



## Waganakising Odawak

Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

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Dear Tribal Citizens, Little Traverse Supporters, and All Community Members,

It has come to our attention that the Emmet County Lakeshore Association has published its Summer 2018 newsletter, which purports to contain an update on the *Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians v. Snyder* litigation. The update contains misleading and biased information about our Tribe and the lawsuit. Because of the importance of this lawsuit to our entire community, we felt it critical to offer our perspective on the issues addressed.

The decision to bring suit against solely the Governor of the State of Michigan in August 2015 was the culmination of over two hundred years of history between the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, the Waganakising Odawak, and our neighbors. In 1855, our Tribe negotiated the Treaty of Detroit at the center of this case to secure our right to remain in our ancestral homeland. It created our Reservation—a permanent space for us to maintain our culture and traditions. In the ensuing decades, changes in United States Indian policies upturned this carefully negotiated agreement. By filing this lawsuit, our Tribe seeks only what it was promised: the permanency of our negotiated reservation boundaries, so that we can protect our children, our families, our elders, our ancestors, and the beautiful natural resources that surround us. Just as it is unthinkable for United States citizens to abandon the Constitution because it is “old,” so too is it unthinkable for our Tribe to abandon the rights preserved for us in our 1855 Treaty merely because of its age.

Believing that their state government representatives would not faithfully represent their interests, two counties, three cities, eleven townships, and two private organizations—the Emmet County Lakeshore Association and the Protection of Rights Alliance—voluntarily chose to intervene as defendants months after the Tribe first began the suit. The Tribe had worked for many years to create good relationships with these local units of government, and did not sue them when it filed the lawsuit. Rather than continuing to work with the Tribe to develop amenable solutions to the complexities that are an everyday part of governmental co-existence, these entities decided to *join* the lawsuit as *defendants*, requiring vast expenditures of time and tax dollars to fight against the rights preserved to the Tribe.

For hundreds of years, our Tribe has been a careful steward of the land, culture, and identity of northern Michigan. Despite the divisive marketing efforts of those opposed to the Tribe’s case, which attempt to sow fears of chaos and destruction of the character of the area, our Tribe remains committed to protecting our homeland for seven generations and beyond. We ask our neighbors to honestly consider: Why would we permit the destruction of our only homeland? Why, as one of the region’s largest

employers, would we do anything to jeopardize the quality of life for residents or the appeal of the area for visitors and their families?

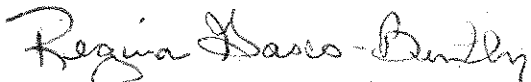
Clearly establishing our reservation boundaries will only bring more resources into the area. These resources can be used to maintain roads, preserve natural environmental areas, improve fisheries and wildlife habitats, enhance parkland and community spaces, and draw prudent, sensible, and in-character business investments to the region. The polarizing and apocryphal information disseminated by those opposed to the Tribe omits the myriad legal constraints imposed by the United States Supreme Court on tribal government operations. One of these organizations in particular—The Protection of Rights Alliance—was created solely for the purpose of fighting the Tribe in this litigation, and was organized and incorporated by the very downstate lawyers now representing it in the case.

This litigation is complex, and it is understandable that many of you want to learn more about what the lawsuit means, and what the future holds for the area after the court makes its decision. The recognition of the Tribe's reservation will not mean a drop in property values, a detriment to local businesses, unregulated and unzoned parcels, or a sudden increase in criminal activity. Just consider the areas of Shakopee, Minnesota, within the Minneapolis metropolitan area, Phoenix, Arizona, or Mount Pleasant, Michigan—reservations where business opportunities and property values thrive.

We understand that not all of our neighbors share our Tribe's culture and traditions, but we all share a deep love and connection to northern Michigan. With this connection comes shared concerns about protecting the environment and natural beauty of the area in which we live. Having the promises and treaty obligations made by the United States government fulfilled makes our entire bay-area community stronger—both the tribal community *and* the communities of our non-Indian neighbors. As responsible stewards of our treaty rights, the Tribe is committed to preserving this beloved space for everyone, both tribal and non-tribal citizens.

If you share any of the fears presented in the Emmet County Lakeshore Association's Summer 2018 newsletter, or if you remain concerned about how this litigation might change the area we all love, we are willing to further openly and honestly discuss these issues. I invite you to contact our office at 231. 242. 1401.

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Regina Gasco- Bentley

Tribal Chairperson