

ORGANIZATIONAL SIGN-ON LETTER SUPPORTING WILD RICE ACT

Minnesota State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

To the Honorable Members of the Minnesota Legislature,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for greater protections for Wild Rice and freshwater within our state. Wild Rice is central to Minnesota's economy, cultural traditions, and biodiversity. We call on the legislature to pass legislation that will address the following issues:

[SF 3915](#) | [HF 3898](#) Pesticide Provision: Pesticides do not belong in Wild Rice waters, and our pesticide statutes governing this should be revised. Pesticides are not part of a healthy food system; these chemicals are poisoning the land, water, and our bodies. Restricting pesticide use in our Wild Rice waters is a major step in the right direction toward addressing this issue.

[SF 3748](#) | [HF 3896](#) Responsible Boating Practices: Irresponsible boating damages Wild Rice waters. We need restrictions to prevent the operation of motorized watercraft directly through uncultivated wild rice beds (except for hand-propelled boats, skiffs, or canoes), and for no-wake zones.

[SF 3749](#) | [HF 3899](#) Recognition of Inherent Rights of Wild Rice: The State of Minnesota should recognize the inherent right of Wild Rice to exist and thrive in our state! Wild Rice is a treaty-protected food and must be considered first, every time and for every permit, in our state.

[SF 3916](#) | [HF 3897](#) Wild Rice Risk Justification: Whenever a proposed project could harm Wild Rice waters, there should be a risk-justification process that includes tribal government input to assess how the project could cause harm.

Uncultivated Wild Rice Is a Crucial Minnesota Economic Driver. According to Earth Economics report *The Food That Grows on Water*, “the annual wild rice harvest results in \$12.5 million in expenditures, and the sale of hand-harvested *manoomin* supports more than \$19.2 million in annual income for tribal harvesters. The annual spending associated with *manoomin* harvesting (gas, equipment, supplies) supports about 153 local jobs, and the annual income generated by the sale of *manoomin* supports an additional 125 jobs.” This past year the impacts of mass precipitation events on Wild Rice across our state were devastating; many ricing areas were washed out due to intense rainfall in the spring. We must work together to ensure this sacred plant remains an economic staple within our state.

Uncultivated Wild Rice is a keystone species. What happens to this native plant reverberates throughout the web of life. According to the MNDNR's report on Natural Wild Rice, “No other

native Minnesota plant approaches the level of cultural, ecological, and economic values embodied by this species. More than 17 species of wildlife listed in the MNDNR's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy as 'species of greatest conservation need' use wild rice lakes as habitat for reproduction or foraging." Wild Rice produces oxygen that fish need to survive, filters out the nutrients that fuel midsummer algae blooms and fish kills, and provides food, shelter, and nesting areas for fish, invertebrates, and wildlife. Protecting Wild Rice protects essential biodiversity within our state.

Wild Rice is protected by treaties. To acquire part of the land that is now Minnesota, the United States made a treaty promise in 1837 that Ojibwe tribes could exercise "the privilege of hunting, fishing, and gathering the Wild Rice" within the ceded territory. Under the U.S. Constitution, treaties are the "supreme law of the land" and must be respected by states. This legislation would ensure that Minnesota protects Wild Rice and freshwater for all to enjoy for generations to come.

Wild Rice (*manoomin* in Ojibwe and *psiy* in Dakota) is sacred, and central to Ojibwe and Dakota culture, traditions, and ceremonies. Over a thousand years ago, the third of seven prophets instructed the Anishinaabeg to journey west from near the Atlantic coast, to where they would find "the food that grows on the water," and on faith, they walked to the land of 10,000 lakes and surrounding regions. *Manoomin* symbolizes their ancestors' journey, their relationship to the land, and philosophy of caring for both water and Wild Rice.

Wild rice was once abundant throughout Minnesota, but due to human activities it no longer flourishes, particularly in the southern part of the state. This decline in Wild Rice has led to a loss of cultural traditions for our Dakota relatives. Minnesota's pristine freshwater systems are home to the largest Wild Rice population in the United States. But Wild Rice is endangered as it faces mounting threats from invasive species, climate change, water pollution, and development. Together, we have the power to address the damage we've caused to our waters and restore Wild Rice to regions where it traditionally thrived.

The cultural, economic, and ecological significance of Wild Rice is irreplaceable. It must be safeguarded, ensuring that both current and future generations can continue to benefit from this sacred plant and the clean waters it requires. We, the undersigned organizations, strongly urge you to support this crucial legislation and work towards its passage with bipartisan unity. By doing so, we protect a legacy that nourishes both people and the land.

