



**Co-Stewardship Agreement
Mi'kmaq Nation and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge
Aroostook County, Maine**



WHEREAS The Mi'kmaq Nation (Nation) are a federally recognized Tribal Nation (formerly known as the Aroostook Band of Micmacs);

WHEREAS The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) is a federal land-management agency with a trust responsibility to the Nation;

WHEREAS The Service administers Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Limestone, Aroostook County, Maine;

WHEREAS The Refuge is located within the Nation's ancestral homeland;

WHEREAS The Nation possesses Tribal lands that are adjacent to the Refuge;

WHEREAS The Service seeks to uphold its trust responsibility to the Nation through co-stewardship of federal lands at the Refuge;

WHEREAS The Nation seeks access to their ancestral lands on the Refuge to harvest native plants and conduct other cultural activities, as specified herein;

WHEREAS The Nation and the Service are already engaged in multiple forms of partnership at the Refuge, including the construction of an interpretive public-access trail that crosses Refuge land and Tribal land;

WHEREAS Co-Stewardship of the Refuge will benefit the natural resource conservation interests of both the Nation and the Service;

WHEREAS This agreement is intended to preclude the need for the Nation to obtain Special Use Agreements from the Service to conduct specified cultural activities on Refuge lands;

WHEREAS The activities to be conducted under this agreement will avoid adverse effects on historic properties, in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106);

WHEREAS The Service has given due consideration to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and has determined that the formulation and signature of this agreement does not warrant an Environmental Assessment because it pertains to a Tribal Nation's access to Refuge lands, and does not involve a federal management action;

WHEREAS The future use of any scientific data produced, or Indigenous Knowledge recorded, under this agreement will be guided by the written



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consensus of both signatory parties;

WHEREAS The Service, to protect the confidentiality of culturally sensitive information, will manage any Indigenous Knowledge shared by the Nation in accordance with the Department of the Interior's Departmental Manual, Part 301, Chapter 7, Departmental Responsibilities for Consideration and Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Departmental Actions and Scientific Research (301 DM 7).

NOW, THEREFORE, The Nation and the Service join in signing a Co-Stewardship Agreement to celebrate and guide their partnership for the years to come.

KNOWLEDGE:

The Nation and the Service will share knowledge in pursuit of shared conservation goals.

Exchange of Knowledge. As the original stewards of their ancestral lands, the Nation possesses extensive Indigenous Knowledge about native plants, wildlife, fish, and their habitats. The Service is committed to using the best available science and Indigenous Knowledge to optimize conservation land management at the Refuge. The Service will seek the Nation's perspectives on stewardship practices on the Refuge by inviting the Nation to review and comment on the Refuge's annual work plan, and, if interested, participate in the development of the plan. Through the sharing of expertise, the Nation and Service can foster a complementary relationship between Indigenous Knowledge and the Service's stewardship practices. Stewardship is defined to include natural and cultural resources and habitat, in addition to Refuge facilities.

Cooperative Research. The Nation and the Service will assist each other on scientific investigations on Refuge lands and Tribal lands, to address research questions cooperatively and obtain data related to biological and ecological inquiries. This work may include, but is not limited to, field surveys, such as the Nation's application of eDNA techniques for wood turtle studies, and the inventory of invasive species on Tribal properties in the Refuge vicinity.

Technical assistance. The Service and the Nation's cooperative technical expertise will be available upon request to exchange information on conservation topics such as aquatic connectivity, fish passage, invasive species management, forestry, endangered species, habitat restoration, and community outreach for environmental education.

Collaborative grant-writing. The Nation and the Service will share awareness of funding opportunities, and as feasible will support each other's applications for grants that advance natural resource conservation and cultural programming on the Nation's lands and the Service's lands. Potential grant sources cited by the Nation include academia (for example, the Nation collaborates with the University of Maine at Orono on brown ash studies), the Native American



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Fish and Wildlife Society, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and conservation foundations that work in northern Maine, such as the Trust for Public Lands and the Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

Opportunities for internships, mentorship, and apprenticeship. The Service and the Nation will collaborate on the creation of opportunities for the Nation's young people, staff, and others to gain experience in ecological research and Refuge operations. This will include partnership with non-profit organizations that focus on providing employment opportunities for young people.

FLORA AND FAUNA:

The Nation and the Service will collaborate on the conservation of native plants, trees, and wildlife on Refuge lands and the Nation's lands.

