

Native Voices, Natural Solutions: 2023 Highlight Report



Midwest Regional Office
Fish, Wildlife and Parks Branch
September 2024

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Preface

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Midwest Region's Branch of Fish, Wildlife and Parks provides funding and support to 36 federally recognized Tribes and 3 Inter-Tribal treaty resource organizations. Tribes in the Midwest Region encompass and steward approximately 62 million acres including treaty ceded territories representing millions of acres of forests, lakes, streams, and wetlands. Tribal natural resource management activities highlighted in the following pages contribute to the sustainability of wildlife populations and local ecosystems within the Great Lakes, Mississippi, and Rainy River watersheds within the states of Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) began in 2010 to accelerate efforts to protect and restore the largest system of fresh surface water in the world, the Laurentian Great Lakes. Indian country, comprised of reservation land bases and ceded territories where Tribes retain rights, represent millions of acres within the Great Lakes Basin. Since 2010, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), with support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has provided GLRI funding to more than 30 Tribes and tribal organizations in the Midwest and Eastern Regions for Great Lakes protection and restoration efforts.

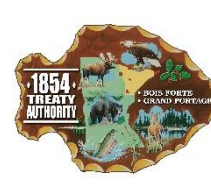
Tribes are leaders in on-the-ground wildlife and habitat restoration and enhancement efforts in the Midwest, often working in close coordination with numerous local, state, federal and non-governmental partners. Efforts include restoring critical wetland habitat for wild rice and waterfowl; protecting culturally important endangered species; controlling non-native and invasive species threatening the integrity of local ecosystems; and engaging the next generation of native youth to foster life-long interest and careers in the field of natural resource management to serve their communities and beyond.

We invite you to explore these 2023 success stories, showcasing how Tribes have played a crucial role in the national Fish, Wildlife, and Parks grant programs and the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Through their ongoing efforts, Tribes continue to be vital contributors to the restoration and preservation of the region's natural resources.

The Midwest Fish, Wildlife and Parks Team



Thank you to all our tribal partners.



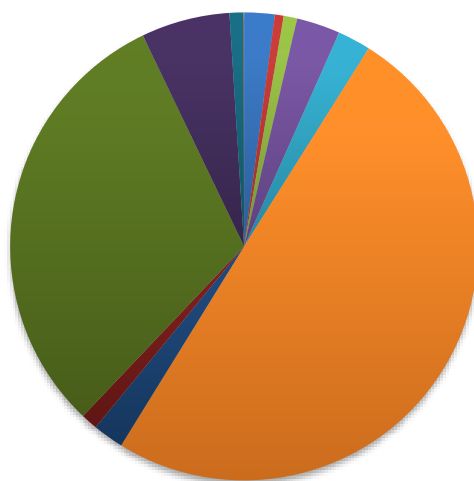
FY23 Funding Summary

In Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Midwest Region continued to administer programs, including Base Funding; Circle of Flight; and several Branch of Wildlife, Parks, and Recreation programs as well as the Distinct Tribal Program for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI DTP). The Midwest Region also administered two new funding opportunities, the first was a one-time funding opportunity for Fish Hatchery Construction. BIA received twenty proposals for nearly 11 million dollars' worth of construction projects, indicating ample need for this funding, one project in was funded through this program (Table 1). In FY23, BIA distributed a total amount of \$12,591,846 for competitive BIA branch programs (Table 1), and \$18,900,000 for 87 competitive GLRI DTP awards (18 Capacity and 69 Project awards, Table 2). Overall, there was a \$84,915 of unmet requests for programs..

A new funding opportunity was launched in 2023, the Bison Program, announced in support of Secretarial Order 3410; the Midwest Region received two proposals, however neither proposal was successful at the national level. We met with the Bison Program lead at Central Office to identify opportunities for Midwest Tribes under this new Program and ways to improve funding odds in the future.

