fROM THE oCTOBER, 2023 INAAJIMOWIN:

ENROLLMENT POPULATION STUDY WILL PREDICT THE FUTURE FOR THE MILLE LACS BAND

*Surveys coming this month*

Important surveys will be coming into Band member mailboxes in early October, asking Band members to fill out information about their blood quantum and their children's blood quantum. The Wilder Foundation Research team, which the Band has hired, will use data from these surveys to conduct a population study. At the end of the study, Band members will receive a report that predicts whether our Band membership population will increase, decrease, or stay the same if changes are made to current enrollment criteria or if no changes are made. It is crucial that as many Band members as possible fill out these surveys and return them. **A $50 Incentive** Is available to Band Members who complete and turn in their surveys to Wilder.

**What’s going on at the MCT with Enrollment changes?**

For several decades, there has been talk in the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT) about allowing MCT members to vote on changing the criteria a person must meet to be eligible for MCT membership. Right now, a person must have at least one-quarter (25%) MCT blood and have at least one parent enrolled with the Mille Lacs Band to be considered eligible for getting enrolled with the MCT as a Mille Lacs Band Member. Blood from other MCT Bands counts for meeting the one-quarter cut-off, but blood from other tribes does not. Tribes across the country have been struggling with the blood quantum issue as their enrollment sharply declines, to the point where some tribes might not exist in the future unless they make changes. This topic was reignited at the MCT in 2015, when the smaller bands which are concerned about their fast-declining population pushed the Tribal Executive Committee (TEC) to adopt two resolutions: 3115 and 3215. Resolution 3115 called for an election on whether other U.S. and Canada First Nations Anishinaabe blood should be counted toward meeting the one-quarter cut-off, and Resolution 3215 called for an election on allowing must other U.S. Anishinaabe blood to count toward the cut-off.

**What would Resolution 3215 do?**

Resolution 3215 is the only resolution being considered for a special election at this time by the MCT, because allowing "First Nations blood" is legally problematic for the federal government. A special election would allow all eligible MCT voters to vote on whether or not they want "other Anishinaabe blood" from Anishinaabe tribes outside the MCT (like Red Lake, Turtle Mountain or other Anishinaabe tribes in states like Wisconsin and Michigan) to be counted toward their membership in the MCT. The issue was pushed to the back-burner after new members were elected to the TEC in 2016. The current TEC has revived this issue, and has requested approval from the Secretary of Interior to hold a special election to see if MCT Members want this change, but this has been a slow process.

**Wasn’t there already a study by Wilder Research?**

Yes. Back in 2012, the MCT hired Wilder Research to conduct a population study of the entire MCT. About 100 Band members from each of the six MCT Bands filled out blood quantum surveys, very similar to the sample survey on page 11. After Wilder received the completed surveys, researchers uploaded all of this data. They used scientific models to predict the future birth-rates and future blood quantum of the next several generations of the six Bands.

**If Wilder did a study in 2013, why is Mille Lacs doing this study again?**

Because at Chief Executive Benjamin's community meetings on this topic, Band members asked for an updated study that uses current enrollment data, just for the Mille Lacs Band, and a much larger sampling of Band Members than the 100 Band members who participated in the first 2013 study. This new study will arm Band members with more accurate population projections that will help them decide how to vote if asked to do so in future elections.

**What will the final report look like?**

It will look very similar to the format of the 2013 report with the same categories of information but with new data that is only about the Mille Lacs Band. Anyone wanting to see MCT's 2013 report can view it on the MCT's website. You can read the 2013 report by visiting the MCT's website and clicking "MCT Population Projections" under the "Quick Links" option on the MCT's home page. There Is also Information about how they conducted the study. As an alternative, go directly to https://www.mnchippewatribe.org/pdf/MCT%20Population%20Projections.pdf.

**What kind of information can Band members expect to see in the report?**

Just like the 2013 report, Band members will be able to see predictions about what is most likely to happen to our Band population every 10 years if the MCT continued with the current one-quarter (25% ) blood quantum requirement with only MCT blood counted toward the one-quarter requirement. The report will also predict what might happen if other possible changes were made to enrollment:

**(1) Reducing the blood quantum requirement from 1/4th to 1/8th;**

**(2) Allowing other Anishinaabe blood from any other Anishinaabe tribe to count toward the 25% (1/4) blood requirement;**

**(3) Allowing any other blood from a federally-recognized tribe to count toward the 25% blood quantum requirement; or,**

**(4) Getting rid of blood quantum altogether and using a lineal descendancy system, which Red Lake just did, which would allow many current and future descendants to enroll.**

**What did the 2013 Wilder study show about Mille Lacs?**

It concluded that if no changes were made to enrollment in 2013, there would be a brief period of continued growth, followed by a sharp decline over the next 100 years because fewer children of Band members would be eligible for enrollment. The study will only be successful Band Members complete and return their surveys to the Wilder Research team.

