

**Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the  
United States Remote Oversight Hearing - Cisco WebEx  
October 26, 2021 12:00 p.m.**

**Oversight Hearing on “Strengthening Indigenous Communities Through  
Cultural and Environmental Preservation”**

**Questions from Rep. Grijalva** for Mr. Chase Meierotto, Treaty Natural Resource Administrator, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

- 1. Can you speak more on the ecological threats that have posed risks to the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa’s cultural and natural resources over the years?**  
**a. How has the tribal government worked to overcome these threats?**

The treaty natural resources division does many things that protect our relatives who cannot speak for themselves. The division is an advocate in connection with proposed permits for activities that could adversely affect treaty natural resources, CWA designation efforts, Clean Air designation efforts and more. Some historical and/or current examples of threats include the expansion of Enbridge’s Line 5, the GTAC mine, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, logging practices, domestic and commercial development of housing and roads, overharvest of fish and game, and human assisted encroachment of non-native beings (invasive species). Red Cliff works to address these threats through a variety of surveillance, monitoring, and control programs to establish baselines and detect impacts over time. TNR also uses this information to recommend sustainable harvest quotas and regulations and develop best management practices that are incorporated and enforceable through Red Cliff’s Code of Laws. TNR also works closely with other management agencies and non-governmental organizations and educational institutions to monitor and guide wise stewardship of the natural resources both on-Reservation and within our Ceded Territories that are critical to sustaining the Band’s past and future cultural identity.

Red Cliff emphatically stives for proper government to government consultation on all these matters. The tribe is routinely considered another member of the public and not recognized as a sovereign nation. There needs to be proper government to government consultation on all of these threats so that Red Cliff can continue to do protect those that cannot speak for themselves.

- 2. Are you able to speak on any future plans for the Red Cliff Fish Company, or other cultural preservation initiatives like it?**

There is planned expansion for the Red Cliff fish Company. More staff would mean more production and more opportunities. Adding more value-added products likes dips spreads and pickled fish is already in the works. The Company will continue to work with our community and do what we can to best meet the needs of Red Cliff. We have begun to create partnerships with other programs such as our tribal farm. The Fish Company has already been contributing to our local Community Shared Agriculture program. This is providing one of the protein pieces that are provided throughout the community. We have also been working with the tribal food distribution program to include fresh fish as part of that program and getting frozen and smoked fish products out directly to the elders in our community.

The Red Cliff Treaty Natural Resources division also collaborates with the local schools in the surrounding area. We work together with the schools to help preserve the Red Cliff way of life. By providing tours, demonstrations, field work and hands on activities we pass on that knowledge to the next generations.

**Questions from Rep. Leger Fernández** for Mr. Chase Meierotto, Treaty Natural Resource Administrator, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

**1, Your testimony mentions the history behind the establishment of the Red Cliff Fish Company. a. Can you speak more on the federal grants and funding that helped your tribal government open this important economic and cultural development entity?**

This was part of the *Keepseagle* litigation settlement funding. Briefly, that case involved a claim that the USDA systematically denied Native American farmers and ranchers nationwide the same opportunities as white farmers to obtain low-interest rate loans and loan servicing. These settlement funds contributed to the cost of constructing the facility. This building has a retail space to deliver our processed fish and products directly to consumers like you and me. The building has a processing floor where all fish come in and are weighed processed and prepped for deliveries or retail sales at the facility. We also received an ANA grant. This grant has funded two vital staff for the company as well as most of the specialized equipment to process the fish and package the fish for sale. There was a need to the Red Cliff Tribal council to also contribute other funds to purchase other equipment such as a backup generator, security equipment, and installation of said equipment. The *Keepseagle* funds and ANA grant provided a great foundation for the company. Without these funding sources the tribe would not have been able to proceed with this endeavor. The Red Cliff Tribe does not have a viable source of revenue from gaming and thus relies on available funding opportunities to further advance these types of projects.

**2. Can you elaborate more on what the local fish economy looked like before the opening of the Red Cliff Fish Company?**

**a. How has the company's creation benefited and supported tribal members and the surrounding communities?**

While some fishers would process their own fish and make local sales or community donations on their own, prior to opening the Red Cliff Fish Company there were only two local fish processing facilities located off-Reservation. Both are non-tribal operations, and because of the lack of competition our tribal fishers were forced to take whatever price was offered or market and sell their product on their own. Being small business owners, these fishermen face many different challenges in running their own businesses. These challenges include things such as transportation costs, maintenance cost, proper food handling course work, marketing, etc. all which make running all aspects of the commercial fishing business prohibitive.

We now have a chance to be competitive in the market and can provide a better price to our fishers. In the past prices to fishermen often dipped below \$0.50/lb for whitefish. In the past year the fish company has been able to offer double and occasionally triple that amount.

The fish company opened during the herring season of 2020 and there was immediate competition amongst buyers to purchase fish. Just the presence of the company brought the price of the fish being

sold by tribal fishermen up from \$0.65/lb to \$0.85/lb. The presence of the RCFC within the market also benefits Bad River tribal members and state-licensed commercial fishermen, both of which have sold their catch to our company and have taken advantage of the prices that we offer for their product.

The Red Cliff fish company continues to grow and as of this morning we now have seven full time employees.