



The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe Of Michigan

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Saginaw Chippewa and State of Michigan to Begin Co-Management of the Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park

On Monday, December 2, 2019, Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Chief Ronald F. Ekdahl was joined by Department of Natural Resources representative Sandra Clark to sign a ground-breaking Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU will establish the beginning of the tribe's co-management of the Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park, or ezhibiigadek asin (written on stone), with the State of Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

This ceremonial signing took place at 10:00 a.m. in the SCIT Black Elk Government Complex located at 7500 Soaring Eagle Blvd. Mount Pleasant, Michigan 48858. This will mark the first state/tribal co-management of a state park in Michigan.

"This partnership is a major step forward in strengthening the authentic interpretation of the Sanilac Petroglyphs site, which speaks to the connections of humankind to nature and the earth," said DNR Director Daniel Eichinger, cosigner of the MOU. "We hope this collaboration will serve as a model, both within and beyond Michigan, of respectful, inclusive, equitable management practices that protect important historic resources while helping people understand their relationship to them."

Donated to the State of Michigan by the Michigan Archaeological Society and managed by the DNR since 1971, the petroglyphs are the largest known group of ancient rock carvings in the state. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the park covers 240 acres along the Cass River near Cass City in Michigan's Thumb region. Stone tools and pottery found on the petroglyphs site on the Cass River floodplain show tribal groups have occupied the area periodically throughout the last 8,000 years. The petroglyphs were likely carved within the last 1,400 years, with some possibly created in more recent centuries.

The tribe and state began discussions about the preservation and stewardship of ezhibiigadek asin (Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park) in 2003. These early conversations about the site involving the tribe, the Michigan Archaeological Society and the state broke down. As the tribe considered how to move forward, in 2005-2010 it joined the Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) Project, an international study of issues related to cultural and intellectual knowledge, how that knowledge is used,

who has access, and who benefits. The IPinCH Report affirmed the tribe's commitment to protect and preserve ezhibiigaadek asin and concluded that it should continue working with the state toward co-management.

“This site is special and sacred to the Anishinabeg. It is a clear indication of the unique origins and history of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. We know our Ancestors were thinking of us when they left the lessons in stone”, explained tribal elder and former Director of Ziibiwing Bonnie Ekdahl. “The MOU creates a relationship that ties us to this beautiful site and marks an important step of acknowledgement and inclusion of the tribe. I am very thankful and proud of the team at the Ziibiwing Center who preserved and carried the vision for over 15 years, and it is especially incredible to know my son is involved with the final step, miigwetch.”

The IPinCH Report also prompted the tribe to engage in conversations about using advanced technology to record the carvings. The petroglyphs are carved in relatively soft Marshall Sandstone. After centuries of natural weathering and decades of recent human activity, some carvings have faded, disappeared or been vandalized.

In April 2018, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) specialists used terrestrial Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) along with detailed close-up photographs to build digital models that will document the site and can be used to track changes in the petroglyphs over time. MDOT's partners in the project included the State Historic Preservation Office (Michigan State Housing Development Authority), the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways (Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan), the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Historic Preservation Office, and the DNR's Michigan History Center and Parks and Recreation Division.

Images and information from the petroglyphs preservation project were featured on the 2018 Michigan Archaeology poster. The free poster is available upon request from the State Historic Preservation Office or at the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture Lifeways.

Tribal Chief Ron Ekdahl stated, “This culturally significant site will be enhanced through a partnership that this MOU creates. We are excited to be working alongside the State of Michigan in preserving this unique piece of Native American history. It will also allow for future opportunities for preservation and historical education. This is just another example of the collaboration between our tribal government and the state and we will continue to work together on important issues like these.”

Guided tours of ezhibiigaadek asin (Sanilac petroglyphs) are available in the summer months. Learn more about Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park on the DNR website. To see the 2018 Michigan Archaeology poster featuring the petroglyphs and the LiDAR survey, visit Michigan.gov/Archaeology.

Please contact Erik Rodriguez, Interim Public Relations Director, at (989) 775-4076 or at erodriguez@sagchip.org or Sandra Clark, Director of Michigan History Center DNR, at (517) 335-2591 or at CLARKSS@michigan.gov for further information on the announcement.



Pictured from left to right: Shannon Martin, Director of Ziibiwing, Sandra Clark, Director of Michigan History Center DNR, Tribal Chief, Ron Ekdahl and Sarah Hegyi, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer.

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