Miigwech / Pilámaya / Thank you

The undersigned organizations and their authorized representatives hereby express their full support for this movement:

Julia Nerbonne | Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light

Jessica Intermill | Intermill Consulting

Kate Winsor | Northeast Metro Climate Action

Dawn Goodwin | R.I.S.E Coalition

Maggie Schupert | CURE

Matt Norton | Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness

Paula Macabee | Water Legacy

Wallace Wadd | East Metro EcoFaith Collaborative

Sherri Knuth | Act For the Earth Team at Unity Unitarian Church

Andy Pearson | Three Waters Pipeline Resistance Team

Avonna Stark | Clean Water Action

Pouya Najmaie | Cooperative Energy Futures

Jean Ross | Vote Climate

Mary Keepers | Creekside United Church of Christ

Tom Grotewohl | Protect the Porkies

John Stoez | Repair Communities for Makoce Ikikcupi

Theresa Keaven | Climate Land Leaders

Tracy Molm and Whitney Wildman | Climate Justice Committee

Tish O'Dell | Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund

Rhonda Conn | Synergy Development Solutions

Ernest Oppegaard-Peltier III | Mukwa

Terri Burner | Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance

Dr. Ry O Siggelkow | Leadership Center for Social Justice at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

Tom Uecker | NE MN ELCA Eco Faith

Emily Levang and Gwiiwizens: Ricky Defoe | Wankam: People for the Estuary

Peggy White | NEMN Synod of the ELCA EcoFaith Leadership Team

Tammy Walhof & Jacob Summerville | Lutheran Advocacy-MN

Bruce Garbisch | NE MN SNOD ELCA ECOFAITH NETWORK

Dr. Diane Jacobson | St. Paul Area Synod Care of Creation Team

Laura Scholl | Metro Blooms

Megan Bond | MN DFL Environmental Caucus

Melissa Baker Roach | Iron Ranger Partnership for Sustainability

Sue Lyback | North East Minnesota Synod Eco Faith Team

DeeDee Edlund | Edina Community Lutheran Church Eco Faith Team

Marylenn Torkelson | Wild Ones Prairie Edge Chapter

Michael Chameides | Rural Democracy Initiative

Tee McClenty | MN350 Action

Jessica Engelking | Great Plains Action Society

Nancy Carpenter | Beyond Land Acknowledgement/First UCC Northfield MN

Helen M. Pohlig | Indigenous Justice Community Outreach Ministry Team of Unity Church Unitarian

Rachel Holmes | Mills Church

Reverend David Carlson | Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Beth Tamminen | Climate Action Team, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Duluth

Kelley Skumautz | Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate

Robert Scheierl | Wes Libbey Northern Lakes Chapter, Izaak Walton League of America

Annie Contractor | Rural Progress

Ruth Dalager Buck | Grace University Lutheran Church, Minneapolis

Craig Sterle | MN Division of the Izaak Walton League of America Chapter

Julie O'Leary | Izzak Walton League of America–W.J. McCabe Chapter

Bridgette Weber | Axis Mundi Catering

Theresa Halverson-Lee | Department of Indian Work

To the Honorable Members of the MN legislature:

We write in support of stronger protections for wild rice and the freshwater systems that sustain not only this plant, but human beings and life across our state. Wild rice is central to the ecological health of Minnesota's waters and to the cultural survival of the First Nations who have lived here since long before Minnesota became a state. Recognizing wild rice's inherent right to exist and thrive, or SF 3749 and HF3899, and including Ojibwe and Dakota languages in state law, represents a meaningful commitment to ensuring that Minnesota's cultures endure.

This request is often misunderstood. We are not asking the state to grant rights to a plant, nor are we suggesting that wild rice is a person. Rather, we are asking the State of Minnesota to recognize wild rice's inherent right to exist and thrive because it is essential to the health of our waters, ecosystems, and communities. **Recognition of rights is different from granting rights. To recognize something means to identify something that has long existed and whose importance has long been understood. Wild rice has sustained ecosystems and human communities here for generations and can continue to for generations if we take care of our waters. The request before the state is simply to acknowledge that reality in law and policy.**

Such recognition would help guide Minnesota and its agencies to understand that protecting wild rice is inseparable from protecting the cultural rights of the First Nations whose treaties allowed for the creation of the State of Minnesota. These treaties remain the supreme law of the land. Respecting them means respecting the natural relatives that are central to those treaty rights.

