

**Tribal Presider's Comments
Chairman Frank Ettawageshik
Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
The Great Lakes Collaboration Meeting in Chicago, IL
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Mother Earth can live without us. When we assume that we are protecting her we are mistaken. She provides for us but she can heal herself totally without our assistance. Actually, what we are seeking to do is to save ourselves. If we work with creation, and honor our place and responsibilities within it, then we will survive. But we must learn these lessons before it is too late for us, before we become even more of a liability to our own existence.

Aanii. Hello. Naakwegeshik n'diznikaaz. Pepegwezance ododem. My name is Frank Ettawageshik. I serve as the Tribal Chairman for my tribe, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians on the shores of northern Lake Michigan. I've been honored with the responsibility of speaking as the Tribal Presider for today's ceremony. It is a daunting task to try to speak in a few minutes and with a single voice what would demand days of talk and hundreds, if not thousands, of voices.

Our Elders teach us to learn how to ask our questions. This can take years to understand. Only then can we start to learn how to understand the answers that come to us, the answers that are all around us waiting for us to recognize them.

What we learn in our traditions is to honor the other beings in creation, to honor those who provide themselves for our sustenance, to respect the waters and lands within and upon which they and we live. Our very existence is in peril when we forget these simple truths.

Our Tribes are rooted in, and upon, this land and these waters of our Great Lakes Region. We have asked our questions. We receive our answers. For generations we have heard the cries and felt the tears of our Mother Earth, felt the pulse of her life blood waters struggling to survive the abuses that have been heaped upon her. One hundred and fifty years ago we had a resource in the Great Lakes region that was considered inexhaustible. It lasted barely two generations. This was the White Pine forest. The White Pine of this century is Water.

This concern for the Water by native peoples is rooted within our entire view of creation and is a part of our daily lives. Two years ago, Josephine Mandamin, an Anishinabe grandmother, was so moved by the plight of the waters that she organized a walk around Lake Superior, a walk on which several grandmothers carried a copper bucket of water and an Eagle Feather Staff. This last year they walked for Lake Michigan and will walk in the coming years for Lakes Huron, Erie and Ontario. By putting their lives on the line in traffic and weather and physical exertion they have inspired many others to relearn, reawaken and remember our true place and responsibilities. Our concern for the Lakes arises from deep within our very beings, from deep within our culture and heritage.

Our Tribal Nations believe that this day is a good day to sign this Declaration, that today, now, is a good time to pledge to work together with each other and with our neighbors in the Great Lakes Basin. We are pleased to have the other governments within the Great Lakes Basin indicate the importance of the Lakes as evidenced by their dedication in working on this process. We are pleased to join them in signing this Declaration and we believe successfully reaching the goals within the Declaration will also help Tribal Nations fulfill our sacred duties and responsibilities to the Waters of the Great Lakes.

Miigwetch. Thank you.