Chippewa Cree Tribal Water Resource Department

February 11, 2016

Martin Hestmark
Assistant Regional Administrator
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation
1595 Wynkoop Street
Denver, CO 80202
Hestmark.martin@epa.gov

RE: Chippewa Cree Tribe Three Year Wetland Program Plan Endorsement Letter

Dear Sir,
The Tribe is proud to present a **"Three Year Wetland Program Plan"** fully endorsed by the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boys Indian Reservation. We reduced the Wetlands Program Plan timeframe from the original five year plan to a three year plan. We feel that this timeframe is more realistic in terms of completing the associated goals and objectives within the plan.

This management tool is designed to further tribal wetland goals and objectives aimed at preserving and protecting key wetland areas for the future generations. This document will serve as guide to both of our governments concerning the effort to fulfill the "*No net loss of wetlands*" philosophy our respective agencies have adopted.

The wetlands program developed by the tribe does provide outstanding service throughout the seven major drainages that encompass the reservation. Please consider our historical accomplishments to date while evaluating this plan. Also, please consider provided detailed recommendations' that may strengthen this planning document. Our tribe appreciates the support your Agency has provided to our tribal wetlands program. We look forward to working with you and your accomplished staff for many years to come.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dustin White, Interim Director
Chippewa Cree Tribal Water Resources/Environmental Protection Department

c.c. Keith Gopher, Tribal Wetlands Coordinator
Toney Ott, Environmental Science Aquatic Resource Protection & Accountability Unit
Jennifer Wintersteen, Region 8, E.P.A Montana Office

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CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE WETLAND PROGRAM PLAN

FY: 2016-2018

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THE CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE WETLANDS PROGRAM MISSION:

FURTHER DEVELOP THE TRIBAL WETLAND PROGRAM TO FULFILL THE TRIBES' DESIRE OF NO NET LOSS OF WETLANDS OR WETLAND FUNCTIONS AND VALUES.

Contact Information for the Chippewa Cree Tribe's Wetland Program

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INTRODUCTION

The Chippewa Cree Tribe scaled back the activities within this Wetlands Program Plan from the previous 4 year timeframe to a 3 year time frame. The Chippewa Cree Tribe felt that a 3 year timeframe is more realistic and it will reflect funding cycles.

The 2016-2018 Wetlands Program Plan addresses the Sweetgrass Monitoring and Assessment activities and will also include demonstration voluntary restoration efforts at select transplant sweetgrass sites.

The Chippewa Cree Tribe recognizes that the EPA has identified four core elements that the Tribe may consider while developing a comprehensive wetland program plan. The Chippewa Cree Tribe will address two of the four core elements in this Wetland Program Plan. Chippewa Cree Tribe will address core elements 1 and 3. (http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/wetlands/cefintro.cfm#what)

1. **Monitoring and Assessment**
2. **Regulatory activities (including 401 certifications)**
3. **Voluntary restoration and protection**
4. **Water quality standards for wetlands**

In 2005, the Tribal Wetlands Program sponsored a wetland plant identification workshop. During the course of the workshop and after consulting with the local tribal plant experts, the Tribal Wetlands Program identified that the populations of sweetgrass, a culturally significant plant, on our lands were declining and of limited distribution. The Bear Paw Mountain range and surrounding foothills is a unique mountain island range environment that is geographically isolated and therefore supports unique, isolated populations of plants. The Tribe has identified that populations of sweetgrass are unique in the fact that this population of plants are non-flowering. This makes populations on Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation vulnerable to disturbance and environmental changes. Restoration efforts initiated on existing sweetgrass sites beginning in 2006 have resulted in successful enhancement of existing populations. These factors have led us to develop a specific sweetgrass monitoring protocol and reintroduction efforts on a broader scale. The Tribe has increased their reintroduction efforts on a broader scale.

In 2006, the Chippewa Cree Tribe developed a Reservation-wide Wetland Conservation and Mitigation Strategy. The purpose of the conservation and mitigation strategy is to establish a framework to guide and facilitate protection, conservation, and management of wetlands for present and future generations. The strategy is based on the recognition that healthy wetlands are important to the Chippewa Cree Tribe and that maintaining fully functioning wetlands is a conservation priority.

