Note the increase in tribal participation for each Farm Bill released. Please also note, the 2018 Farm Bill is current and will display higher totals when it is complete in the future.



**Figure 2.** The NRCS CSP active tribal contracts by Farm Bill year. Note the increase in participation with each Farm Bill. The 2018 Farm Bill is current and will display higher totals when it is complete in the future.

## USDA ANIMAL PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE (APHIS) WILDLIFE SERVICE

*Ma'iingan*, or the grey wolf, is a prominent fixture of *Anishinaabe* culture. The grey wolf is representative of one of the five great clans of the *Anishinaabe* and served as a companion to man in his early days on Turtle Island, otherwise known as North America. These and other facets of *Ma'iingan's* role in the *Anishinaabe* worldview were the focal point of a symposium with USDA APHIS Wildlife Service (APHIS WS), the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Council and the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

Sharing this cultural knowledge with APHIS WS has helped the agency better understand how their wolf management impacts not just the wolves themselves, but the *Anishinaabe* with whom they share a strong cultural tie. This basis of shared understanding between APHIS WS and Bad River has improved cooperative efforts in their conservation management of *Ma'iingan* going forward. APHIS WS has regularly partnered with Bad River for radio collaring and monitoring efforts of wolves in northern Wisconsin.

Other work by APHIS WS to support and promote Wisconsin Native American culture included beaver management to promote better regrowth of *manoomin*, or wild rice, and hosting a yearly summer program for Wisconsin Tribal youth called Safeguarding Natural Heritage, since 2007. In 2018 and 2019, the Safeguarding Natural Heritage program was held at the College of the Menominee Nation in Kenosha, providing Native American youth a two-week opportunity to explore careers in plant and animal science, wildlife management and agribusiness. In 2020, APHIS WS also partnered with WTCAC to support an extended opportunity for tribal youth to gain career experience in a week-long summer program.

## USDA FARM SERVICE AGENCY

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) oversees the Conservation Reserve Program, which pulls environmentally sensitive agricultural lands out of production and places them in conservation cover. In 2020, the FSA was instrumental in developing relief packages for agricultural producers affected by Covid 19. FSA was successful in efforts to include agricultural products produced specifically by Tribal Nations, such as maple sap/syrup, wild rice, aquaculture raised walleye and others in the second round of relief funding.



*Photos: (Clockwise) The grey wolf, shown here on forest land, is a prominent fixture in Anishinaabe culture. Maple syrup production is prominent among Wisconsin Tribes and USDA offers programs and resources for tribal and non-producers. Manoomin, or wild rice regrowth is a top priority for many Wisconsin Tribes.*



## U.S. FOREST SERVICE

A Memorandum of Understanding was recently completed between WTCAC and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which outlines a framework for their partnership. Topics addressed include knowledge sharing, project facilitation, technology transfer, training and financial assistance. One such example highlighting the collaboration between these two organizations has been the WTCAC Student Employee Program. Funding from the USFS supports Native American college students as summer employees who apply through WTCAC for a 10-week opportunity. The USFS also assisted the Mole Lake Tribal Nation with wetland restoration efforts on their reservation and hosted a two-day pesticide training workshop with DATCP, which was held at the college of the Menominee Nation.

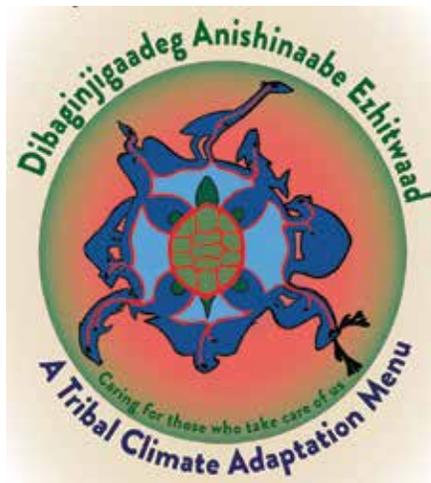
A project highlight includes partnering with its Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science division with Lac du Flambeau, Menominee and GLIFWC to help develop *Dibaginjigaadeg Anishinaabe Ezhitwaad* (Doing Something Based on the *Anishinaabe* Way), which is a climate change adaptation menu tailored to suit the values, customs, needs and institutions of Tribal Nations. The menu contains a list of general and specific adaptations to climate change that can be easily modified to suit the unique situation of a given tribe.

