

## **President's Message**

*November 10, 2016*

This is the season of remembrance. On November 11th we remember those who gave their lives in sacrifice for our freedom. Canadians of all walks of life, of all ages, and of all nations, mark Remembrance Day. Once known as Armistice Day, since 1919 it marks a moment of silence on the bell's toll at the 11th hour, on the 11th day of the 11th month. At that moment we pause our work, or our play, to offer our respect and thanks to those who have made sacrifices in our struggles against tyranny and oppression.

When I look back over the centuries of the Métis Nation, I am reminded of the many who have fought for our freedom, rights and recognition. From the early struggle of Cuthbert Grant, to the resistance by Louis Riel through answering the call to our Métis Veterans to fight for freedom and keep the world's peace. This Remembrance Day take a moment to recall those who gave so we may enjoy. Attend a service - say a prayer of thanks - reach out to each other and share one another's burdens.

On November 16th is Louis Riel Commemoration Day. On that date we remember the man and recall his deeds. We mark the anniversary of his death and celebrate his life. He and his government took the stand to protect our rights, our lands, and our families. It was by his stand, and of other Métis leaders, that the Métis became Canada's negotiating partners in Confederation and the Founders of Manitoba. This year we will continue to grow his legacy.

We have been left a legacy, by Louis Riel and others who have gone on before us, blazing the trail to recognition and self-governance. We must remain diligent and vigilant. We must continue the good fight managing and protecting our people, our resources and our environment. This past week I attended the COP22, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Marrakesh. At this conference, attended by international leaders, I was privileged to present on responsible conservation management that considers and includes the impact of our efforts on our environment, resources, animals, culture and economy.

One of Canada's most invaluable natural resources are Manitoba's boreal forests. These forests often called "the great lung of North America" for their superior air and water filtration, and their irreplaceable ability to store carbon. Boreal forests are one of few remaining places in the world that house fully functioning ecosystems, supporting countless communities and animal species. Failing to maintain these ecosystems will lead to the disappearance of animal and plant species. Preserving boreal forests are critical in protecting the earth's current and future ecological health. It is also important for the survival of our way of life.

Sadly, the best methods of tackling these issues are often misunderstood. Conservation that doesn't focus on preserving a balance may have devastating impacts on our ecosystems and those dependent on them. Although well-intended, many resource management efforts are short-sighted and can cause a chain-reaction of long-lasting, negative effects. We must focus on ensuring both the environment and the economy are integrated in our plans.

An instance of misguided conservation can be seen with beaver trapping, which has nearly become obsolete. As a consequence, the trapping industry and the environment beavers live in have both suffered. The beaver population has grown rapidly, unrestricted by a lack of incentives for trappers and no natural predators. Large numbers of beaver dams create enormous pools of stagnant water. Oxygen levels drop without constant water flow, killing masses of fish, and forming breeding grounds for dangerous bacteria like E.coli. Flooding caused by dams introduces harmful pollutants like methyl mercury to essential waterways. The result? A trickle-down of negative, far-reaching impacts.

The Manitoba Metis Federation has witnessed these types of adverse effects on our environment firsthand, and has worked to correct misunderstandings on responsible resource management. In 2000, The MMF launched the Lake Winnipegosis Clean-Up Project to clear creeks and streams of beavers and their dams in the Lake Winnipegosis area to help restore depleted fish levels. The Project provided meaningful jobs to people in the area benefitting the local economy. Recent observations indicate the fish population has increased since the project began. In 2012, The Lake Winnipegosis Clean-Up Project won Manitoba Hydro's Spirit of the Earth Award for its successful environmental protection approach.

Our conservation approaches must take into account of the long-term effects and impacts of our actions and policies. Wise use, well-considered decision-making, and, of course caution, will hopefully reduce negative chain-reactions. Protecting our environment and natural resources while preserving our livelihoods must go hand in hand. Together we will ensure – even in the new reality of climate change – we will have these fish and wildlife to enjoy for generations to come.

In closing I wish to bid each of you a healthy season of remembrance. May memories of your loved ones give you warmth and confidence. I also send my thoughts and prayers to those of us who mourn, are sick or shut in. May you enjoy community and help from your family and friends.

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