



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### EXECUTIVE ORDER #277

#### **Relating to Tribal Treaty Rights and the Protection of Wild Rice**

**WHEREAS**, the state of Wisconsin reaffirms that the 11 federally recognized Native Nations of Wisconsin are sovereign nations and their sovereignty is recognized by federal law and protected by federal treaties;

**WHEREAS**, treaties, rulings from the Supreme Court of the United States, as well as federal and state laws, have established a unique legal relationship between states and Native Nations;

**WHEREAS**, Executive Order #18 charged cabinet agencies with developing policies and practices aimed at improving the intergovernmental relationships between the state of Wisconsin and Native Nations located within the state;

**WHEREAS**, in addition to constitutional and statutory obligations to respect Tribal sovereignty, ongoing and comprehensive education on Treaty Rights is vital in recognizing and respecting Native Nations, their inherent rights, and the rights of Indigenous people;

**WHEREAS**, Indigenous communities are the original stewards of the land, air, and water resources of the state, and their ancestral knowledge is deeply valuable in efforts to promote environmental and ecological resilience across Wisconsin communities;

**WHEREAS**, it is critical that the Native Nations of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources work collaboratively to preserve and enhance the vast and valuable natural resources of the state;

**WHEREAS**, wild rice, or manoomin, is a culturally significant and important food source to the Native Nations of Wisconsin, serving as a central feature in Tribal agricultural practices, as well as community and faith-based traditions;

**WHEREAS**, habitat requirements for wild rice are fairly specific, and changing ecological conditions are putting Tribes' ability to grow, cultivate, and harvest on ceded Tribal lands and waters at risk;

**WHEREAS**, centuries ago, manoomin was abundant across the Great Lakes Region and parts of North America, but research suggests that wild rice available for Tribal harvest off reservation has continued to see a steady decline in the Great Lakes Region, a trend that is projected to continue due to anthropogenic climate change, specifically increased early-summer precipitation and warmer winters;

**WHEREAS**, the *LCO v. Voigt* Decision, made by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit in 1983, upheld the rights of the Ojibwe Nations of Wisconsin to hunt, fish, and gather in the ceded territory, and preserving Native Nation's long-established practice of wild rice stewardship in these fixed territories is critical to honoring this agreement;

**WHEREAS**, the Voigt Intertribal Task Force was created to manage the hunting, fishing, and gathering rights affirmed by the *LCO v. Voigt* Decision and committees comprised of Tribal and state representatives work collaboratively to provide a framework for co-management of resources;

**WHEREAS**, a joint State/Tribal Wild Rice Management Committee was formed under the *LCO v. Voigt* Decision with responsibility to share data and develop recommendations for the protection and enhancement of wild rice;

**WHEREAS**, the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change previously recommended building on this work by creating a Manoomin Stewardship Council in partnership with the Native Nations of Wisconsin; and

**WHEREAS**, Wisconsin reaffirms its commitment to working with Native Nations to foster a better understanding of climate change and to develop solutions that will lead to the preservation of cultural resources, along with improved ecosystem function and means of sustainable food production.

**NOW, THEREFORE, I, TONY EVERS**, Governor of the State of Wisconsin, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the Laws of the State, hereby order the following:

- a. Order the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, in consultation with the Native Nations of Wisconsin, to:
  1. Develop and provide a mandatory training to all Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources employees on Tribal Treaty Rights as it relates to fishing, hunting, and gathering.
  2. Work with Tribal governments, the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission, and other appropriate organizations to identify the greatest public education needs on Tribal Treaty Rights related to fishing, hunting, and gathering and provide this public education.
  3. Develop a plan to incorporate Indigenous languages and public education on signage at state parks. This plan shall be presented to the Governor by May 2026.
  4. Explore additional options to expand the preservation and harvest of wild rice.
- b. Create a Wild Rice Stewardship Council, that shall include the following members appointed by the governor to serve at the pleasure of the governor:
  1. A representative from each of the 11 federally recognized Tribes of Wisconsin;
  2. A representative from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources;
  3. A representative from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection;
  4. The director of the Office of Environmental Justice;
  5. A representative from the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission; and
  6. Other individuals appointed by the governor to serve at the pleasure of the governor.
- c. The Wild Rice Stewardship Council shall do the following:
  1. Promote the protection of wild rice in Wisconsin.
  2. Provide recommendations to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
  3. Make itself available to the joint State/Tribal Wild Rice Management Committee at that Committee's request.
  4. Develop recommendations to protect and enhance wild rice, including policies, educational initiatives, research, and/or monitoring to be shared with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Department Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.
  5. Study and understand the impact climate change is having on Wisconsin's wild rice and develop long-term solutions for proper management and protection.
  6. Consider social, cultural, and recreational values associated with wild rice and strive to ensure its presence for future generations.
  7. Develop strategies to educate the public on the importance of wild rice to the state of Wisconsin.

- d. Instruct the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to bolster efforts to educate consumers on wild rice and develop a website to provide education and streamlined reporting of false labeling of wild rice.
- e. Declare the first week of September as Wild Rice Week beginning in 2026 and instruct state agencies to conduct activities to raise awareness of the value of wild rice.

**IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF,** I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great seal of the State of Wisconsin to be affixed. Done at the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Institute on the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation this thirteenth day of October in the year of two thousand twenty-five.

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TONY EVERS  
Governor

By the Governor:

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SARAH GODLEWSKI  
Secretary of State