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Walleye Recovery Program in Red Lake, Ojibwe County, Minnesota

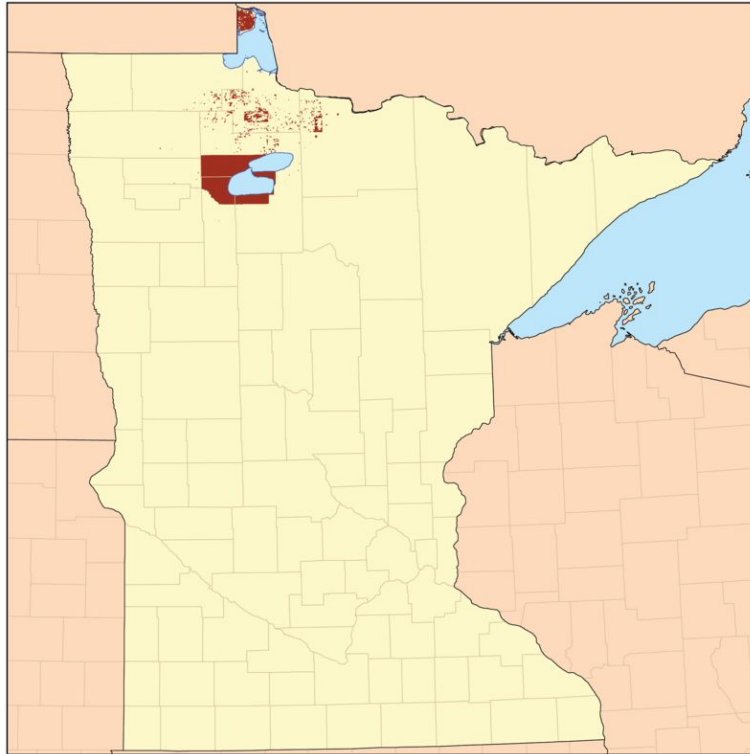
INTRODUCTION

Going back several hundreds of years, the Red Lake Nation, formerly known as the Red Lake Band of Chippewa-Ojibwa, have been depending on *ogaa* walleye in Red Lake, Minnesota for food, income, and for maintaining the ecosystem on the land on which they live. After nearly a decade of exploitation, the walleye population began to collapse. Beginning in the 1990s, the decline in the walleye populace started to have a detrimental effect on the culture of the Red Lake People, their economy, and on the ecosystem in which they survived (Red Lake DNR, 2006). In an attempt to restore the cultural and historical significance that the Nation attributes to the walleye in Red Lake, members of the Red Lake Nation partnered with the Minnesota DNR in 1999 to create the Walleye Recovery Program. Even though both governmental bodies had been coexisting for over a hundred years, the Walleye Recovery Program was the first instance of community partnership between the Red Lake Nation and the State of Minnesota. Through the use of effective communication, all distinct governing bodies had the opportunity to adequately and efficiently make a positive impact on their surrounding environment.

BACKGROUND

The Red Lake Nation is a federally recognized band within the Lake Superior Ojibwe Nation. They are the only reservation within the state of Minnesota that is a “closed reservation”;

meaning that all reservation property is public property (Brill 19). For Centuries, fish, particularly walleye, have been a staple in the diet and income of the Red Lake People (Allen,



2012). Like many other Nations, the Red Lake Nation was faced with the invasion of their homelands by European settlers in the late 1800s. Although they had managed to protect a large amount of the land they possess from being unfairly given or sold to non-native people, certain negotiations had tricked them into less than what they had claimed.

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POLICIES AFFECTING THE CASE

Negotiations made in 1889 regarding allotments and the boundaries of the Red Lake Nation reservation had members of the Nation believing that they had secured the whole lake as well as their original land base. However, the final 1889 Treaty documents had said differently, assigning the upper portion of Red Lake to the State of Minnesota instead of allotting the entirety of the lake to the members of the Red Lake Nation (Dolan et al., 5).

In 1929, the US Bureau of Indian Affairs had gained control of fishing operations of Red Lake. This required them to develop fishing regulations that decreed monitoring of harvest and

resource management. While such policies were implemented, neither the Bureau nor members of the Red Lake Nation followed through with regulations on walleye fishing. This, in turn, is the biggest reason for the exploitation of the walleye population in Red Lake. By the 1970s, the walleye population was showing signs of being on the verge of collapse (Dolan et. al, 7). In response to the decline of the walleye population, administrations like the Red Lake Fisheries Association (RFLA), the Red Lake Tribal Council, and the State of Minnesota all took action. The RLFA, a cooperative consisting of commercial fisherman from the Red Lake Nation, had voted to ban all commercial gillnet fishing on Red Lake in 1997. This decision was unanimously passed although their decision had a large impact on their subsistence. Similarly, despite the direct impact of their decision, the Red Lake Tribal Council decided to pass a resolution that prohibited hook-and-line fishing for walleye. The decisions of both organizations effectively ended all fishing on tribal waters which had a significant consequence on the Nation's way of life. Countless families had lost their main source of income and food (Dolan et. al, 4). Following suit, it was not long before the United States government began to implement their own policies in coalition with the Red Lake Nation.

