

## **President's Message**

*August 23, 2017*

Summer is quickly passing. I hope you have had the chance to enjoy all that the Métis Homeland has to offer such as Métis Days at our Locals, Métis historic sites like the Battle of Seven Oaks, also known as the Victory of Frog Plain or "la Victoire de la Grenouillère," as well as the fiddle entertainment at Riel House in St. Vital on Thursday evenings. These are just a few among the many places to visit.

My family, friends and I have been fortunate to carve time out of our very busy schedules to do some of that and more, such as spending time together fishing, visiting, camping and playing golf. I cherish these long days, the beautiful weather and time with those I love and appreciate.

This summer has been full of great times and gatherings. Your Métis Government has been traveling around the province meeting face-to-face with Métis Citizens. We have heard about the wonderful things that have been happening in our regions. Among the meetings we have been having recently are the night hunting consultations.

In 2012 the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) signed a Points of Agreement with the province of Manitoba that saw the province agree to a recognized harvesting zone and to respect our Métis Laws of the Harvest and Harvester Identification Card. This important milestone means laws we have followed since the days of the Buffalo Hunt are recognized for their attention to conservation and responsible management of our resources. As Métis Harvesters, we agree and support efforts that serve to maintain our heritage for generations to come.

Our Métis Laws of the Harvester were developed through consultation with our Métis Elders, Citizens and Harvesters. They are a reflection of our community knowledge and traditions. The night hunting and night lighting consultations we are having in the MMF's seven regions continue the spirit of this work by exploring how we, as a Métis Community, desire to exercise our inherent right to harvest.

For many years it was illegal for our Métis Harvesters to hunt and exercise their inherent right to provide for their families. For protection from the arbitrary provincial laws and harassing actions of officers, some harvesters often waited until the cover of night to hunt for food for our families. They were guided and assisted by the light of the moon and stars. For others, it is a traditional practice to call in moose at night during the rut or wait at salt licks until a moose showed up. Clearly there are different reasons for hunting at night or with lights. There are differing opinions on whether we should continue these practices

We are talking to our Métis Elders, Citizens and Harvesters to determine how we wish to proceed. As I have said before, we will never extinguish, or give up our inherent rights. But as a Métis Community, we can collectively determine for ourselves how we choose to exercise those rights. If, as a Community, we decide to change how we Harvest, it does not mean we are surrendering or giving up any right. No, it is instead a thoughtful discussion and agreement how we will continue to exercise our hunts.

For your opportunity to share your thoughts, I encourage you to attend an upcoming meeting. You can also provide your thoughts and comments by filling out a form and sending to Manon Soulard at [manon.soulard@mmf.mb.ca](mailto:manon.soulard@mmf.mb.ca) or by calling her at (204) 586-8474. The list of upcoming meetings and comment forms can be seen on our website, and downloaded and printed if needed. Simply click the graphic for Night Hunting on the MMF homepage at [www.mmf.mb.ca](http://www.mmf.mb.ca).

Some comments we have heard regarding Harvesting include questions on how we will manage and address Métis Harvesters who do not abide by the accepted and recognized Laws of the Harvest. For those who follow the laws set out by the Métis Community, they are supported by our Métis Government. In times past, some recent, we have had overzealous Conservation Officers try to take matters into their own hand and, sometimes fraudulently, attempt to defeat our right to harvest. During those times, the MMF has had to defend our Métis Harvesters in the courts. The courts recognize our rights and our Harvesters have carried the day.

As the self-governing democratic representative of Manitoba's Métis Community, the MMF is committed to the protection, promotion and preservation of our inherent rights as a Community. We will not be bullied or harassed for diligently and responsibly exercising those rights. Our rights and conservation ethics are closely related and are truly sustainable.

Regarding the management of those Métis Harvesters who do not follow the laws of our Métis Community, we will be working with our Métis Citizens to determine appropriate actions to take. Our Métis Community is empowered and can determine what is or isn't appropriate for our Community including hunting outside our laws. As a community, we will determine for ourselves how we will manage our resources. Our laws are made by the Métis, for the Métis and to protect our Métis traditions and heritage.

In this message, I have focused upon our right to harvest. However, the jurisdictions and authorities we define in an upcoming self-government agreement will do much more than assist us in protecting and advancing our harvesting rights. This agreement will give us the necessary tools to advance other areas such as education, employment, economic development, healthcare, housing and much more. This is an historic time. We are on the cusp of something that has never been done in Canada. We are creating a fully recognized Métis self-government – a third order of government – with the jurisdictions and authorities to maintain a nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship with Canada and the province.

For information on what we are doing in self-government, visit [www.ManitobaMetisGovernment.ca](http://www.ManitobaMetisGovernment.ca). Also, get involved in your Locals and Regional Meetings. Share your voice and strengthen your Métis Government.

In closing, I send my thoughts and prayers to you all, in particular to those of you who are sick, shut-in or have cause to grieve. Be near each other. Help one another. I hope you enjoy these last weeks of Summer. I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming Annual General Assembly on September 22nd, 23rd and 24th at the Assiniboia Downs in Winnipeg.

Believe in Yourself – Believe in Métis  
Meeqwetch,