Native plant inventory/survey. Databases maintained by the Service and Nation provide information about populations of native and invasive plant species found on the Refuge and Nation's lands. Through cooperative field surveys and sharing of equipment, the Service and the Nation will update these databases and add spatial data.

Harvest and gathering of native plants. The Service recognizes and respects the Nation's interest in accessing ancestral lands for the harvest of brown ash, birch bark, spruce root, sweetgrass, medicinal plants, and other culturally important materials. This agreement is intended to honor the Service's trust responsibility by authorizing the Nation to harvest plant materials on Refuge lands. The Nation will coordinate with the Refuge manager prior to harvest activities. Plants that are federally protected or on the State of Maine's list of rare/endangered plants will not be harvested.

Brown ash stewardship and use. Stands of brown ash on Refuge lands will be managed cooperatively by the Nation and the Service under the guidance of the Nation's forestry staff and Refuge biologists. Stand health will be prioritized while allowing for sustainable harvest and use by the Nation's traditional basket makers.

LANDS AND FACILITIES:

The Service and the Nation will facilitate access to each other's lands and facilities.

Interpretive trail system. The Service and the Nation already have a productive relationship collaborating on the design and creation of an interpretive trail network that traverses the Nation's lands and adjacent Service lands. Both parties will collaborate on the future expansion of the trail network.

Refuge facilities, lands and Tribal activities. Upon request, the Service will facilitate the Nation's access and use of Refuge facilities and lands for Tribal activities. For example, Tribal citizens may seek a private space to conduct ceremony prior to plant-gathering. In addition to the harvest of plant materials, examples of Tribal activities include Indigenous environmental education, scientific field research, and



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cultural programming. The Nation may use the Refuge's visitor contact station for presentations and workshops on Native artforms and traditional uses of plants.

Access to the Little Madawaska Division of the Refuge. Upon request, the Service will provide the Nation with access to the Refuge Division and the Little Madawaska River for canoeing, biological surveys, and native plant harvesting.

Access to Mi'kmaq Nation Lands. Upon request, the Nation may grant access to Service staff to the Nation's lands located outside the interpretive trail network, to conduct surveys and interpretive or educational activities. This agreement may be amended as necessary to include the Nation's guidelines for Service access to the Nation's lands and the activities to be conducted.

PROGRAMMING:

The Nation and the Service will collaborate on programming at the Refuge and on the Nation's lands, to preserve cultural knowledge and traditional practices, and to educate the public about the Nation's heritage and natural resources.

Potential examples include interpretive and educational programming, environmental education, cultural and historical awareness, and exhibits at the Refuge's visitor contact station. Additional forms of programming include Tribally led storytelling, use of Mi'kmaq language and terminology, and seasonal Indigenous Knowledge presentations.

GUIDELINE FOR COMMENCEMENT, EXPIRATION, AND TERMINATION OF AGREEMENT:

This agreement takes effect when the last representative of the Service or the Nation signs the agreement (Effective Date) and shall remain in effect for five (5) years from the Effective Date. This agreement may be extended or amended upon written request of either signatory party and the subsequent written concurrence of the other signatory party. Either party can terminate their participation in this agreement with a 30-day written notice to the other party.

GUIDELINE FOR COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES:

This agreement is intended as a good-faith expression of mutual commitment and does not create legally enforceable obligations or financial commitments for either signatory party. This agreement creates no right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable by law or equity. The Service and the Nation shall manage their respective resources and activities in a separate, coordinated and mutually beneficial manner to meet the purposes of this agreement. Nothing in this agreement authorizes the Service or the Nation to obligate or transfer anything of monetary value. Nothing in this agreement is intended to alter, limit, or expand the Service's statutory and regulatory authorities. The Service's participation in this agreement and ability to provide access to the Refuge or the facilities on it



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are subject to the availability of annual appropriations.

GUIDELINE FOR JOINT EVALUATION OF CO-STEWARDSHIP OUTCOMES:

The Service and the Nation will meet annually to review and evaluate Co-Stewardship activities and outcomes at the Refuge and plan activities and programming for the next year. Potential amendments to the agreement can be proposed at the annual meeting. The Service and the Nation will prepare brief annual reports to document Co-Stewardship activities and outcomes for future reference.

April 22, 2026

Sheila McCormack
Chief
Mi'kmaq Nation

April 22, 2026

Sharon Marino
Acting Regional Director, Northeast
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service