In the mid 1930s, the Nation felt strongly about preserving their traditional system of hereditary chiefs instead of forming an electoral government. Because of this strong value, the Nation refused to join with six other Chippewa and Ojibwe Nations that now make up the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (Brill, 19). Similarly, unlike many other Ojibwe Tribes, the Red Lake Nation is not one of the eleven tribes managed by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC). Because of this, they have a unique federal, state, and tribal management system for governing use of resources as well as their protection.

Their unique system of environmental management helped lead the way to the first tribal-state relations that took place in the state of Minnesota in 1999. In agreement between the State of Minnesota, the US Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Red Lake Nation, the two governmental bodies acknowledged the concerns of those of the Red Lake Nation. The three bodies signed an agreement prohibiting walleye fishing on all of Red Lake. The agreement also called for a strict monitoring and regulating of the suspension on both owners of the lake. In turn, countless partnerships sprouted with the creation of a committee dedicated to the management and recovery of the walleye in Red Lake. This included partnerships between organizations like the Red Lake DNR, RFLA, the Minnesota DNR, the University of Minnesota, the BIA, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Part of the agreement allowed for the participants to resign the contract every ten years if they so desired, which they did in 2010 (Dolan et. Al 9).

ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It could be argued that new non-native people living in the area as well as outside inhabitants associated with tourism are a large part of the blame for the inconsistencies within the walleye population. Prior to the invasion of European Settlers, the Red Lake Nation had practices that culturally sustained the population of walleye in Red Lake. Up until the arrival of settlers, there was little to no exploitation of their most valued resource, the walleye. Swift colonization replaced surrounding areas with white populations and tourists which created a perfect environment for illicit sales of walleye that doubled the legal amount put in place by the BIA to be sold per year (Anderson 2006).

Although some people a part of the Red Lake Nation were at fault for the decline of the walleye, their culture ultimately saved the population. Their traditions and values positively

impacted the environment because as a culture, they are conscious of how their actions were affecting the land and resources. As Red Lake Nation Tribal member, Judy Roy put it, “We have to remember that we don’t inherit our land and resources from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children and grandchildren (Dolan et al. 4)”. People on the Red Lake Nation, while hesitant, were willing to pause traditions that trace back to the 17th century in order to continue to have them in the future. Ojibwe culture values the environment by taking the long view. Without the awareness of those in the Red Lake Nation, it is very possible that the walleye population would have been fished to extinction in that region.

LESSONS LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS

Through the analysis of this case, it is clear that it is essential for there to be equal and effective communication between all parties involved in making agreements, placing an emphasis on the Native Nation that is involved in any given case. While the creation of a community partnership is usually just in regards to one specific issue, it should grow into a partnership that addresses any at all issues at stake. In relation to the Red Lake Nation and State of Minnesota partnership, it is important to consider that there were two distinct governing bodies who controlled parts of the same body of water. The Red Lake Nation was the first side to implement regulations hoping to positively affect the walleye population. Without the cooperation of the State of Minnesota, it would have been a lot more difficult to reverse the damage. Although the state only owned about thirteen percent of the water, the suffering walleye population could have still been negatively affected by fisherman who were legally allowed to harvest them.

That being said, it is also extremely important to have effective communication with the public. Specifically, the public that will be directly involved with whatever plans are being created and implemented. Like previously mentioned, the decisions made collectively by the Red Lake Nation and the State of Minnesota had a huge detrimental impact on the lives of local people, particularly those part of the Red Lake Nation. It is worth recognizing that preservation of important cultural resources and economic development often times, such as in this case, go hand in hand. Because the walleye is both a cultural resource and an essential part of the economy of the Red Lake Nation, the preservation of walleye was essential for saving Red Lake Nation cultural resources as well as their economic development.

In regards to the Cultural Management Plan for Woodlands park, it is important to first and foremost take the needs and desires of the Ho Chunk Nation into consideration when composing and implementing a plan. This can easily be done by effective communication practices between all parties involved, including members of the community. It is also important to take this opportunity to be able to further grow a relationship between the community partners. Each group has different things to offer that can and will be beneficial from a community standpoint.

CONCLUSION

While in this case, the community partnership was overall beneficial, it is still important to reflect on how it could have been improved. In regards to this specific case, it is important to think about whether or not the agreement will continue to be sufficient for providing regulations and protecting the walleye population in the years to come and whether or not it could to extend to more issues than just the walleye population. While the creation of the Walleye Recovery

Program did create partnerships, there is no guarantee that partnerships will continue to sprout or flourish. It is important to ponder how lessons learned in this particular partnership could be extended in regards to forming new partnership or building onto old ones that will effectively and productively contribute to the greater good of society and to each individual nation.

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