**Environmental Justice Information for WI FY22 AOC Project:**

**St. Louis River AOC Wild Rice Restoration Project**

The overarching goal for this project is to implement the Manoomin Habitat Restoration Plan and complete management action 9.21 in the St. Louis River AOC Remedial Action Plan. Wild rice has profound cultural significance for the Anishinaabe community, and the depth of traditional ecological knowledge and expertise that our Indigenous partners bring to the table is critical to the program’s success.

There is no doubt that the concept of ‘Environmental Justice’ intersects with this project. That said, it is not the intent of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to impose our voice to this story. Rather, we rely on the experiences of our Tribal partners to provide context to environmental justice as it pertains to Manoomin restoration in the St. Louis River Estuary. In previous conversations with Tom Howes – Natural Resources Program Manager for the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa – it is clear that the Federal-State-Tribal partnership to restore Manoomin has meaning to the Indigenous community and that there is an important story of environmental justice to tell.

The St. Louis River Estuary has taken care of the Ojibwe people for thousands of years. In fact, our colleagues at the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa derive the name of their people from the “Head of the Lake”. The Treaty of 1854 ensured that the Ojibwe people would retain rights to hunt, fish, trap, harvest, and manage the natural resources that have sustained their families for generations, and continue to do so, within the Arrowhead Region of northern Minnesota.

The industrialization of the St. Louis River Estuary – guided and facilitated by the Federal and State governments – resulted in substantial ecological impairments that we are now, collectively, working to fix. In the view of Tom and other Tribal community members, State and Federal partners are making good on their promise to honor treaty rights by funding and implementing the restoration of resources upon which those rights are founded – not the least of which is wild rice.

Paraphrasing Tom’s words, there is environmental and tribal justice in the act of working to fix the mistakes that we have made in the St. Louis River Estuary.

Tribal partners from the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, 1854 Treaty Authority, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin have been involved in all levels of planning and implementation for this project and their expertise drives management activities (e.g., site management, seeding, monitoring, etc.) and resource allocation.

The Manoomin Restoration and Implementation Plan outlines restoration objectives for specific acreage targets that include harvestable stands of wild rice which would return a lost opportunity for both Tribal and non-tribal community members to enjoy. And while the concept of ‘Environmental Justice’ is certainly part of this project, it should be clear that there is a nuanced perspective as explained by Tom during our conversation.

**The AOC-funded Manoomin restoration work brings justice to the estuary and to the Indigenous peoples who have been impacted by the estuary’s degradation**.

This is an important story to tell, and it highlights how State, Federal, and Tribal partnerships can make a meaningful difference through accountability and collaborative action.