## USDA NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service provides useful information to tribes and other agricultural producers through their census. Their most recent census in 2017 featured Wisconsin statewide data to include 222 Native American agricultural producers operating 48,615 acres of land with a combined market value of products and government payments totaling \$221.8 million. This information gives context to the general public concerning tribal lands and their positive impact on the agricultural industry in Wisconsin.

## USDA RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY

The USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) is responsible for overseeing the federal government's crop insurance program. Recently, the RMA hosted three Native American interns, one each from the Oneida, Menominee and Navajo/Dine nations at their regional headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota. This regional office covers the state of Wisconsin. Over the course of their internship, the three Native American interns shared insight and experiences with the RMA on how their programs could better serve tribes, while the interns gained valuable experience with ArcGIS in addition to actuarial data.



*Photos: (Left to Right) Mole Lake Band Tribal elders plant wild rice seed on Rice Lake. The U.S. Forest Service logo for the Tribal Climate Adaptation Menu. The U.S. Forest Service partnered with the Mole Lake Band to restore a wetland area and improve wild rice habitat on 30 acres of Rice Lake.*

## USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Projects involving Wisconsin Tribal Nations include business programs, housing programs, community programs, water and environmental programs and rural utilities. With the Forest County Potawatomi farm, *Bodwewadmi Ktegan*, funding from the USDA Rural Development was used to promote locally raised meat and eggs for tribal members, as well as help expand farm operations and increase economic viability.

## WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) covers a wide range of programs and activities in its work. One of DATCP's areas of partnership is the monitoring and management of insect pests and diseases in partnership with the USDA APHIS, WTCAC and Tribal Nations. DATCP also supports efforts in mitigating EAB and Oak Wilt. In February 2020, the DATCP partnered with the WTCAC and the Produce Safety Alliance to put on a Tribal Food Safety Workshop, hosted by the Oneida Nation. During the workshop, participants from the Tribal Nations of Wisconsin exchanged knowledge and insight about food sovereignty and food safety, learned post-harvest handling and sanitation procedures for crops and how to develop farm safety food plans.



*Photos: (Clockwise) Rural Development partnered with the Forest County Potawatomi farm to promote locally raised eggs available. The DATCP provides workshops to tribes members on farm safety, post-harvest handling and more. The DATCP supports efforts to mitigate Emerald Ash Borer, an insect that damages ash species, like the tree damage shown here.*

## OTHER WTCAC PARTNERS

The WTCAC works with many key federal USDA and state partners in Wisconsin. These partnerships help extend conservation resources and provide technical and financial assistance directly to the 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin. The WTCAC also partners with many other outside organizations to further their mission. They work with non-profits, schools, private associations and more. The WTCAC would like to thank the following organizations for their partnership in helping support land conservation with Wisconsin Tribal Nations.

Other WTCAC partners include:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- College of the Menominee Nation
- Environmental Protection Agency Region 5
- Forest County Potawatomi Foundation
- Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission
- Indian Nation Conservation Alliance
- Intertribal Agricultural Council
- Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- University of Wisconsin College of Ag and Life Sciences
- Wisconsin Lakes Association
- Wisconsin Wetlands Association



*Photos: (Clockwise) An Oneida Nation Tribal elder explains the importance of white corn husking and drying in tribal culture. Partners collaborate to restore Tribal natural resources, including reservation waters, like the ones shown here, which are vital to tribal culture and food sovereignty. WTCAC partners collaborate to restore a wetland on Oneida Nation land.*



# Your Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Partnership Leaders

The WTCAC and the USDA NRCS in Wisconsin, partner with Wisconsin Tribes to put conservation on the landscape. These efforts would not be possible without the partnership and assistance of key leaders from both organizations. Below are leadership contacts for the WTCAC and the NRCS, who work daily in partnership with Wisconsin Tribes to make our lands more sustainable for the future.