The Midwest Region Branch of Wildlife & Parks led efficient and timely distribution of the large and complex GLRI DTP with the support of Midwest Regional leadership and administrative staff; BIA's Great Lakes and Michigan Agencies; Self-Determination officials and staff; Branch of Environmental and Cultural Resources; Branch of Transportation; Budget/Finance offices; Eastern Regional Office Natural Resources and Self-Determination; the Office of Self-Governance; the Central Financial Office; EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office; inter-agency Great Lakes Regional Working Group; and the following additional Department of the Interior Bureaus and Agencies who's GLRI and/or Tribal relations staff served on the FY23 BIA DTP funding proposal review team: National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Forest Service.

FY23 Midwest Region Funding Amounts



COF	(\$980,521)
CLEO	(\$282,000)
Endangered Species	(\$437,786)
Hatchery Maintenance	(\$1,399,962)
Hatchery Operations	(\$1,064,464)
Great Lakes Restoration	(\$23,235,542)
Invasive Species	(\$992,465)
Noxious Weeds	(\$537,012)
Rights Protection	(\$14,344,220)
Tribal Mgt. and Dev.	(\$2,852,521)
Tribal Youth Initiative	(\$447,870)
Wildlife & Parks TPA	(\$13,468)
Agriculture	(\$5,521)

Competitive Programs	Requested amount	Number proposals	Proposals funded
Circle of Flight	\$980,521	10	all
Endangered Species	\$437,786	5	all
Fish Hatchery Maintenance	\$1,399,962	38	all
Invasive Species	\$992,465	16	all
Noxious Weeds	\$537,012	4	2
Tribal Youth Initiative	\$447,870	13	all
Conservation Officer (CLEO)	\$282,000	-	4
Non-Competitive Programs			
Wildlife & Parks TPA	\$13,468	NA	NA
Agriculture	\$5,521	NA	NA
Fish Hatchery Operation	\$1,064,464	NA	NA
Rights Protection (RPI)	\$14,344,220	NA	NA
Tribal Mgt. & Development	\$2,852,521	NA	NA
Total Branch Programs	\$23,357,810		

Table 1. Requested funding by program, number of proposals and percent funded by program for BIA Midwest Region (Circle of Flight) and BIA Central Office programs, Fiscal Year 2023.

Program	Requested amount	Number proposals	Proposals funded
Capacity	\$3,000,000	20	18
Projects (all Focus Areas)	\$17,400,000	70	69
FA 1 Area of Concern	\$1,000,000	5	-
FA 2 Invasive Species	\$2,800,000	38	-
FA 3 Non-point Pollution	\$1,100,000	16	-
FA 4 Species & Habitats	\$12,000,000	4	-
FA 5 Future Foundations	\$606,243	13	-
Total GLRI	\$23,235,542		

Table 2. Requested GLRI funding for Capacity and for Projects by Focus Area (FA 1 Areas of Concern for pollution, FA 2 Terrestrial and Aquatic Invasive Species; FA 3 Nonpoint Pollution Prevention; FA 4 Habitats & Species; and FA 5 Future Foundations, Science, and Education), number of proposals and percent funded, Fiscal Year 2023.

Meetings and Site Visits

The BIA Midwest Region led numerous intergovernmental and collaborative discussions with Tribal and Federal partners about the upcoming Action Plan IV for GLRI funding (FY2025-FY2029). Ensuring representation of the Distinct Tribal Program (DTP) and work led by Tribes in the upcoming Action Plan. After distribution of GLRI FY23 funding our team held 17 One-on-One meetings between BIA and Tribal Natural Resources staff, discussing funding, reporting and any other needs or concerns from Tribal staff.

All staff attended a Wildlife, Parks and Recreation Branch Meeting in Durango, CO (June 2023) and the Partners in Action Meeting in St. Paul, MN (August 2023). Chase Meierotto attended the Coregonine Steering Committee annual meeting in State College, PA (September 2023). Chase and Carolin Donnelly attended the Great Lakes NAFWS meeting in Sault Ste Marie, MI (September 2023) and Chase and Drew Becker attended a Regional Working Group meeting with the EPA in Chicago, IL (November 2023). Jennifer White attended the Manoomin/Psin Symposium, Black Bear Casino, Carleton, MN (November 2023).

