

Project title: *Mnomen Initiative*: Building Relationships to Assess the Feasibility and Sustainability of Anishinaabe-Centered Wild Rice Restoration on Specific University Properties

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*Part 1: The following sections will be made **publicly available** on the Graham website.*

Summary

Mnomen, wild rice, is fundamental to Anishinaabek culture, epistemologies, identity, language, lifeways, and more. Thus proposing the restoration of Mnomen for sustainable futures is far more than a western-science “ecological restoration” project. Given the challenging history of the University of Michigan’s interactions with Anishinaabek tribes since the treaty of 1817 that established the University, and that Mnomen once grew on the waters of properties the University now stewards, the Mnomen Initiative is fundamentally part of the restorative-justice foundation for a new way forward with multiple Anishinaabek partners.

This work was planned before the COVID epidemic. Although extensive on-site Tribal travel and engagement was anticipated, the proposed system was not tenable under COVID health realities. Instead there was a pivot (explained in greater detail in the interim report of 01 September, 2020) to COVID-framed joint field work. This resulted in several project outputs - all available on-line (see References.) More significantly, the Mnomen Initiative crystalized a culture-change at the UM Matthaei Botanical Gardens & Nichols Arboretum, reinforced with the arrival of a new Director, Dr.

Anthony Kolenic . This change of institutional perception of its roles in restorative justice - and the critical importance of Mnomen work to our credibility with Tribal, University, and foundation relationships - is functionally irreversible.

The project closed in a way absolutely unanticipated, and far more impactful than we could have imagined during its conception. On March 2nd, 2022, Ricing Elder Roger LaBine (Lac Vieux Desert Tribe) conducted an Ice Out ceremony with Mide Punkin Shananaquet (Match E Be Nash She Wish Band of Potawatomi) and Pipe Carriers Douglas Taylor and Fredrick Jacko (both of Nottawaseppi-Huron Band). Representatives from every Tribe of Michigan were invited, but due to enduring COVID-protocols only 8 of 13 Tribes (12 in Michigan, one in Ontario) were present and hosted. We believe this is the first Ice Out on University lands in southern Michigan since the Treaty of 1817. After the Ceremony and Feast, the ensuing discussions allowed Dr. Selena Smith (LSA-EES) to propose a way forward of Two-Eyed Seeing (using Western and Indigenous perspectives concurrently). That proposal, framed by the relationships and insights of this Graham catalyst project, has resulted in a submitted funding request to LSA’s Meet the Moment for \$249.5K over 2 years to accomplish the next fundamental steps together. Subsequent grant seeking from NSF and other agencies is currently being scaffolded as well.

Project background and approach

Provide a brief overview of the issue, including the sustainability challenge the work sought to address

The fundamental issue is the need for meaningful Tribal engagement for Mnomen (wild rice) restoration. This is an issue of trust-building, and it can't be "our" project that "they" allow. The "we" must be Tribal partners *and* university representatives. Although from a Western perspective the important issues center on water- and submerged-soils assessment and monitoring, these issues - as critical as they are - are only part of the critical suite of elements to understand for success. Tribal partners have millennia of experience as well as greater experience in developing Two-Eyed research frameworks for success. Assuming mnomen can be re-established in its former habitats, it will likely underpin significant as well as subtle shifts in ecosystem function and the restoration of bio-cultural diversity.

Identify the external partner(s) and their interest in the work

Our external partners are the Anishinaabek tribal agencies, culture-keepers, and staff from across Michigan as well as the deeply-connected and related Tribes in Ontario (specifically, Bkejwanong Unceded Territory, aka Walpole Island First Nation.) Since Mnomen is central to cultural lifeways and sustainable water-land food systems of the future, there is great potential for profound work together. But first there has to be strong and trusting relationships.

Describe the activities/process including the approach to engaging external partners and/or stakeholders

Mutually agreed field-work and learning, with subsequent meetings, was the proposed approach. Due to COVID, this had to change significantly, as there could be only one person per canoe or kayak, and no "COVID bubbles" broken during travel to sites - functionally limiting field work to two or three people per site. We pivoted, and Ricing Elder Roger LaBine suggested the Ice Out is the essential next step, and then set out, with Tribal colleagues, the course for the next few years of partnership and effort.

Briefly describe any changes to the scope or timeline, if applicable

COVID caused huge changes - a metamorphosis - to the project. Once the field work that could be done was accomplished, and the key task of identifying the best site among all the down-state UM properties, we reframed the timeline. The project concluded with Ice Out on March 2, 2022. That planning began in the early fall of 2021, when Michener went to meet with Ricing Elder Roger LaBine for a candid discussion at a site of his preference in the western Upper Peninsula.

Findings

There are four key findings appropriate for public distribution.

1. The highest priority site combining Western and Traditional Knowledge criteria is Willow Pond at the UM Matthaei Botanical Gardens. Assessing all the potential sites and coming to this unanimous conclusion is a significant finding.
2. Anishinaabek epistemologies are the appropriate framework, and Anishinaabemowin (as the language is known) is the appropriate language for public interpretation. This is significant and frames all subsequent Two-Eyed approaches and funding proposals.
3. This work should be tied - structurally - to the water and sustainable development needs of each Tribe involved.
4. All parties see this work as mutually beneficial and realistic for the coming years

Outputs

Provide a description of each of your outputs, including who will be using the output and how.

The outputs to date (see References) are for all audiences. As we move forward, we will be making a Tribally-vetted web presence for ongoing reference.

Provide citations for project-relevant publications and presentations to date and planned, and provide a list of events and participants if applicable.

See References

Where feasible, please provide links to or submit copies of described outputs noting clearly if these should not be shared publicly.

Please use the References

Outcomes

Provide a brief description of each of your project outcomes.

