



# WHITE EARTH RESERVATION

CHAIRMAN Michael Fairbanks SECRETARY-TREASURER Michael LaRoque  
DISTRICT I Henry Fox DISTRICT II Eugene Sommers DISTRICT III Laura Lee Erickson

April 3, 2025

Attn: Senate Environment, Climate, & Legacy Committee  
Minnesota Legislature

RE: SF 1247 Wild Rice Act

Dear Chairman Hawj, and Committee Members

The White Earth Nation would like to first thank you for the opportunity to share our support for SF 1247, otherwise known as the Wild Rice Act. The White Earth Nation is joyful for the potential statewide protections of our precious Manoomin (wild rice). Wild rice beds are continually diminishing without protections in place. SF1247 is a good start to ensuring the protections for future generations. The White Earth Nation would like to take this opportunity to highlight the significant importance of wild rice to our Nation, as well as current threats and challenges that wild rice faces throughout Minnesota. Our intention would be to continue to strengthen any laws pertaining to wild rice protections.

## Cultural Significance

The anishinaabeg carry with them a migration story, as people originally from the east coast, they were told from the Creator to move westward till you find the food that grows on water. This is the reason why the Ojibwe people inhabit the upper Midwest, including northern Minnesota. Since the move to the new homeland, Ojibwe people have harvested and still harvest wild rice the same traditional way; by canoe, pushpole to propel and steer, and two flails to knock the rice into the boat. Today, the White Earth Nation has hundreds of citizens partake in harvesting wild rice each day during the harvest season. This continued tradition, passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years, is still strong in the people of the White Earth Nation. The connections between the water, rice, and Anishinaabe are still very prevalent and strong. Anishinaabeg people live by the philosophy "that if we care for the nibi (Ojibwe word for water) and manoomin, the manoomin will care for us." The harvesting of wild rice is more than a lifestyle, it is inextricably woven into who we are as Ojibwe people, as the White Earth Nation.

## Economic Importance

During the harvest season, the White Earth Nation buys green, unprocessed wild rice from its rice harvestors to sell to its citizens at a well below market rate. This program injects millions of dollars into our tribal economy as well as ensures that members, especially our elders have the opportunity to obtain their traditional, healthy, staple food source at a very low cost. Just before the winter months, the millions of dollars that are incorporated into the local economy ensures that peoples homes are equipped for the cold and they have the ability to purchase propane, cords of wood, etc. This money also ensures that the future of our Nation, our children, are ready for the school year with new school clothes and supplies. Even today in our modern world, the White Earth Nation has hundreds of citizens that rely on mother nature to care for them economically and for sustenance.

## Threats and Challenges

Wild rice faces many challenges in today's world. The ongoing effects of climate change and current land uses play a major role in the viability of rice beds throughout Minnesota. The system as a whole is susceptible to changing temperatures, excessive nutrients, and pollution. However the real killer in plain sight, the real reason this bill is so important to us, is that Tribes find themselves facing State agencies who permit non-tribal members to actively destroy rice beds within our borders. For example, the MN DNR issues Aquatic Plant Management permits throughout Minnesota, primarily so that dock owners can remove weeds to access the water. These permits are obtained through an application process and unfortunately, all too often, they allow for the mechanical and chemical removal of wild rice! Sometimes, these permits are issued while the White Earth Nation is actively trying to restore rice beds! Another killer in plain sight for our wild rice beds are the use of watercrafts that are not propelled by hand in and around rice beds. Wild rice is susceptible to uprooting if water levels change too quickly so the wave action from recreational watercraft as well as the allowance for watercraft to drive right through a rice bed is an issue statewide. These actions directly effect the ability of tribal members and non member harvestors to adequately harvest wild rice.

This testimony is a short explanation of the importance of the Manoomin to the White Earth Nation as well as some of the threats and challenges that wild rice faces daily but it is by no means exhaustive. We could go on further about the importance of Manoomin and all the challenges facing it. We call on you to please support the passage of SF 1247. The time to take action is now; before its too late.

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[Michael Fairbanks \(Apr 2, 2025 12:38 PDT\)](#)

Michael Fairbanks

Chairman

White Earth Reservation Business Committee







# SF 1247 Wild Rice Act written testimony 4.2.25

Final Audit Report

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