The Wildlife and Parks team also made site visits to Tribes and Tribal organizations. Albany Jacobson Eckert visited the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) in August and the Forest County Potawatomi Community, Ho-Chunk Nation, and Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in September. Chase visited Red Cliff, GLIFWC and Lac Vieux Desert in October, and 1854 Treaty Authority and Keweenaw Bay Indian Community in November. In October, Jennifer visited the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, and the Upper Sioux and Lower Sioux Indian Communities, and in November visited the Meskwaki Nation (Sac & Fox Tribe). Drew attended many of these site visits as well.

In addition, the BIA Midwest Region submitted two Tribal Success Stories for consideration in the FY23 GLRI Report to Congress and the President, and published a Great Lakes Tribal Restoration Accomplishments Brochure available online at <http://www.glifwc.org/publications/pdf/2019BIAGLRI.pdf>.



Fish, Wildlife and Parks Branch Chief
Drew Becker visiting the Red Cliff Band

Success Stories: Wildlife and Parks Branch Programs

Circle of Flight

St. Croix Chippewa Indians of WI

Wild Rice Seeding by the St. Croix Chippewa supports the Department of Interior's goal fulfilling Indian trust responsibilities by enabling Tribes the meaningful exercise of their treaty fishing, hunting, and gathering rights while also assisting Tribes in the management, development, and protection of Indian trust land and natural resource assets.

Branch support allows Tribes to monitor, protect, and restore native species and thousands of acres of fish and wildlife habitat; simultaneously supporting Tribal self-determination, traditional lifeways, cultural revitalization, and local food systems and economies.



Photo: Wild Rice Seeding in Allouez Bay – St. Croix Chippewa

Tribal Youth Initiative

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

The Leech Lake Department of Resource Management's Wildlife Program provided an opportunity for youth to experience what it is like to be a wildlife biologist. Youth went on a 2-day program to Ely, MN to explore the International Wolf Center and North American Bear Center. The two centers provided unique learning experiences for youth by submersing them in wolf and bear biology – two important cultural species to the Leech Lake Band. Youth explored each Center's displays to learn more about the animals, saw live wolves and bears that they are learning about, and got a taste of what it's like to be a biologist by participating in activities like radiotelemetry.



Photo: Leech Lake Tribal Youth Bear Center Visit

Endangered Species

Fond du Lac Band

Fond du Lac received funding to continue ongoing wolf population monitoring on the Fond du Lac Reservation. They collaborate with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and 1854 Treaty Authority each year to estimate statewide wolf populations and pup survival.

With BIA ES funding the band began studying wolves in 2015-16 and estimated pack number and population size on the reservation. Additional funding in 2018-20 allowed for further study with Global Positioning System collars and trail cameras, allowing the band to learn about wolf movements, denning sites, reproduction, and causes of mortality. These studies provide information on the potential impact to wolves from forestry practices or development plans. Fond du Lac also shares wolf data with local schools, where students can use the data for science projects and fairs.



Photo: Gray wolf, trail photo. Fond du Lac Band.

Endangered Species

Prairie Island Indian Community

The Prairie Island Indian Community received BIA ES support to collaborate with partners in monitoring the federally and state endangered Higgins eye mussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*). The Minnesota DNR propagated and released this species (6,822 of them!) into Sturgeon Lake from 2003 to 2010; a lake where mussel numbers and diversity had been on the rise and therefore a potentially promising site for the Higgins eye. Naturally recruited Higgins eye mussels were first discovered at the reintroduction site in 2020, and a freshly dead *L. higginsii* was collected from a mammalian shell pile in Buffalo Slough in 2021 suggesting the reintroduced population is expanding (G. Miller pers. Obs.). This funding will support aquatic surveys and monitoring of shell piles to track mussel recovery.



Photo: Higgins eye mussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*). Gary J. Wege/USFWS.

Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds

The branch administers two programs dealing with non-native species, the Invasive Species Program, funded through Department of Interior, deals with a wide variety of Aquatic and Terrestrial Invasive Species, including plants, animals, insects, and pathogens. We also administer the Noxious Weeds Program, funded through the Department of Agriculture. This program focuses on agricultural weeds and species that have been declared noxious weeds, it requires a 50 percent match for funding requests.

