

Women's Nibi Conversation – March 15, 2013
Biboon Room, Grand Casino - Mille Lacs
Mille Lacs Ojibwe Nation, Minnesota

What can we do , in our own world (family, community, organization) to care for , honor nibi-mni in our community?

*Identify a place where people can gather to pray “natural place” - a space where water is held – water towers, waste treatment centers. Prayer - begin with prayer – four songs – wherever we go is where we meet.

*Organize women to feed the mni/nibi. There was mention of various practices that are still conducted in our communities. One involves the making of small raft with colors, asema and food is offered usually in the fall and spring.

*The young women – coming of age teachings. An example is the berry fast that is practiced.

*One of the elders mentioned that when the people meet they should sit on the ground in the wooded area so as to connect and capture the essence of the earth mother.

*One individual felt strongly the need to identify or put back in place hand pumps that families use to rely on for fresh spring water to garner and carry to their homes. Many have disappeared and now with the threat to our nib/mni our tribal communities need to begin to organize efforts to assure fresh water is available to the people. It was mentioned during recent storms at Leech Lake the electricity was cut off to many families and communities for a lengthy time. They had no water due to electricity for their pumps etc.

*The newly constructed Red Lake Nation Tribal College will include a sacred space.

*The Dakota people of Lower Sioux shared a story of their water spirits that protect the water. And the origin of mni – which references life – the word that depicts water in their language.

*The idea of identifying natural springs in our communities where people can gather fresh clean water to carry to their homes.

*The conversation pointed towards sharing the knowledge for those who travel to know where the spring waters flow in other areas beyond their home communities.

*Identify the original names of lakes, ponds, streams, rivers and wetlands in your community.

*They spoke of the story behind all the waterways of the earth and how important our language is in all this work.

*Urgent that women keep doing their work and to teach one another to do this work as well.

*Responsibility to carry on the work and grandmother teaching so as to carry forward the work of Anishinaabe.

*Dakota women shared a few thoughts about their cultural view of and for the water.

*A story was shared about a first nation in Canada that placed a tipi near their waste-water treatment plant. This was utilized for the people to honor and pray for the water to continue bringing life to that community. It was available for people to do solo or group prayers. This reflected in a tight knit healthy Anishinaabe village.

*The need to actualize ways to decolonize our minds. To develop tangible tools for everyday use by individuals, families and communities.

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*There was discussion about training on the tools of decolonization for Reservation Tribal leaders, employees, tribal schools, tribal colleges and leadership.

*A topic was brought up that some of the wild rice committees on our reservations and reserves no longer speak and feed the waters and mahnomen before people set out on the water to gather at harvest time. They have forgotten these important teachings and practices to honor and respect that which is provided by the earth mother. The delegate from Nett Lake shared about their wild rice lake and how they had worked to keep it protected.

*Wild Rice/mahnomen harvesting time – having community members acknowledge our young people that are learning to harvest mahnomen – to build pride and historical context to their growth. Many young people are not picking up the ways of harvesting and finishing mahnomen, so we need to nurture this for them.

*Teachings were given to be shared – pass them on – don't take them with you – share them with others.

*What would we do if we had a water contamination emergency, look at both sides. Do our tribal governments have an emergency preparedness plan in place? The ones that would be responsible for contamination most likely would be from the outside, are we aware of what they have in place? The oil spill in Michigan on a river was brought up during this conversation.

*Someone mentioned about big brown water tanks in our yards to provide water would be provided by the military. How do our communities protect the water? How do we hear our old people? How do we address current contaminated areas: thoughts came about cars on lakes in the winter and boats and motors with their oil and gas that pollute the waterways. Neglect the earth and waterways. Invasive species and plants are identified as: ash-borer, zebra mussels and natural arsenic found in groundwater. Participants spoke to their work on those topics and shared some information what is being addressed.

*There is a need to understand the natural cycle of water from earth to sky/sky to earth. The churning of the oceans, rivers, lakes and the delicate cycle whereby they exist.

*Need to encourage more of our people to offer asema to the waterways and to sing our songs to the waterways in our communities. And whenever we travel to address those waters if possible.

*There was talk about Dr. Masaru Emoto, water missionary from Japan. His book “Hidden Messages of Water”. His work interfaces with the fact that 80% of the full grown human body is water as is the planet we live. How the molecular structure of water is affected by its interface with humankind.

*Water songs have a place in our creation story for both the Anishinaabe and Dakota.

*Healing the water, ourselves and each other .

*Remember the male role in this work.

*Remember the inclusion of our language in this work. -Know your language- water expresses in the language.

*How we treat each other as well.

*Science and Tradition + Indigenous science

*Establish a Grandmother's Council on Water or Water Council

*Establish an Advisory group in our communities to address water.

Next meeting: Discussion was either at White Earth or Red Lake. Those representatives will speak with their communities about hosting another conversation in the summer.