



## *Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians*

*Executive Branch of Tribal Government*

*Office of the Chief Executive*

June 18, 2025

Dear Mille Lacs Band Members,

Aaniin. After nearly a year in office, my staff and I—as well as the entire administration—have been working diligently to settle into this new role. The Mille Lacs Band remains strong in federal, state, and local relations. We have emphasized maintaining our relationships, as well as fostering new ones. We have also dug into various issues facing Band government, taken our time to fully assess, and now I would like to address a couple of very important developments.

As Band members may or may not be aware, the Band's business revenues have been in decline for several years (more than 18 percent since 2011). When I swore my oath, I promised that I would do the hardest work possible, while looking out for future generations and the long-term success of the Band. Staying on the previous course was not a viable option for success, and new opportunities had to be considered. Imagine taking office as Chief Executive and being confronted with the challenge of carrying on all government programs and services directly provided to Band members while facing declining revenues. The way I see it, this was one of the most important issues that needed to be addressed.

Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures has taken many necessary steps to move the Band in the right direction. These decisions did not come easy, and all change is difficult. That being said, I am pleased to provide an update on some of the exciting work that is being accomplished. This letter does not encompass all the hard work that is being done across the Band, but does highlight a couple of important items of which Band members need to be aware: a partnership with the Minnesota Wild and the Band's growing cannabis business. I want to be clear and transparent, as I know many of you will have questions. You deserve more context than what will be shared in media stories.

### **Minnesota Wild Partnership**

Like many casinos across the country, Grand Casinos have seen declining visitation in recent years. The market is more competitive, and traditional advertising methods no longer reach people the way they used to. Within the coming days, Grand Casinos will announce a major new marketing partnership with the Minnesota Wild, securing the naming rights to the arena formerly known as the Xcel Energy Center in Saint Paul. This is a bold move—one that will elevate the Grand Casino brand and open doors to new opportunities.

This partnership puts the Grand Casino brand in front of millions of Minnesotans and visitors—every time they attend a game, a concert, or even scroll through social media. It's a way to build lasting brand affinity in the state's largest market, and a long-term investment in the continued success of one of our most important enterprises. The partnership also puts the Grand Casino

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brand in the national spotlight. That's a huge leap forward with respect to how we market our gaming operations.

Importantly, no tribal government dollars were used for this partnership. The funding came entirely from Grand Casinos' existing marketing budget—money that was already set aside for brand promotion. This partnership simply represents a shifting of marketing resources that will now be used in a smarter, more strategic way.

As one of your elected leaders, it is my job to provide services to Band members, defend our sovereignty, and represent the Band in government-to-government relations. Meanwhile, the Band's corporate enterprises—like Grand Casinos—are focused on generating revenue to support the Band's economic future. To that end, the Minnesota Wild Partnership was proposed by the leadership team at Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures, then reviewed and approved by the Corporate Board of Directors in late April. Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures spent more than a year negotiating the agreement and could not disclose the details until now as the result of a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

### What Are the Benefits of the Minnesota Wild Partnership?

This is far more than just a logo on a building. Some of the most important benefits include:

- **Telling the Band's story.** Dedicated space within the arena will introduce millions of visitors to our history, the beauty of our culture, and the resilience of the Mille Lacs Band, helping build broader understanding and respect.
- **Protecting our gaming interests.** This partnership establishes Grand Casinos as the Minnesota Wild's exclusive gaming partner; furthermore, it ensures our interests remain aligned should state policy on sports betting evolve in the future.
- **Supporting our hotels.** This partnership will drive increased overnight stays at the InterContinental and DoubleTree in downtown St. Paul—including bookings from visiting NHL teams and fans.
- **Building long-term value.** This is a strategic investment in visibility and enterprise growth, strengthening our capacity to reinvest in Band priorities.

Without innovative approaches like this partnership, Grand Casinos' customer base risks significant decline over the coming decade. This collaboration helps safeguard gaming revenues and aims to ensure a strong economic future for the Band.

### Cannabis

I would also like to take this opportunity to provide an update on the Band's entry into the emerging cannabis market. Approximately 18 months ago, the Band leadership decided to enter into the state of Minnesota's budding cannabis market. The Band made a substantial investment into a state-of-the-art cultivation facility which is now proudly staffed with a workforce of more than 60 percent Band members. The Band's cannabis business, Lake Leaf Cultivation, has now harvested hundreds of pounds of cannabis flower and is entering full operational capacity.

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Lake Leaf also recently began its extraction process. Distillate is currently being used to fill vape cartridges and production of edibles will begin shortly thereafter. This will significantly increase the types of products Lake Leaf will be selling on the market.

Lake Leaf has made substantial sales of flower and pre-rolls to tribal dispensaries owned by the Prairie Island Indian Community and the Fond du Lac Band. Repeat sales will be executed soon. Additionally, Lake Leaf expects to expand its sales statewide in the near future.

The Band has entered the final stages of negotiating its cannabis compact with the state of Minnesota. Once the compact is complete, Lake Leaf will be able to sell its products to any state-licensed dispensary. As Minnesota just recently completed its lottery for dispensary licenses, Lake Leaf products will soon expand across the entire state.

To take advantage of early access to the market, Lake Leaf Retail has begun opening temporary dispensaries. As of this writing, the temporary dispensary in Mille Lacs has opened softly and will undergo its Grand Opening on Friday, June 20. Lake Leaf Retail also expects the temporary dispensary in Hinckley to conduct a soft opening on or around July 14. The Band did appropriate funds for three temporary cannabis dispensaries, so hopefully we can establish an additional facility in District 2. These temporary outlets will allow the Band to capture revenue while its permanent retail outlets are under consideration for future construction.

### **Looking Ahead**

Since Grand Casino Mille Lacs opened in 1991, the Band has steadily strengthened its financial foundation. That strength has been essential to protecting our sovereignty and investing in our future. We've diversified, adapted, and evolved—always with a long-term vision of prosperity and self-determination. And despite the challenges and setbacks I have outlined within this letter, our financial position remains strong. My priority is to make sure that per capita and general welfare exclusion payments, together with our Band programs and services, continue to serve our members effectively. I am dedicated to preserving these benefits and ensuring they remain meaningful.

We didn't get here alone. Our progress has been possible because of bold leadership, the support of our community, and strong partnerships across Greater Minnesota. This new partnership with the Minnesota Wild, along with the development of new revenue streams through wholesale and retail cannabis, represent a couple of major steps forward — ones that reflect the strength, vision, and potential of our people. Miigwech for taking the time learn more.

Sincerely,



Virgil Wind  
Chief Executive

***“We remain the Non-Removable Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe today and forevermore.”***



**GRAND CASINO**  
MILLE LACS  
HINCKLEY



*"This partnership is more than a marketing decision — it's a bold signal that the Mille Lacs Band builds, leads, and invests with vision. It puts our story of resilience and innovation in front of millions, while creating long-term value for our people and enterprises. We didn't get here alone, and this moment reflects the strength of our partnerships and the power of what we can achieve together!"*

Chief Executive Virgil Wind