



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians

Executive Branch of Tribal Government

Office of the Chief Executive

Via E-mail

April 9, 2026

To: Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR)

Re: Letter of Support for "Milkweed Renaissance" Proposal

Dear Members of the Commission:

On behalf of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, I am writing to express support for the proposal "Milkweed Renaissance: Conservation-Compatible Milkweed Supply Chain," led by Dr. Wenqing Zhang at the University of Minnesota – Duluth.

The Band supports this project because it advances a stewardship-based approach to conservation that recognizes the importance of protecting native plant communities, pollinator habitat, and the ecological relationships that sustain them. Milkweed plays a vital role in monarch life cycles and broader biodiversity, and efforts to conserve it should be guided by respect for place, long-term ecological care, and responsible harvesting practices.

This proposal's focus on a stewardship-first, conservation-compatible supply chain is especially important. By including milkweed seed and plant production along with pod and fiber/floss pathways, the project creates a framework that can support habitat protection while also identifying appropriate economic opportunities. We appreciate that the proposal recognizes existing businesses, organizations, and community participants already involved in parts of this work and seeks to connect them within a scalable model rather than replace or ignore their contributions.

We also value the proposal's inclusion of a dedicated seed-processing component, including cleaning, testing, cold stratification, storage, and related value-adding processes. These functions can improve the quality and usefulness of seed for restoration and propagation while helping ensure that any collection and production activities are grounded in clear protocols and stewardship safeguards.

The proposed AI-supported field decision and reporting tool is another promising element. A tool that helps participants document milkweed condition, upload photos, assess pod maturity using protocol-based guidance, and generate real-time field reports could strengthen stewardship and support more consistent harvesting practices. If implemented respectfully and collaboratively, such a tool could also improve monitoring and help ensure that collection decisions are guided by ecological conditions and project standards.

Letter of Support from MLBO Chief Executive Virgil Wind
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We are encouraged by the project's intention to engage partners in ways that support conservation, stewardship, and long-term public benefit. We believe this proposal has the potential to contribute meaningfully to habitat protection, biodiversity, restoration capacity, and responsible community participation across Minnesota.

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Virgil Wind
Chief Executive

CC:

Kelly Applegate, MLBO Commissioner of Natural Resources