## WISCONSIN TRIBAL CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



### JEFF MEARS

Phone: (920) 639-7457  
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Jeff Mears has served as the Executive Director for WTCAC since June 15, 2020. He is an environmental professional with more than 25 years' experience in environmental, land and natural resources program management. Jeff is a member of the Oneida Nation and most recently served as Deputy Director of Environmental Health & Safety for the Oneida Nation. Jeff has a Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences with a minor in Chemistry from Northern Illinois University and a Masters of Public Administration from the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh. He has worked with tribal, state and federal governments and served on numerous committees, such as the chair of the Oneida Land Commission, co-chair of the EPA Tribal Science Council, membership on the EPA Regional Tribal Operating Committee and workgroup chair on the National Advisory Council on Environmental Policy and Technology.



### LACEY HILL KASTERN

Phone: (715) 862-2797  
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Lacey Hill Kastern serves as the Deputy Director and Tribal Pest Survey Specialist for the WTCAC. She started as an employee in 2019 and served as a WTCAC board member and co-chair of the forestry sub-committee for eight years prior. Lacey has spent the past eleven years working with tribes and natural resources management. She has worked numerous positions over the years with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, United States Forest Service, and also the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission as an invasive species coordinator. She also spent nine years as the Wildlife Program Manager for the Bad River Tribe. Lacey has a Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Ecology: Research and Management and Biology from the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. She is currently pursuing her Master of Science degree in Organizational Leadership from Norwich University.

## WISCONSIN TRIBAL CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (CONT.)

### JERRY THOMPSON

Phone: (715) 821-0555  
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Jerry Thompson serves as the Outreach and Education Specialist for WTCAC. Jerry is a Vietnam Era Veteran and after his service, attended University of Wisconsin—River Falls. Jerry has a Bachelor of Science in Scientific Land Management, Wildlife Biology and Soil Science. Jerry had a 30-year career with the USDA NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in Wisconsin, a District Conservationist in Hawaii, a Navajo Nation Tribal Liaison and Supervisory District Conservationist, Wisconsin Tribal Liaison and Oneida Nation District Conservationist, USDA NRCS National Tribal Liaison and concluded his career as the Northwest Area Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Wisconsin. Jerry then served as the WTCAC Executive Director for 5 years until retiring from that position in 2015.

### JONATHAN PRUITT

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Jonathan Pruitt serves as the new Tribal Resource Conservationist for the WTCAC. A native of Lansing, Michigan, he graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Science in Fisheries and Wildlife Management in 2010. In 2016, he joined AmeriCorps as a service member with the Ingham County Land Bank's Garden Program, offering technical service to many of the program's members. After completing his AmeriCorps service, he began graduate studies at the University of Michigan, completing a Masters in Sustainability and Environment in 2019. Shortly after graduation, he took an internship position with The Alliance for a Sustainable Amazon in Peru. Now that he's back stateside, he looks forward to working with Wisconsin Tribes to meet their stewardship and conservation goals.

### TOM MELNARIK

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Tom Melnarik serves as the Civil Engineering Technician for the WTCAC. Tom attended Fox Valley Technical College and earned a degree in Natural Resources. He was hired by the Soil Conservation Service, now NRCS, in Eau Claire as a Soil Conservation Technician to implement the 1985 Farm Bill. Tom also worked for Kewaunee County Land Conservation and the Wisconsin Conservation Corps, a job training program for young adults. He also spent 16 years working with the NRCS as a Soil Conservation Technician before recently retiring. While working for the NRCS, Tom was introduced to Tribal cultures, traditions and values, while assisting with putting many conservation practices on the land. Most notably, Tom was the lead designer and construction inspector for fish hatcheries in Mole Lake and Lac du Flambeau and designed the Lac Courte Oreilles facility. Tom enjoys working with Wisconsin's Tribes to meet their natural resource goals.

## USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE TRIBAL LIAISONS



### CHRIS BORDEN

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Chris Borden serves on the Wisconsin NRCS State Programs staff as a Soil Conservationist. He also serves as the State NRCS Tribal Liaison and the NRCS Liaison to the Ho-Chunk Nation. Chris has worked for the NRCS since 1987. Prior to coming to Wisconsin, he served as an NRCS District Conservationist in Illinois and Minnesota. Chris also served as a Peace Corps Volunteer working with Guaymi and Embera farmers in the southern Panama Canal Watershed. He enjoys his current position partnering with WTCAC and others to meet the conservation needs of the 11 federally recognized Wisconsin Tribes.



