

Chief Brenda Commander

Good afternoon Governor LePage; thank you for this opportunity to address you and your staff. Our current tribal enrollment consists of 1,184 members, and the tribe has acquired approximately 854 acres of federal trust lands. We have built our community along our aboriginal homelands, the Meduxnekeag River, the place where our ancestors once lived, hunted, gathered food, medicines, and sustained their cultural ties to the environment.

Environmental stewardship is fundamental to the Band's culture, and our cultural survival. We have been working diligently to restore water quality and fish habitat in the Meduxnekeag River. And as fish are a very important food source to our community, sadly, Governor, I must warn our members and elders about the state advisory on fish consumption currently in affect. Through our work we have learned that existing safeguards are not always sufficient to support our efforts and protect our community. Over the years we have urged the state to update water quality information and strengthen water quality standards. Our hope is that your administration will continue the progress made in the area of our environment. Consistent and meaningful consultation when and where state decisions have the potential to impact the culture, land, natural resources, economy, government, and/or the people of the Wabanaki tribes, would demonstrate the willingness of the state to ensure its actions do not impair the health and welfare of the Wabanaki people.

Education is key. I encourage you to gain a better understanding of why protecting the environment is critically important to the Maliseet people and all Wabanaki tribes. We invite you to visit our community to learn about us firsthand. Please accept this small gift. It is a map of the watershed, it shares information about the relationship of people and the natural resources on which we all rely, and also I brought you from the earth, a blade of sweet grass, which is used for ceremonial purposes and also basket making, and medicinal.

Woliwon, Thank you.

Remarks at "Maine People and the Environment" roundtable with Governor LePage
January 20, 2011 at the Augusta Civic Center
Event sponsored by the Natural Resources Council of Maine www.nrcm.org