When we work to protect treaty rights, we also protect life and ecological health for everyone in our state. Minnesota law already reflects similar aspirations. For example:

[Minnesota Statute 116D.01](#) declares the purpose of state environmental policy to:

- (1) encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between human beings and their environment;**
- (2) promote efforts that prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere while supporting the health and welfare of human beings; and**
- (3) enrich understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the state and the nation.**

Recognition of the inherent right of wild rice to exist and thrive is in line with this statute on environmental policy. Protecting wild rice is not only about protecting a plant. It is about protecting Minnesota's waters for all, honoring treaty obligations, and ensuring that the state's ecological and cultural foundations remain strong for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We urge the legislature to pass all legislation aimed at creating stronger protections for Minnesota wild rice and freshwater this year. Recognizing manoomin's right to exist and thrive also protects Minnesota's State Grain, our health, our

ecosystems, and future. We support the following legislation which is aimed at protecting wild rice and the waters that sustain us all.

1. [[SF 3749](#) | [HF 3899](#)] Updates Minnesota's "State Grain" Language to include *psíŋ* in addition to *manoomin* and a recognition of the Inherent Right of *Manoomin/Psíŋ* (Wild Rice) to Exist & Thrive in Minnesota.
2. [[SF 3748](#) | [HF 3896](#)] Encourages responsible boating practices by restricting motorized watercraft operation through natural stands of uncultivated wild rice, implementing no-wake zones near wild rice beds, and adding educational signage for wild rice waters.
3. [[SF 3916](#) | [HF 3897](#)] Requires a "Risk Justification" be conducted for projects which could damage Wild Rice waters.
4. [[SF 3915](#) | [HF 3898](#)] Bans the application of pesticides in and near Wild Rice waters.

Sincerely,

Organizations and their authorized Representatives:

Avonna Stark | Clean Water Action

Jennifer Garbow | University of Minnesota CFANS Tribal Engagement & Outreach Liason

Lea Foushee | George Crocker | North American Water Office

Evan Mulholland | Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Robert Shimek | Ganawenindidaa

Martin Jennings | Northwest Indian Community Development Center

Debra Topping | Rise Coalition

Richard Watson | Lutefisk Technologies Inc

Randy Finn | Leech Lake Financial Services

Christina Hausman Rhode | Voyageurs Conservancy

Lori Cox | Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC

Chris Knopf | Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Susan Ballot | Circle of Life Academy

John Siekmeier | Minnesota Division Izzak Walton League of America

Lucy Mullany | Minnesota Zero Waste Coalition | Eureka Recycling

Lori Olinger | Coalition for Plastic Reduction MN

Kate Winsor | Northast Metro Climate Action

Kathleen Shuler | Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate

Jane Dow | Mankato Area Zero Waste and Beyond Plastics

Ella Rank, Joseph Johnson, Jo Schirling, Jaqlynn Spencer, Gabby Bennet, Olivia Janis, Bella

Bassat, Ian Roback, Elizabeth Watson, Nokomis Paiz, Chayse Cookson, Tyler Bailey, David

Lawrence Grant, Cassandra Smith, Sativa Warren, Devery Fairbanks, Nia Navarro, Mae

Davenport, Emi Ito, Justin Revenaugh, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, Emily Beverly, Hayley Orlowski,

Christof Zweifel, David L. Fox, Mark Shapley PhD, Jocelyn Currie, Jacqueline Hamilton,

Cathleen Torres Parisian, Hanna Sewell, Emma Schnieder, Clark Ward, Joel Barker, Crystal Ng,

Bill Grimm, Darlene St. Clair, Jessica Garcia Fritz, Saheli Patel, Lily Jarvis, Amelia Olson, Lucia

Kerkes, Lori Robinson, Uma Ashrani, Sophie Hanning, Diede Hein, Lou Miller, Sarah Francis

Please work to swiftly pass HF 3896. This boating restriction aims to protect wild rice areas from boat traffic. **The request is simple: avoid driving boats through a vital food source. Just as no one is permitted to drive through a farmer's cornfield, the same respect should be shown to this food source.** Protecting wild rice is not only a cultural responsibility; it is a legal requirement and a matter of stewardship for all Minnesotans.

Last year, during Minnesota's early teal season, my son and I were harvesting wild rice on Leech Lake for reseeding. This is essential to sustaining this plant for future generations. While we were harvesting, a boat drove directly through the rice bed where we were working. Shortly after, we heard gunshots nearby. The rice bed we try to protect was being destroyed by flawed MN practices.

This experience was not only alarming, it was also dangerous.

Minnesota's current early teal season effectively creates conditions where duck hunting and wild rice harvesting overlap in both time and space. This overlap puts harvesters at risk and encourages boat traffic through fragile wild rice beds. When boats are driven through these areas, they uproot rice and damage it, destroying the very habitat that sustains waterfowl.