Important components of both programs are coordination with others to manage non-native species to prevent their reestablishment once removed and to prevent spread to new areas. Surveillance is important to prevent establishment and is a key part of Early Detection and Rapid Response, to identify non-native species and remove them before they can gain a foothold and become a problem for native species. Tribal agencies also coordinate stewardship of non-native species in ceded territories.

Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe has been working with invasive plants including common buckthorn and Japanese knotweed, both species can form thick monocultures, crowding out native species and altering habitat for animals.

In FY23, the Mille Lacs Band received Invasive Species funding to address a new issue, Oak Wilt. Oak Wilt is caused by a fungus (*Ceratocystis fagacearum*) that can be transmitted by beetles or tree to tree via their roots. Identifying and monitoring new non-native species and managing established invasive species is important for protecting native and culturally important species into the future.

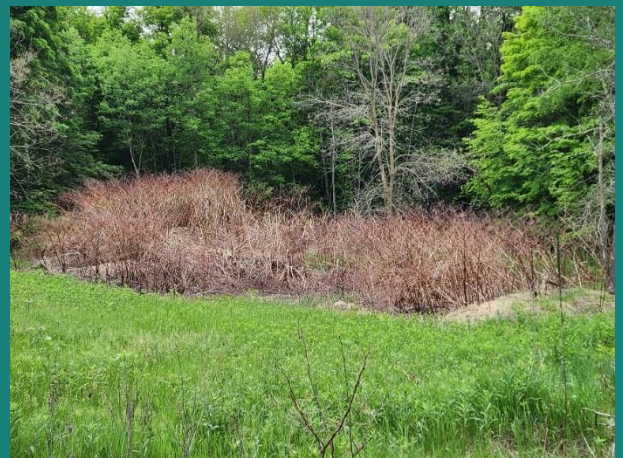


Photo: Patch of knotweed after treatment, making space for a native plant understory, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.

Tribal Fish Hatchery Maintenance and Operation

Tribal fish hatcheries are crucially important in many ways: for subsistence and nutritional value, for cultural preservation and recreation, and for employment and support of local economies. The Bureau of Indian Affairs supports these hatcheries through maintenance (FHM) and operation (FHO) funds. FHO program support ensures adequate and safe operations while extending the life of hatcheries and rearing facilities. To support facility maintenance, the Bureau of Indian Affairs provides annual competitive FHM funding. Typical projects include re-lining grow-out ponds, replacing water pumps, upgrading alarm systems, and rearing tank installation. In FY 2023, nearly 1.5 million dollars were provided to Tribes in the Midwest Region to support Fish Hatchery Maintenance projects.

Lac du Flambeau Band

In FY23 the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians received FHM funds to replace water pumps to supply the hatchery with fresh lake water, filter equipment to ensure fish rearing water is clean, as well as a water testing system and filters to remove iron from rearing ponds.

Hatchery staff also conduct sturgeon surveys and assessments. Adult sturgeons are captured and scanned for PIT or Floy tags. They are then measured and weighed; this data is used to determine age, growth rates, and to estimate the population within the Lac du Flambeau Reservation. This is an ongoing study with plans to stock more sturgeon until there is a naturally reproducing population.



Photo: Live capture of adult sturgeon during survey.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Focus Area 1

Objective 1.1: Remediate, restore, and delist Areas of Concern.

Objective 1.2: Engage underserved communities and share information on the risks and benefits of consuming Great Lakes fish, wildlife, and harvested plant resources with the people who consume them.

Objective 1.3: Increase knowledge about contaminants that have impacted or pose the potential to impact the ecological and/or public health of the Great Lakes and its natural resources.

Focus Area 2

Objective 2.1: Protect native species and communities by preventing introductions of new non-native species.

Objective 2.2: Reduce economic, ecological, and human health impacts to the Great Lakes by limiting range expansion, including lake-to-lake transfers, of invasive species.

Objective 2.3: Provide ecosystem and human benefits through prioritized and collaborative invasive species control efforts.

Focus Area 3

Objective 3.1: Reduce nutrient loads from agricultural watersheds to reduce HABs (defined generally as harmful and nuisance algae).

Objective 3.2: Reduce nutrient loads from agricultural watersheds to reduce HABs (defined generally as harmful and nuisance algae).

