

USDA Forest Service Botany in the News

Northern Michigan Tribes Unite to Recover and Conserve Native Plants and their Pollinators

In a historic move of solidity and commitment, five Native American tribes of Northern Michigan have made a new, collaborative commitment to recover and conserve the region's natural biodiversity. On March 23, 2014, the tribal council of Bay Mills Indian Community, located on the southeast shore of Lake Superior (Brimley, Michigan), formally adopted a resolution to work with the Zaagkii Wings and Seeds Project and four other regional Native American communities to restore ecosystems and recover native plants species.

Leaders of Michigan's five federally recognized tribes have now passed [five resolutions](#) (PDF, 2.3 MB). The effort was coordinated over the last seven years across Michigan's Upper Peninsula by the USDA Forest Service Eastern Region, in partnership with the nonprofit Cedar Tree Institute and Northern Michigan University's Center for Native American Studies. The common language of these resolutions read that the area's five tribes "desire to join in partnership the Hiawatha and Ottawa National Forests and other Native American communities in Northern Michigan to further work with the Zaagkii (Wings and Seeds) Project in recovering native plants, encouraging pollinator protection, and restoring threatened ecosystems."

Since 2009, the Zaagkii (Wings and Seeds) Project has sponsored eight native plants workshops, established the first Reservation-based eco-friendly native plants greenhouse east of the Mississippi, and provided out-of-state trainings for over 20 tribal representatives at training events across North America. In 2013, the Zaagkii Project hosted the Forest Service Annual Intertribal Nursery Council at the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community drawing representatives from 11 different tribes across North America. In 2014, the Project carried out two additional technical workshops focusing on raining tribal staff about invasive plant control, crop wild relatives, and opportunities in the propagation and commercial production of native plants.

Martin Reinhardt, Ph.D. (Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians) and Assistant Professor Northern Michigan's Center for Native American Studies points the tribal resolutions as speaking to the need for sustaining partners in this unique example of eco-cultural recovery. "Revitalizing our relationships with the natural world is of the utmost importance. Spiritual connections that support ecological relationships are strengthened when we remember our traditions. As our five tribes unite to recover and protect native plants food sovereignty issues, it's good to have allies that support our efforts."



Bay Mills Indian Community Resolution.

Jon Magnuson, Director of The Cedar Tree Institute, underscores the uniqueness of the Zaagkii Project. “A healing of the environment is a healing of the human spirit,” he reminds collaborative partners. “This partnership of the U.S. Forest Service with Native communities of the Great Lakes Basin is an investment in an bold, emerging vision: A new, and yet in some ways very old profound way of living with each other and protecting a threatened natural landscape we share in common.”

Jan Schultz Program Leader for Botany, Invasive Species and Special Forest Products in the Forest Service Eastern Region, adds, “This collaboration represents a wonderful illustration of a current landscape scale restoration opportunity with significant partners. Significant projects have resulted and there are more to be implemented. The opportunities for collaboration are huge and are crucial.”

Participating Northern Michigan tribes formally entering into this partnership include the Sault Ste. Marie Band of Chippewa Indians, the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, the Bay Mills Chippewa Indian Community, and the Hannahville Indian Community. Combined, these Native American communities oversee a total of over 70,000 acres of tribally managed lands.

Zaagkii is a traditional Anishinaabe word for “gifts from Mother Earth.”

For more information, reference <http://www.wingsandseeds.org>.