

President's Message

October 6, 2014

This coming weekend we will be celebrating Thanksgiving Day. For many, this is a time fondly remembered for family and friends, and, of course, the food. Thanksgiving has its roots in various harvest festivals and is part of the sacred and secular traditions of many peoples. It is truly a special time to remember and celebrate all the people, and all those things, we are thankful for.

On Thanksgiving, afternoon or evening, many families will have a turkey or ham dinner. For others, a meal of goose, deer, or moose is on the table. One of the things we should be thankful for are our cultural traditions, whether it be farming or hunting, that are still with us today. Thankfully, with the labour and toil using our own hands, we are able to feed our families by our historical practices passed on to us by our parents and grandparents.

We are surrounded by a "modern" society that has lost its special connections to the lands and waters, and its respect for fish and wildlife. The traditional ways of life have been forgotten or ignored. In such a society, thankfully we have a Canadian Constitution that protects our right to harvest for food. The 2003 Supreme Court of Canada section 35 Powley decision first gave recognition to Metis harvesting. Here in Manitoba, the 2008 Goodon Decision further acknowledged our right.

The Metis Laws of the Harvest that we practice today have their origins in the written Laws of the Buffalo Hunt from the 1840s. We are a people who understand our responsibilities. Before and after the Powley decision, the MMF undertook over 70 consultation workshops throughout our Manitoba Metis Community. In 2002 we produced the Report on the Metis Laws of the Hunt. The recommendations set out four principle directives that were subsequently approved at the Annual General Assembly.

These directives included the setting up of a Metis Conservation Trust Fund, Metis Laws, Metis Management System, and of course, our Metis Harvester Identification Cards. This card protects our harvesters while ensuring only Metis can exercise our right according to our own traditions. Our first card was issued in September 2004. Since that first card the MMF has issued approximately 7,800 cards to date.

Almost two years ago to the day, September 29, 2012, the MMF and the Manitoba Government signed the 2012 Points of Agreement on Metis Harvesting. This agreement recognized Metis rights within a harvesting zone that included much of Manitoba. We are in discussions with government to increase the size of the zone. It is also the year to review the current agreement. As a reminder, for those harvesting outside the recognized zone, please contact your MMF regional office for information on how to get a full reimbursement for buying the required Manitoba licenses.

Protecting our right to harvest is not something that is only done in the courts or in the halls of the legislature. It is also done by each and every one of you when you get your harvester identification card, your conservation trust fund stickers, and your management tags. It is also protected when you fill out MMF harvesting surveys, and when you and your family participate in MMF traditional land use studies and consultation meetings before projects like hydro transmission lines and forestry plans are licensed. This will help to ensure our territories will be available for future generations.

I offer prayers and condolences for all who have lost family and friends. Please pray for the good health of those who are sick or shut-in. I ask that you be sure to give each other a hug. Best wishes to all.

Believe in yourself – Believe in Metis!

Meeqwetch,