



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians

*Executive Branch of Tribal Government
Office of the Chief Executive*

Via E-mail

April 16, 2026

To: Tribal Nations Leaders

Re: Invitation to Connect on Protecting our Shared Waters

Dear Tribal Leaders,

I'm writing to you to extend an invitation for your Nation to engage in a coordinated effort focused on protecting the waters we share.

As Tribal Nations, we carry a shared responsibility to care for the lands and waters that sustain our people. What happens in one watershed does not stay there. These connected waters flow across our territories and communities, linking our cultures and futures.

Through our [Water Over Nickel initiative](#), the Mille Lacs Band has been working to protect clean water, natural resources, and cultural lifeways from the risks associated with proposed nickel mining in our region.

In that spirit, we have begun a parallel effort to convene Tribal Nations and trusted organizations across watersheds. At a time when increased interest in mining is placing new pressure on our lands and waters, we see a need to come together around shared principles that reflect our responsibilities as stewards.

This "Convening Across Watersheds" approach is not about a single issue or project, but about building long-term alignment grounded in our shared responsibility to protect the waters that sustain us. This work is beginning to take shape, and we believe it is important that Tribal Nations are aware of and able to engage in a way that reflects your priorities.

As part of this effort, we have begun developing a set of [guiding principles](#) and [ways of working together](#) to align and strengthen our collective approach across watersheds. **We would value your perspective in informing this work, ensuring it reflects our shared values while respecting the distinct priorities and sovereignty of each Nation.**

We recognize and respect the sovereignty of each Nation. There is no expectation tied to this "Convening Across Watersheds" invitation. Rather, we hope to connect, listen, and explore how we might support one another in protecting our waters in ways that align with your Nation's priorities.

To support coordination moving forward, we have included your natural resources staff on this message. At your direction, we anticipate any next steps or technical discussions would happen

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staff-to-staff. If it would be helpful, I welcome the opportunity to connect directly about this effort or Water Over Nickel, or to have our Commissioner of Natural Resources Kelly Applegate follow up to share additional context on this effort.

We appreciate your leadership and stewardship, and we welcome your guidance on how you would like to engage.

Miigwech,



Virgil Wind
Chief Executive

CC:

Kelly Applegate, Commissioner of Natural Resources, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
Perry Bunting, Director of Environmental Programs, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
Katy O'Neill, Account Director, Beehive Strategic Communications
Chris Holms, Director, Bois Forte Department of Natural Resources
Arianna Northbird, Environmental Program Manager, Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior
Chippewa
Vallen Cook, Executive Director of Natural Resources, Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe
Brandy Toft, Environmental Director, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
Deb Dirlam, Director of Environmental Program, Lower Sioux Indian Community of Minnesota
Gabriel Miller, Program Manager, Prairie Island Indian Community
John LeBlanc, Director of Environmental Program, Red Lake Band of Chippewa
Scott Walz, Director of Natural Resources, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
Jerry BigEagle, Environmental Director, Upper Sioux Community
Dustin Roy, Director, White Earth Band of Ojibwe
Luke Warnsholz, Executive Director, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe