

Boozhoo my name is Chase Meierotto, and I am the Treaty Natural Resource Administrator of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Thank you for the invitation to speak today at the Strengthening Indigenous Communities Through Cultural and Environmental Preservation Hearing.

The Red Cliff Band is dedicated to the preservation, protection, and sustainable management of the Tribes' **inawemaaganag** (relatives), who are often called "natural resources". Doing so creates a balance between a healthy environment, economic goals, and future subsistence of all tribal members. This ensures that our future generations continue to enjoy the benefits of the places that hold significant historical, cultural, and environmental importance. The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians' mission is to promote, plan, and provide for the health, welfare, education, environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic wellbeing of all Tribal Members and to protect Treaty Rights now and in the future.

By tradition, the Anishinaabe are hunter-gatherers and, we believe that there is a responsibility to our relatives to protect them for the next seven generations and beyond. Red Cliff must be mindful of many threats and counter them through investigation and restorative practices. These risks range from invasive species to the ever-warming climate, to the contamination of the natural world. With these constant threats to our relatives, Red Cliff remains committed to protecting *nibi* (water), *aki* (land), and air of our current and ancestral homelands for our people and the generations to come. To address these threats, tribal employees work closely together within the tribal government structure to represent those relatives who cannot speak for themselves. Through continuous monitoring, knowledge sharing, and in many other ways, the Tribe continually strives to ensure that our relatives will be protected.

To protect our relatives, we must protect our shared environment. This means preserving our treaty rights and our traditional life ways. Red Cliff is, and always has been, a fishing tribe. Our reservation was selected because of its location on Lake Superior and close proximity to historic fishing grounds. Fishing Lake Superior has been a tradition passed down from generation to generation that is still going strong. Elders have passed down this way of life and knowledge of the great Lake Superior to sons and daughters alike. Currently the Red Cliff tribe has 14 licensed big boaters and 20 licensed small boaters who all hold commercial fishing licenses.

Commercial fishing on Lake Superior provides Red Cliff food sovereignty and a means of living for many Red Cliff families. Not only do the licensed fishers benefit from fishing, but many other community members are involved in fishing practices as well. They hold jobs as deck hands, processors, and distributors. In 2018, The Red Cliff Tribe was awarded settlement funds from the *Keepseagle* court case, to build a 3200 sq. foot Food Processing Facility, and develop value-added products such as frozen fish, smoked fish products, and caviar. This facility is now known as the Red Cliff Fish Company. In the past, the local fish market was monopolized by one non-Native, off-reservation buyer who controlled the local market and prices for over sixty years. However, with the opening of the Red Cliff Fish Company there is now local competition for that fish market. An Administration for Native Americans grant assisted with opening the Red Cliff Fish Company, which opened its doors in the fall of 2020 and has been purchasing local fish ever since.

Red Cliff has faced many great challenges over time and most recently one of those challenges is the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been a different kind of threat but has presented many challenges to the Red Cliff Nation. During this time the Red Cliff Community called on its relatives for help. The Red Cliff Fish Company and tribal fishers collaborated with many other tribal programs to provide food to our community. Fresh, frozen, and smoked fish were distributed throughout the community at different times to help with feeding local families. During the pandemic our land has been seen as an oasis for the community. With no social gatherings many turned to areas such as Frog Bay Tribal National Park for outdoor activities in which they were able to stay happy and healthy. It is in these times of trouble that we come together and take care of each other.

The relatives of the Anishinaabe are vital to the way of life here in Red Cliff. The federal government has a trust obligation to provide for the Tribes. Failure to provide for our relatives not only violates this trust responsibility, but it also renders treaty guaranteed rights to hunt fish and gather on ceded lands meaningless. We are asking that you fulfill your trust responsibility to the Tribes and uphold our treaty guarantees by providing sufficient funding and support to further monitor, research and help to protect our relatives.”

Miigwech for your time and consideration.