Objective 3.3: Improve effectiveness of nonpoint source control efforts to reduce HABs.

Focus Area 4

Objective 4.1: Protect, enhance, and increase resilience of habitats necessary for sustaining native aquatic and terrestrial species important to the future Great Lakes ecosystem.

Objective 4.2: Increase resiliency and representation of native species under future climate conditions.

Focus Area 5

Objective 5.1: With a focus on disadvantaged communities, (1) educate the next generations about the Great Lakes ecosystem; and (2) teach people the skills needed to enter the environmental restoration and protection workforce.

Objective 5.2: Conduct targeted science to inform and assess Great Lakes restoration.

Success Stories: Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Focus Area 1

Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Coalition

Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Coalition (GLIFWC) continued implementation of their Mercury Program for Promoting Safe Fish Consumption for GLIFWC Member Tribes.

The Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Coalition Collected and analyzed of over 500 walleye, 8 northern pike, and one sturgeon for a suite of contaminants. GLIFWC shared this information with member Tribes and States (MI, MN, WI). A product of this work includes new musky consumption guidelines and outreach material. GLIFWC also conducted multiple outreach activities in person, virtually, and in print.



GLIFWC's Mercury Program began testing mercury levels in subsistence species in 1989 in response to concerns about the health risks to tribal members of consuming contaminated fish. As of May 2021, GLIFWC has collected and analyzed for mercury nearly 11,000 fish from Lake Superior and over 300 inland lakes within the Ceded Territories with plans to continue this work into the future. GLIFWC's advisory program has positively impacted the health of tribal members by influencing walleye harvest and consumption patterns in ways that reduce mercury exposure.



For more information on the mercury program or to request additional copies of this brochure, contact
GLIFWC:
P.O. Box 9 – 72682 Maple Street



MAAZHIGINOOZHE (MUSKELLUNGE) A SAFE EATING GUIDE



GLIFWC Watercolor by W. Ballinger

GLIFWC'S WISCONSIN
CEDED TERRITORY GUIDANCE
FOR MUSKY CONSUMPTION



Focus Area 2

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe: Tribal Shoreline Invasive Plant Management

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT) Shoreline Invasive Plant Project is a multi-year project in the southern territory of Akwesasne that will manage established stands of invasive phragmites, Japanese knotweed, and common/ glossy buckthorn, while preventing further spread of these species.

This effort included the use of integrated pest management to treat invasive plants using an herbicide at a vulnerable stage in their life cycle. The goal is to re-populate the treated areas with native plants with ecological and traditional use values. Sites that were successfully treated were planted with native plants grown at the SRMT Native Plant Nursery. For FY23 native plants were successfully grown at the SRMT Native Plant Nursery and are planned for Spring 2024 out-planting.

Nearly all project sites showed an improvement over pre-treatment conditions. Seventy five percent of project sites had sparse return of invasive plants, whereas fourteen percent of project sites had no return of invasive species. Native plant cover on sites that were not actively re-planted was reported on sixty one percent of sites, indicating a revitalization of naturally occurring native plants following the treatment and/or removal of invasive plant species. In 2023 the number of aquatic/terrestrial acres controlled by this project totaled 3.6 acres.



Photo taken during the 2023 post-treatment assessment. Photo shows a former invasive plant site, that had previously been an invasive species monoculture with rich biodiversity comprised of multiple native plant species that have returned following treatment.



The image above is an example of the site maps created during the field reconnaissance to determine presence/absence of invasive phragmites. These maps were used by project staff to identify landowners and obtain consent for land and river access as well as treatments of our target species.

Focus Area 3

Oneida Nation of Wisconsin

The nonpoint pollution abatement with cover crops in the Lower Fox River Basin projected to reduce over 125 lbs. of phosphorus into Lake Michigan annually.

In 2021, Oneida Nation: Planted cover crops on over 1,052 acres, coordinated with Outagamie County to prioritize areas of concern for erosion and nutrient runoff, increased sampling on Tribal cropland to better track nonpoint runoff, and continued working directly with Tribal farmers and grazers to provide support for nonpoint reduction options.



Photo: Cover crops reduce agricultural runoff, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.