This creates a contradiction in management. The same wild rice beds that are essential to the health of duck populations are being degraded during a season intended to support hunting. By allowing this level of disturbance, current guidance undermines both conservation goals and public safety.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has a responsibility to ensure that its policies do not place people in harm's way or contribute to the destruction of critical habitat. Protecting wild rice beds protects not only those who harvest them, but also the ecosystems that waterfowl depend on.

This must change. Clear protections are needed to prevent boat traffic and hunting activity in active wild rice beds during harvest periods. Without action, we risk losing both a vital cultural life source and the ecological foundation that supports Minnesota's waterfowl.

This request is straightforward: avoid wild rice beds while you are on the water. These are areas with clear aquatic vegetation floating or emerging from the water. If your boat is in or near wild rice, stop the motor and coast, push, or paddle through. Our people have paddled for generations; it's good exercise and can make a real difference for the health of our wild rice beds. There isn't really an enforcement mechanism here; it is mainly an educational statute that asks boaters to be good neighbors to the First Nations in Minnesota, just as we are good neighbors to them.

Protecting wild rice from large boat wakes is also essential. Wild rice is very sensitive during the floating leaf stage; large waves from wakes can harm its growth and that of other aquatic vegetation. Requiring that boats be respectful and responsible in our waters is not a big ask. Go slow near the shore, do not go in rice beds or create massive wakes near wild rice, and be safe.

Protecting wild rice also means protection for the fish that Minnesotans enjoy. Wild rice absorbs excess nutrients and turns them into a nutrient-rich food source, which our people then harvest. Taking excess nutrients out of our waters is important in this moment, as they lead to overgrowth of algae, creating toxic waters and areas that are devoid of oxygen, which can lead to fish kills. Protecting wild rice supports the health of the fishing industry, which generates 4.4 billion in annual revenue and fuels 28,000 jobs. Wild rice also produces oxygen, which fish need to survive. Having this plant in our waters plays a central role in protecting Minnesota's fishing and tourism industries by keeping our waters healthy.

This legislation seeks to create a respectful coexistence between two cultures that is currently missing in Minnesota, while highlighting that treaty-reserved rights are essential to protecting the web of life. These rights must be respected and protected for future generations, just as our ancestors intended. We cannot settle for Minnesota prioritizing one culture over another; this is a form of environmental racism.

To the honorable members of the Minnesota Legislature:

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) writes this letter in support of the Inherent Rights of Manoomin/Psínj legislation. We also support the host of other legislative actions that the Rise and Repair Alliance is working to bring forward that will uphold those Inherent Rights to exist and thrive.

The mission of MIAC is to protect the sovereignty of the eleven Tribal Nations that share geography with Minnesota and ensure the well-being of all American Indians throughout the state. MIAC is the official liaison between state and tribal government, and its executive board consists of the elected tribal leaders of the sovereign tribal governments. As the original stewards of the land in this region, we recognize the cultural and spiritual significance of Manoomin/Psínj (wild rice) and its essential role in the ecological balance of our state. This sacred plant has sustained our people for generations, and we must take immediate action to ensure its survival for future generations.

Wild rice holds significant spiritual importance for Indigenous Nations and communities, as it is not only a staple food but also central to their inherent relationships rooted in Traditional Indigenous Knowledge and fundamental to their identity and ecosystems. Indigenous wisdom teaches that water, plants, and animals are relatives who sustain life and deserve respect, not domination. Indigenous peoples have protected these lands and waters for thousands of years; now colonial systems of extraction threaten sacred traditions across treaty territories. Unless we act together, freshwater, wild rice, and our collective futures are threatened.

Beyond its cultural importance, Manoomin/Psínj is a keystone species essential for the biodiversity and health of Minnesota's ecosystems. The plant provides habitat for wildlife, stabilizes water systems, and contributes to the overall environmental well-being of our state. Recognizing the inherent right of Manoomin/Psínj to exist and thrive is not simply a matter of cultural preservation; it is a fundamental responsibility to protect the very essence of life in Minnesota. Wild rice thrives on clean water, just as we do, and our lives are deeply connected to this sacred plant. Protecting Manoomin/Psínj is not only a commitment to our heritage but to the future of all life that depends on the health of our land and waters.

