

Women Elder's Nibi/Mni Council – October, 2013

The second Women Elder's Nibi/Mni Council meeting was held in conjunction with the third Nibi and Manoomin symposium held at Mille Lacs during the fall of 2013. The focus of this conversation was on gathering information about creating water research centers on our tribal nations. All participants of the symposium were invited to the discussion.

Should there be one center or several centers across each reservation?

There was agreement that tribes must drive the creation of any water center. There is a water center at the University of Minnesota that has a federal component, an agricultural component. At this time, for example, White Earth has no lab and needs to ship water samples off reservation for analysis. Having a lab on reservations is important. Pollution affects medicine plants - they absorb pesticides and other toxicants. Challenge to doing lab work: Can tribal government or tribal colleges use National Science Foundation (NSF) or other federal dollars use funds to get the equipment. However, it is not feasible for any one tribe to get capacity to test for every possible thing. Arsenic is naturally occurring, was in wells and a common well, healing water from flowing wells. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) said we need to seal wells as arsenic is a little elevated but the well is sacred. Take the idea to tribal colleges so that they blend two ways of seeing and knowing to strike balance.

Too often, tribal communities are overwhelmed with issues of water.

We have to start somewhere – can we use the U of MN Water Center that focuses on septic systems Sitting Bull College has their own lab, can we use this model?

How might any water center interaction with state agencies and U of MN?

Fisheries and other natural resources are interest in training students, especially more NA students. There is a natural link between educational and doing good for communities. Youth programs are trying to get youth started in science earlier.

How do we fund a water center planning committee?

Joint fundraising attempts are necessary to fund a committee. Tribal communities, tribal colleges, other colleges and universities, and other groups are needed.

Is Indigenizing education cultural corruption or cultural salvation?

Throwing a few words into curriculum is not right. Could it be a Fire/Water center? Another element we are disrespecting is fire. We need to balance fire as well, which is the men. Earth and prairie grasses should also be considered. These ideas must emerge from the grass roots from the community. People know their own lands. In the past folks have said that university has no place in creating water centers. We must ensure that our little ones receive the teachings as they may not get this at home. Also, we need to recognize that we too can learn from little ones. Stories about impact, evaluation should be a story. Knowledge can be compared to picking berries, not are all ripe for picking. But in the future they will be. Story telling is a traditional way to teach. Instructions for doing things came through dreams. Ceremonies should be incorporated into these programs. Traditional values should be taught in traditional language – a strong language program gives us a good foundation.