In 2007, the Chippewa Cree Tribe enacted a Tribal Wetlands/Aquatic Lands Protection Ordinance (Resolution 35-07), was enacted pursuant to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation, Article 5, approved by

the Secretary of the Interior on December 13, 1935. The legislative intent of this ordinance is to prevent the degradation of Reservation waters and aquatic lands (including wetlands) by regulating construction or installation or projects upon aquatic lands whenever such projects may cause erosion, sedimentation, or other disturbances adversely affecting the quality of Reservation waters and aquatic lands.

1) Overall Goal Statement and Timeframe for Plan:

The overall goal of the Chippewa Cree Tribal Wetlands Program Plan for 2016-2018 is described as follows:
"Further develop the Tribal Wetland Program to fulfill the tribes' desire of no net loss of wetlands or wetlands functions and values."

The Tribal Wetlands Program intends to fulfill the overall goal of no net loss by carrying out the following activities based on a three-year time frame.

Protect Tribal Wetlands Identified Specifically as Traditional Cultural Place.
This WPP does not specifically include protection activities to Traditional Cultural Places (i.e. sweetgrass harvesting areas, culturally sensitive waters) but is an overall ongoing activity within the Chippewa Cree Tribal Wetlands Program.

Identify Unique and High-Quality Wetlands

Improve the Wetlands Knowledge Base

Complete Baseline Wetland Inventory

Establish Protocol to Track Losses and Gained Wetlands

Establish Wetland Monitoring Program

Secure Additional Funding Sources for Voluntary Restoration

Utilize Tribal Functional Assessment Methodology

Identify Functions and Values Feasible with Mitigation

Action and Activities Supporting Overall Goals, with Schedule:

Year One (2016)

Action:
During fiscal year 2016, the Chippewa Cree Tribe Wetlands Program will complete the following action's that includes two of the EPA's Four Core Elements for continued Wetlands Program progress: 1) **Monitoring and Assessment:** continued monitoring of sweetgrass wetlands to obtain data on population trends and 2) **Voluntary Restoration and Protection:** restoration of three existing sweetgrass wetlands (Watson, Belcourt and Eagleman Spring) and one historical sweetgrass site (Upper Muddy Creek). Core elements of a comprehensive wetlands program addressed by each activity are listed in parenthesis. The majority of the activities listed here is field work. "Field season" is roughly from April to September (give or take a month). Non field season activities will include but not limited to: reporting, revising of plans, public education activities.

Activities:

- Continue sweetgrass monitoring at 6 wetlands. Data will be used to assess population trends and guide future restoration and reintroduction efforts at other historical or suitable wetland sites on Chippewa-Cree lands. **(Core Element 1. Monitoring and Assessment).**
- Conduct sweetgrass wetland condition and population monitoring in the Upper Big Sandy Creek Watershed. Monitoring results will identify future restoration needs and identify any new populations in the watershed. **(Core Element 1. Monitoring and Assessment).**
- Restore local sweetgrass genets to amend declining populations, using local donor plants, at Watson wetland site and augment small remnant populations at Belcourt, Eagleman Spring, and Upper Muddy Creek. Suitable microsites, out-planting dates and plant stock types for augmenting declining and remnant populations have been identified for all restoration sties during past project work. **(Core Element 3. Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring 2016***
- Working with project partners, fencing, deferred grazing and other necessary strategies will be implemented at one historical sweetgrass site; it will be determined at a later date which of the three sites will be identified as the restoration site (Upper Muddy Creek, Eagleman, and Belcourt). Project partners will include: Dr. Joe Elliott, Tara Luna, CCT Natural Resources Department, Cultural Resources Department, local Tribal plant specialists and the National Resource Conservation Service. **(Core Element 3. Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring/Summer 2016***

- Working with community members, schools and Tribal Cultural Preservation office, the CCT Wetland Program will develop educational materials and conduct sweetgrass workshops that integrate cultural preservation and community participation into restoring and perpetuating local sweetgrass populations. Activities will include workshops, traditional picking of local populations, and sweetgrass wetland restoration work projects that includes propagating local sweetgrass plants for restoration, erecting fencing and other monitoring and preparation work required at wetland restoration sites. **(Core Elements 2 and 3. Monitoring and Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring/Summer 2016***

Year Two (2017):