A key outcome is a shift - and a deepening - at the UM MBGNA from Tribal engagement to Tribal agency / voice and vision in decision-making related to the sites we steward, and the work we can do together to develop sustainable lifeways. This is a trajectory, not a destination.

Another key outcome is the inter-tribal engagement that is happening on the lands and waters stewarded by UM MBGNA. For example, at the recent Ice Out it was expressed that for some, participating was part of the recovery of ceremonies that are on the cusp of endangerment from cultural erasure, especially since it was led by four Elders and culture-keepers from three Nations. Likewise, the outline of a working session planned to follow the Feast lunch was scrapped as it was the group's desire to network based on several issues at hand - and yet out of this came the framework for the recently submitted LSA Meet the Moment proposal (attached as a pdf).

Other information (optional)

Describe any other accomplishments or relevant project information not covered in other sections of this report that you wish to share.

In the References section the concurrently-running work, *Izhi-Minoging Mashkikiwan - Place Where Medicines Grow Well*: Landscape design proposal for the Cheboiganing Burt Lake Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians that was organized by Eva Roos as her UM SEAS Practicum in Landscape architecture is listed. The work of Heritage Seeds and then the Mnomen Initiative had established sufficient cross-party trust for her innovative work to be conceptualized and then brought to physical reality. Although it is separate from this Catalyst Grant, the milieu that this Grant has helped create are responsible for her inspiring work with the Cheboiganing Burt Lake Band and new ways forward.

Likewise, the co-generative work with multiple Anishinaabek tribes in the region led Michener to be invited as one of two co-PIs in the state of Michigan (the other is Dr. [Kyle Whyte](#)) in the National Science

Foundation pre-proposal led by Dr. Sonya Atalay (University of Massachusetts.) This is a 5-year, \$30M request to fund a Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledge and Science at UMass. There would be ca 30 co-PIs nationwide. Michener/ MBGNA was requested for its record in “place-based research projects, climate change adaptation, and foodways.” The pre-proposal was submitted in late March, 2022. The Mnomen Initiative work demonstrated that the trajectory of the GSI-funded project, Heritage Seeds, represents foundational change.

References

A. UM SEAS Master's Practica

1. Stokes, Samantha F. 2021. Mnomen: Assessing the Feasibility of Anishinaabek-Centered Wild Rice Restoration on University of Michigan Properties <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/167289>
2. Roos, E. 2021. Izhi-Minoging Mashkikiwan - Place Where Medicines Grow Well. Landscape design proposal for the Cheboiganing Burt Lake Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians. <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/167291>

B. Gala Class

1. Stokes, Samantha and Goode, Maeghen. Decolonizing University Land Management. [Can Anishinaabe-Centered Mnomen \(Wild Rice\) Restoration Help Restore Right Relations between the University of Michigan and Indigenous Communities?](#)

C. Meeting the Mnomen LSA proposal

1. Add as a PDF

D. National Media and Exhibits

1. An article in Popular Science by Indigenous Investigative Reporter Kalen Goodluck, web-published 10 February, 2022. [Indigenous farmers are 'rematriating' centuries-old seeds to plant a movement. Heirloom plants from museums and seed banks are being reconnected with their original tribal stewards for cultural preservation and food security.](#)
2. US National Botanical Garden / USDA Exhibit on Capitol Hill, Washington, DC. Opening May, 2022 and running through December, 2023 (expected visitation ca 1.5 to 2.x million people) **Cultivate: Growing Food in a Changing World**. Press materials will come, but pre-media images of soft-opening (NOT FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION) at: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pa675ak31ctnqjx/AACon_WiYU6RMAu2N4Tki6Qqa?dl=0

*Part 2: The following sections are for internal program tracking and program improvement and **will not be shared publicly**.*

Project personnel details

This includes more detailed contact information than what is included in the public content section

If there have been changes to project personnel (i.e., researchers, partners, and students) not already reported during the mid-project check-in report, please list names and email addresses. For U-M students, please also indicate degree program

This one element is not for public disclosure. Due to both unanticipated and unimagined circumstances, one project partner demanded removal from project elements, including the revision of all public documents (incl Stokes Master's practicum) of said person's engagement. With the assistance of key administrators, public security, and the OCG, this was accomplished.

UM Degree Granted in relation to this work: SEAS - Masters; Samantha F. Stokes. See references for her Deep Blue citation.

- Based on this GSI-funded work, Ms. Stokes was awarded a highly-competitive, fully-funded (4 year minimum) PhD position at the University of Minnesota. [The University of Wisconsin offered her a prestigious Regental-level fellowship to recruit her, but she declined that offer.] She works with [Kawe Gidaa-naanaagadawendaamin Manoomin - First we must consider Manoomin / Psin wild rice\) A Tribal-University Research Collaboration](#). She is listed as one of the "Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Researchers".

Budget

Provide information on budget expenditures.

The Summary Close-out budget is attached as a pdf. There is a balance of \$1,858.76, which reflects an unanticipated (at the time of our application) Rackham Award of \$1,500 to Samantha Stokes to augment this work (line 3 on the budget pdf). Had that Rackham award not been made, the balance would have been \$358.76. We will use the balance to continue this Mnomen-based Tribal engagement.

Evaluation

Summarize the team's evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the project, including measures of success from the proposal.

Rather than a separate Evaluation, there were several steps that indicated the project was moving forward constructively, as reported above. Key are:

1. The selection of one site by all parties, directly related to this grant and the basis of Ms. Stokes Master's at SEAS, and her aggressive recruitment by several universities (given above.)
2. The emergence of the profoundly meaningful Ice Out ceremony, and the gathering of cultural leaders from 3 tribes to lead it, for the benefit of all Tribes who could attend.
3. The submission of a \$249.5K proposal for the next steps.