**What about the confidentiality of the surveys, and who will see them?**

Nobody from the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe will ever see your completed surveys; your responses are 100% confidential. The Surveys will be mailed to you from the Wilder Foundation, and they will be mailed back to the Wilder Foundation in a postage-paid envelope. Only the researchers who are inputting the blood quantum data will ever see or touch the surveys. After the final report is generated, all surveys will be destroyed by Wilder.

**If the surveys are confidential, why are my enrollment number and address being requested?**

Your enrollment number is your unique identifying number and is being requested so Wilder knows that only one survey was returned for each adult Band member. Filling in your name and address are completely optional, but Wilder needs to give the Mille Lacs BAnd the addresses of any Band Member who wants to receive a $50 gift for filling out the survey. Wilder will keep a record of everyone who completed the survey and tell the Band the names and addresses of people who should be mailed gift cards.

**Doesn’t the Mille Lacs Band Enrollment Department and the MCT already have our blood quantum information?**

Yes, but the MLB Enrollments office and the MCT only have a record of each Band member's MCT blood. Many Band members and their children have blood from other Bands like St. Croix, LCO, Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, and others, but that blood is not counted toward the 25% cut-off to be enrolled in the MCT. To predict how big or small the impact might be on the Band of allowing "other Anishinaabe blood" to count toward the one-quarter cut-off, Wilder needs to know how many Band members and their children have other Anishinaabe blood, including first generation descendants. This will help predict future birth-rates and the future blood quantum of the next several generations. Band members will also be asked about their blood quantum from other federally recognized tribes like Oneida, Standing Rock, Choctaw, or any of the other 580 Indian tribes in the United States.

**If the MCT membership votes to allow "other Anishinaabe blood" to count toward enrollment, what would that mean for MLB members?**

Let's say there is a Mille Lacs Band child with one parent who is one-half (50%) Mille Lacs Band and a Mille Lacs Band Member, and one parent who is one-half (50%) Turtle Mountain and zero MCT blood. Even though the child of those two parents is 50% Native American, the MCT records will only show that child to be 25% because the Turtle Mountain blood is not counted. This means that when this child grows up to have children of her own, her children may not be eligible for enrollment with the Mille Lacs Band because MCT records would show that child to be just one-eighth (12.5%), which is less than the one-quarter cut-off. If the Turtle Mountain blood were counted, the child would have 50% blood quantum on their record, and her future child would be one-quarter. More people would be eligible for enrollment In the near future, but the next generation will be In the same position that the MCT finds Itself In today.

**Will any questions ask my opinion about changes?**

There is one open-ended question, where Band Members can share any thoughts they want to share, and one opinion question is being asked. That question asks Band Members whether think the approximate 4,900 Mille Lacs Band should have to follow whatever enrollment criteria the 41,000 MCT Members vote on so that all Bands follow the same criteria, or whether Band members believe that only the Mille Lacs Band voters should decide what enrollment criteria should be for Mille Lacs.

**What is the timeline for this project and who is in charge?**

The TEC previously agreed that there would be not be an election until a massive educational campaign was done by the MCT. That has yet to happen, so Chief Executive Benjamin took it upon herself to hold community and Elder in-person and zoom meetings to discuss enrollments with Band members for the past two years and share the 2013 Wilder report. During those meetings, Band members requested that the 2013 Wilder study be updated for Mille Lacs. The date for a special election has yet to be determined. MCT staff have Indicated there are barriers at the federal level that are proving difficult to resolve. The Chief Executive's Office is paying for this population study from pre-existing funds in the office budget, but Wilder Research is in charge of the study and the surveys. The Band's only role is to tell Band members about the surveys, and mail gift cards to the people Wilder says completed and turned in surveys. Wilder has an outstanding reputation and has become the trusted go-to for tribes across the United States who want these kinds of studies, and recently completed a similar study recently for Red Lake Nation.

**Please look for your surveys, complete them as best you can, and return them. There may also be an on-line option to complete surveys, so watch for updates about that as well. Miigwech!**