Before statehood, wild rice covered the entire area that would become Minnesota. But today, threats to natural stands of wild rice are evident: climate change, invasive species, pollution, industrial agriculture, and pollen drift from hybridized cultivars all jeopardize the health of manoomin ecosystems. The very existence of this native plant is at stake. According to one study, the availability of wild rice for off-reservation tribal harvest has declined regionally by 5–7% annually. Wild rice is central to biodiversity within our state; loss of this plant will have deep impacts throughout ecosystems. Wild rice supports over 17 species in Minnesota listed as species of greatest conservation need. Studies have shown that wild rice plays a role in improving water quality by assisting in the removal of pollutants such as excess ammonia, nitrogen, and phosphorus. Proposed sulfide mining poses a significant threat to wild rice and Indigenous lifeways here in Minnesota.

Manoomin/Psij has continued to decline in abundance over the years, as noted by the Governor's Task Force on Wild Rice. These threats are all human-made. The rice isn't dying; Minnesota is killing it. It is our responsibility to take meaningful action to address the problems we have created and to protect this sacred plant. Manoomin/Psij is more than the state grain—it is a living relative that nourishes our people, our waters, and our way of life.

As the caretakers of the land and water, we have a sacred duty to protect and honor Manoomin/Psij as a living being with inherent rights to exist and thrive. We urge lawmakers to recognize and uphold the inherent rights of Manoomin/Psij to exist and thrive and to support the protections for wild rice and freshwater within our state brought forward by the Rise and Repair Alliance. It is essential to safeguard the health of our communities, the environment, and the well-being of future generations. We trust that the Minnesota Legislature will rise to the occasion and act in the best interest of all living beings in passing stronger protections for wild rice and freshwater within our state.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Respectfully,



Robert "Bobby" Deschampe, Chairman
Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
MN Indian Affairs Council



Shannon Geshick, Executive Director
MN Indian Affairs Council



National Congress of American Indians | 1516 P St NW, Washington, DC 20005 | (202) 466-7767 | www.ncai.org

The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #SEA-25-010

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Larry Wright, Jr.
Ponca Tribe of Nebraska

TITLE: Establishing Support for recognizing the Rights of *Manoomin/Psínj*; a sacred plant that is central to Indigenous cultures in the Great Lakes region

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, NCAI Resolution #ANC-22-008, duly adopted at the 2022 Mid Year Convention in Anchorage, Alaska, establishes a policy for the National Congress of American Indians to support the rights of nature legal framework promoted by various Tribal Nations in the United States; and

WHEREAS, as an example, wild rice, known as *Manoomin* in Anishinaabemowin and *Psínj* in Dakota, holds profound cultural significance for Native peoples in the Midwest region and is essential to biodiversity and ecosystems health; and

WHEREAS, wild rice holds significant spiritual importance for American Indian communities, as it is not only a staple food but also an aspect of our inherent relationship to the Earth, rooted in Traditional Indigenous Knowledge and fundamental to our identity and ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, Anishinaabeg Nations' treaties with the United States protect the inherent right and responsibility of the Anishinaabeg to harvest wild rice; and

NCAI Resolution #SEA-25-010

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WHEREAS, protecting wild rice is not just an environmental concern, but a matter of honoring treaties, nourishing indigenous bodies and culture, and ensuring that future generations can continue to practice their traditional ways of life; and

WHEREAS, wild rice faces significant threats from climate change, invasive species, pollution, and other human activities, all of which collectively jeopardize its existence; and

WHEREAS, the wild rice plant is especially sensitive to water quality, and can be compromised by various activities, such as mining, as elements such as water flow and temperature are essential for wild rice growth, and preserving the integrity of the wetlands home to wild rice beds is vital to maintaining biodiversity and the overall health of aquatic environments; and

WHEREAS, wild rice is a key indicator of freshwater health, and wild rice lakes are vital ecosystems that support diverse wildlife and plant species; and

WHEREAS, protecting wild rice directly correlates to maintaining water quality and habitat integrity, as wild rice thrives in clean, nutrient-balanced waters; and

WHEREAS, waters home to natural wild rice beds sustain an intricate web of life and also support local communities that depend on healthy ecosystems, and safeguarding wild rice ensures the resilience of freshwater systems.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) supports recognizing the inherent rights of *Manoomin/Psínj* (wild rice) to exist and thrive under the same legal framework as the rights of nature recognized in NCAI Resolution #ANC-22-008.

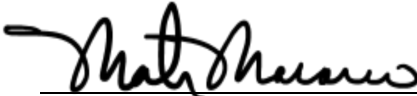
BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.



National Congress of American Indians | 1516 P St NW, Washington, DC 20005 | (202) 466-7767 | www.ncai.org

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2025 Annual Convention of the National Congress of American Indians, held November 16-21 at the Seattle Convention Center in Seattle, Washington, with a quorum present.



Mark Macarro, President

ATTEST:



Christie Modlin, Recording Secretary