### GARY HAUGHN

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Gary Haughn is the Ashland USDA Service Center District Conservationist for the NRCS. He works with two tribes (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and Bad River). Gary started his NRCS career in Illinois, with 10 years of service working on agriculture production, storm damage, Mississippi River flood relief, Lake Springfield watershed management and research and experimental EQIP on irrigation management. Moving to Ashland in 2000, Gary began service to the two tribal entities in northern Wisconsin. He has spent the past 20 years building WTCAC collaboration with the 11 Tribes in Wisconsin. Gary has worked on several projects over the years including walleye fish hatcheries, wetland for wildlife and effluent remediation, community garden management, high tunnels and stream bank protection. He will continue to service resource needs to meet the cultural and diverse concerns of the tribes.



### RON SPIERING

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Ron Spiering is the Spooner USDA Service Center District Conservationist for NRCS, servicing Burnett, Sawyer and Washburn counties. He is also the Tribal Liaison for two tribes (Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and the St. Croix Chippewa Indians). Ron Graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources Management from the University of Minnesota—Crookston. He started his career with Minnesota NRCS in 2004 as a Soil Conservationist and he accepted his first position as a District Conservationist in Alpena, Michigan, in 2009 before joining the Wisconsin NRCS team in 2014. Ron has assisted the Tribes in developing two aquaculture facilities, forest management and enhancing wildlife habitat on tribal lands.

## USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE TRIBAL LIAISONS (CONT.)



### MICHAEL STINEBRINK

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*Email: michael.stinebrink@usda.gov*

Michael Stinebrink is the Rhinelander USDA Service Center District Conservationist (DC) for the NRCS. Since 2010, he has worked with three tribes (Forest County Potawatomi, Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and Sokaogon Chippewa Community) providing conservation technical and financial assistance. He manages the delivery of NRCS conservation programs throughout Florence, Forest, Oneida and Vilas counties. Michael has assisted the Lac du Flambeau and Sokaogon Chippewa install aquaculture ponds for raising walleye and other species, the Forest County Potawatomi improve vegetable and grazing production and all three tribes in sustainable management of their forest resources. He has served as a DC for more than 12 years. Previously, as a Resource Conservationist for over 4 years, he provided assistance to Wisconsin cranberry growers. He started his NRCS career in California, as a Soil Conservationist, working with pear, walnut and wine grape growers. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in Watershed Management and History from the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point.



### SHERRIE ZENK-REED

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Sherrie Zenk-Reed is the Shawano County USDA Service Center Acting District Conservationist for the NRCS. She works with three tribes (Oneida Nation, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians) providing conservation technical and financial assistance. After graduating with a Master's Degree in Wildlife Management from University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point, Sherrie started her career working as a Wildlife Biologist for the Army Corps of Engineers in St. Louis, Missouri. Wanting to be closer to family, she moved back to Wisconsin in 1998 to work as a Soil Conservationist for NRCS. In 2001, she accepted the Tribal Liaison position working with the Menominee and Stockbridge-Munsee Tribes, and in 2015, she became the Tribal Liaison for Oneida Nation.

*Thank you Wisconsin*

Tribes and partners for  
your conservation efforts.



*Wild rice thrives on tribal lands due to conservation efforts.  
Photo courtesy of Daniel Cornelius.*



**Photos:** (Top to Bottom) NRCS staff and a tribes member inspect crops. Participants attend a forest habitat type training at the Bad River Reservation. Volunteers assist in construction of the Spirit Island streambank stabilization project on the Red Cliff Reservation. Extended growth walleye is seen being released into St. Croix Tribal waters. Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal members demonstrate tribal dances to NRCS tribal conservation training participants. Cattle graze on reservation lands in fall. NRCS Wisconsin State Conservationist Angela Biggs (left) views the Spirit Island streambank stabilization project on the Red Cliff Reservation.

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**Back Cover Photos:** (Clockwise) Kakahunike, Vickie Cornelius, of the Bear Clan, Oneida Nation, supports conservation education by sharing her passion with tribal youth. Tribal members assist with white corn husking after harvest amid the Covid 19 pandemic. The WTCAC helps restore tribal lands, like this forest at the Oneida Nation, that Tehahukótha, Randy Cornelius of the Bear Clan, visits often to gather mushrooms. Oneida Nation youth view a recently restored wetland.



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