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188 acres of ancestral land returned to the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

At the end of December 2024, 188 acres of land along West Grand Traverse Bay, once known as Timber Shores, was returned to its original stewards, The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTB). The purchase and transfer of this land back to the tribe was made possible through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) FY 23 Transformational Habitat and Coastal Resilience grant opportunity and efforts from a Northport based non-profit, New Community Vision.

This culturally important land is named Mashkiigaki (Mashkeeg-aki) which means the place of the medicines and represents the importance of these wetlands as a traditionally significant location for hunting, fishing, gathering, and collecting medicines. Mashkiigaki is one of the last remnants of undeveloped coastal land within GTB's ancestral homelands and historic 1855 Reservation on Grand Traverse Bay, Lake Michigan. The land will now be restored and protected through GTB stewardship in perpetuity.

“Reconnecting with this land, and restoring it, taking care of the water and fish, the white pine, tamarack, and cedar trees, and the plants, will strengthen our way of life. The stars, sun, moon, sky, trees, plants, animals, earth, rocks, and water are our relatives and teachers. Those of us in the middle between the ancestors and the children, have an obligation to protect the land, water, and our rights for future generations.” – Eva Petoskey, GTB Tribal Elder

Ecocultural restoration plans will be developed through tribal-led community engagement sessions that highlight the importance of Mashkiigaki to the past, present, and future native and non-native communities. Design and implementation of such plans will be directed by a multi-generational group of GTB tribal elders, citizens, government staff and continuing community engagement. Accordingly, protection and community-based restoration will provide opportunity to experience a culturally enriched space that is oriented towards reminders of the necessary and intimate connections all humans have with healthy intact landscapes.

The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTB) is a federally recognized Tribe whose citizens are the Kchi-Wiikwedong Anishinaabek, the original inhabitants of the Grand Traverse Bay region. GTB, along with 4 other Tribal nations, is a signatory of the 1836 Treaty of Washington, which recognizes the sovereign rights of Tribal Citizens to hunt, fish, gather and live within their traditional homeland. This treaty deeded over the land base that would become the state of Michigan in 1837. In 1855, GTB was given a reservation of 87,000 acres in Leelanau County. In 1872, this reservation was illegally terminated by the U.S. Government. After restoration of federal recognition in 1980, GTB's Service Area now comprises six counties in northern lower Michigan, within which a scattered patchwork of 2,981 acres are under Tribal ownership. Peshawbestown, holding GTB's largest community and governing seat, is situated on West Grand Traverse Bay, an arm of Lake Michigan.