Action:
For FY 2017, newly established populations at restoration sites from 2016, Eagleman, Belcourt and Upper Muddy Creek, will be monitored to track survival, growth and clonal spread. The Tribal Wetlands Program shall also continue population monitoring of existing populations at six sites in the Box Elder Creek Watershed to record annual population trends and wetlands in the Upper Big Sandy Creek Watershed. We will implement restoration at the historical site Rocky Creek, at least one site from the Upper Big Sandy Creek identified during previous monitoring work in 2016. Restoration work will include fencing, hydrologic restoration, propagating sweetgrass plugs at our sweetgrass nursery facility and out-planting plugs into suitable micro-sites. Additional restoration preparation work will be conducted as needed for newly identified wetland restoration sites. "Field season" is roughly from April to September (give or take a month). Non field season activities will include but not limited to: reporting, revising of plans, public education activities.

Activities:

- Continue sweetgrass wetland condition and population monitoring in the Box Elder and Upper Big Sandy Creek Watershed. **(Core Element 1. Monitoring and Assessment).** ***Summer 2017***

- Monitor augmented sweetgrass populations at 2017 restoration sites: Watson, Belcourt, Eagleman and Upper Muddy Creek. **(Core Element 1. Monitoring and Assessment).** ***Summer 2017***

- Restore local sweetgrass genets to the historical site at Rocky Creek in the Box Elder Drainage and at least one wetland site in the Upper Big Sandy Creek watershed. **Core Element 3. Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring 2017***

- Continue local community participation and education in perpetuating existing and restored sweetgrass populations and provide educational field work during wetland restoration projects. Activities include population monitoring, sweetgrass propagation, outplanting, fencing construction and working with landowners to

protect populations from overgrazing. Educational components include cultural preservation, natural resource and wetland conservation and management, wetland ecology and restoration, plant population monitoring and native plant propagation and restoration. **Core Elements 2 and 3. Monitoring and Assessment, Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring/Summer 201***

Year Three (2018):

Action:

For FY 2018, the Chippewa Cree Tribe Wetlands Program will continue to monitor and assess the Sweetgrass reintroduction sites. The Chippewa Cree Wetlands Program will update the Tribe's Sweetgrass Monitoring Protocol to include more specific restoration plans and practices for specifically the transplanting of local donor sweetgrass. Each of the transplanted/restoration sites will be monitored for a period of five years to determine outplanting survival, establishment and increase in sweetgrass populations that have been restored to historical sites and existing sites. We will continue wetland condition monitoring at existing, historical and potential sweetgrass wetlands and incorporate 319 & 106 water quality monitoring into existing protocol. Additional restoration work will occur at historical sites and other groundwater fed wetlands determined suitable for long term persistence of transplanted sweetgrass populations. Wetland Program work will result in the development of Best Management Practices to protect and restore wetland condition and water quality and buffer and protect local sweetgrass populations from drastic environmental changes. "Field season" is roughly from April to September (give or take a month). Non field season activities will include but not limited to: reporting, revising of plans, public education activities.

Activities:

- Continue sweetgrass wetland condition and population monitoring in the Box Elder and Upper Big Sandy Creek Watershed. **(Core Element 1. Monitoring and Assessment).** ***Summer 2018***

- Monitor augmented sweetgrass populations at 2017 restoration sites: Watson, Belcourt, Eagleman, Upper Sandy Creek, Upper Muddy Creek and Rocky Creek. **(Core Element 1. Monitoring and Assessment).** ***Summer 2018***

- Restore local sweetgrass genets to the historical site at Enos Johnson or perennial stream channel near Ski Bowl and at least one groundwater fed palustrine wetland in the Upper Big Muddy Creek watershed. **Core Element 3. Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring 2018***

- Continue local community participation and education in perpetuating existing and restored sweetgrass populations and provide educational field work during wetland restoration projects. **Core Elements 2 and 3. Monitoring and Assessment, Voluntary Restoration and Protection).** ***Spring/Summer 2018***

- Develop wetland water quality monitoring protocol for cultural wetlands containing sweetgrass through the 319 & 106 programs. **Core Elements 2 and 3.**

Monitoring and Assessment, Voluntary Restoration and Protection).
Spring/Summer 2018

- Research and begin to develop SOPs and BMPs for restoring local wetlands and perennial stream channels to maintain water quality, water storage, cultural plant populations and other ecological benefits necessary for maintaining water quality.