Focus Area 3

Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe implemented best management practices to reduce *E. coli* levels, runoff, nutrients, and erosion in the Chippewa River Watershed. An Agricultural Runoff Buffer Strip project at the Corbitt Tribal Property on the Isabella Reservation in Isabella County, Michigan has been completed.



Photo: A Buffer Strip along an agriculture field prevents agricultural runoff from entering Onion Creek and the Saginaw

Focus Area 4

Red Cliff Band

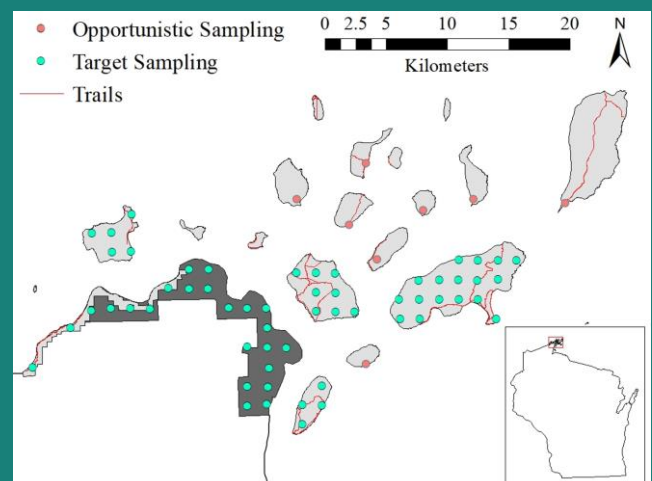
Mainland-island black bears: quantifying connectivity and viability of bear populations between Red Cliff and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore

The Red Cliff Reservation is in northern Wisconsin on the Bayfield Peninsula, along the shore of Lake Superior. Red Cliff is adjacent to the Apostle Islands. The coastal peninsula and islands offer a diverse array of habitats, including high-quality coastal wetlands, northern hardwoods, boreal conifers, old growth hemlock-hardwood stands, and conifer plantations. Red Cliff, like other groups of Anishinaabe, views the black bear or makwa, as a culturally significant species, both for its ecological role and its role as one of the original clan animals. Besides broad population estimates and harvest levels, surprisingly little is known on either the ecology or population dynamics of black bears, and in particular, the population complex that inhabit Red Cliff and the Apostle Islands Lakeshore. With Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding the Red Cliff collaborated with UW Madison, National Park Service, and GLIFWC to conduct research aimed at understanding the metapopulation dynamics of black bears in the Bayfield Peninsula with the hopes of providing the Tribe and the National Lakeshore with updated abundance and density estimates, vital rates including survivorship, reproductive output and recruitment, population growth rates, immigration rates and connectivity between islands and between islands and the mainland.

Data were obtained via genetic tagging of black bears that were noninvasively sampled in the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and the Red Cliff reservation during the summers of 2020-2022. One hundred forty-two bears were identified during 2020-2022 and 84 individuals from 2002-2010 for a total of 226 black bears. Ten individuals were detected in both 2002 and 2010, and 10 individuals were detected in both 2010 and 2020-2022 including 2 females (one on Sand Island and one on Stockton Island) that were alive since 2002. This project has laid the groundwork for long-term monitoring for population trends of black bears regionally and cost-effectively. Additionally, through fieldwork, this project fostered a collaborative endeavor between state (UW-Madison), federal (National Park Service), and tribal agencies (GLIFWC, Red Cliff).



Cub and sow entering and exiting black bear hair corral.



Locations of hair corrals in the Red Cliff Reservation (dark grey) and Apostle Islands National Lakeshore (light grey).

Focus Area 5

Lac Courte Orielles Band

Foundations for the Future - educating the next generation about the Great Lakes Ecosystem

This focus area includes science and monitoring studies to learn about contaminants and health of waters and habitats within the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem. It also includes experience-based learning opportunities for youth in the Great Lakes, promoting Great Lakes Stewardship.

Lac Courte Orielles Band - Manoomin (Wild Rice) Education and Outreach to area schools with class lessons, ricing workshops, elder interviews, wild rice monitoring, internships, and the Tribal Youth Apprenticeship Program.



Photo: A Buffer Tribal youth education in the 1854 Ceded Territory

