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Boozhoo Gakina Awiyaa, Cyndi Bergloff Nindizhinikaaz. Enaasige-anang nindigaa, Zhigaagong nindoonjibaa, Ashkibaagiziibing daayaan. Owashtanong Odawa nindaaw. Mii'iw. Miigwech.

Hello everyone, My name is Cyndi Bergloff, and my Anishinaabe name is Shining Star. I grew up in Chicago, and live in St. Paul, MN. I am Grand River Bands Ottawa. Thats all, thank you.

To Whom It May Concern,

I wanted to begin with a formal introduction in Anishinaabemowin, as my grandmother, Hilda Williams, has taught me that I should do in every space I enter, especially as someone who was able to reclaim our language. Hilda is an enrolled member of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, and I am a descendant of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. I submit this comment in support of federal acknowledgment of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Petitioner #146. In addition to this brief letter stating my support, I am also attaching a research document stating further considerations to this petition. I am requesting that moving forward, I am kept informed on the status of this case.

As a lifelong advocate for Indigenous education and Anishinaabemowin revitalization, I have dedicated my career to uplifting Tribal communities and preserving our cultural heritage. My resume, submitted alongside this letter, reflects my work as an Anishinaabemowin educator, Indigenous Education Specialist, and community organizer. I have developed curriculum rooted in Tribal knowledge systems, coached Ojibwemowin Quiz Bowl teams, and facilitated cultural programming across Minnesota, Wisconsin, and beyond. My education reflects the reclamation of knowledge, with a B.A. in American Indian Studies from UW-Milwaukee, M.A. in Education from Augsburg University, and a current First Nations Education Doctorate in progress from UW-Green Bay (set to complete in summer 2028).

These efforts are not just professional, they are personal. They are rooted in the teachings of my ancestors and the enduring legacy of the Grand River Bands. Our people have maintained community through kinship, ceremony, and resistance, despite centuries of displacement and federal neglect. From cemetery cleanups to intergenerational gatherings and language camps, our traditions continue to thrive.

Letter of support for
petitioner #146

The historical record is clear: the Grand River Bands were signatories to the Treaties of 1821, 1836, and 1855. We were recognized by the federal government through annuity rolls, the Durant Roll, and Indian Claims Commission awards. Our community has remained politically active, culturally vibrant, and geographically rooted in Western Michigan.

I urge the Department of the Interior to honor these truths and restore the government-to-government relationship promised to our ancestors. Federal acknowledgment is not a gift, it is a fulfillment of treaty obligations and a recognition of our inherent sovereignty.

Miigwech for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,


Cyndi Bergloff

Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians

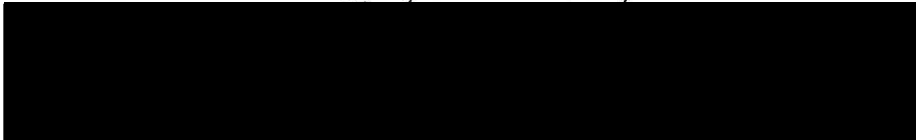
Thunderbird Clan

Pronouns: They/Them/Theirs

B.A. American Indian Studies, UW-Milwaukee

M.A. Education, Augsburg University

First Nations Ed.D student, UW-Green Bay



Cyndi Bergloff

Pronouns: They, Them, Their

Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians, Thunderbird clan

Experience

April 2025- Present

Minnesota Department of Education: Office of American Indian Education, Minneapolis MN

Indigenous Education Specialist

- Design and implement professional development for educators aligned with Tribally Endorsed curricular resources
- Support Tribal Leadership in Minnesota in the development curricular materials for Indigenous Education For All
- Foster collaboration within the agency and external partners to strengthen Indigenous Education For All efforts

September 2020- April 2025

American Indian Magnet School, Saint Paul, MN

Anishinaabemowin Educator

- Design and implement educational programming about Tribal Rights and Indigenous Knowledge Systems
- Provide support to colleagues through committees, PD facilitation and school wide cultural campaigns
- Develop Anishinaabemowin and Indian Education curriculum, as well as serving as Ojibwemowin Quiz Bowl coach

January 2018- September 2020

Walker's Point Center For the Arts, Milwaukee, WI

Program Coordinator

- Boosted internship and service learning participation by 200% through strategic planning with a small non-profit team
- Coordinated university partnerships for interns, volunteers, and Artists-in-Residence
- Facilitated community art events and exhibition setup to promote accessible creative spaces

Summer 2018

UWM LGBT Resource Center, Milwaukee, WI

Camp Curriculum Coordinator

- Co-designed culturally relevant camp curriculum and implemented sustainable systems for logistics and counselor support
- Supported youth development by promoting healthy boundaries and relationships between camp participants and staff
- Collaborated with peer coordinator to ensure inclusive programming and culturally affirming experiences for all campers

August 2017-June 2021

Young People For Fellowship, Washington, DC

Mentor, Alumni Participant

- Mentored fellows nationwide in designing and implementing their individual Blueprints for Social Justice projects
- Facilitated workshops at the National Summit on activism, community organizing, and education for social change
- Participated in strategic planning sessions to improve program efficacy and expand impact across diverse communities

January 2017- May 2018

Electa Quinney Institute at UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

Undergraduate Researcher

- Represented the Institute at Indigenous language and culture conferences through tabling, presentations, and outreach
- Supported research efforts in Indigenous Studies by learning from Tribal Elders and assisting community partners
- Co-organized Mooshkine, a summer camp for Indigenous youth focused on science, culture, and language revitalization

June 2017- August 2017

Native American Research Center for Health, Milwaukee, WI

Research Intern

- Assisted in planning and executing the American Indian Science Scholars Program for high school students
- Researched Indigenous Social Emotional Learning and applied findings to youth programming and curriculum design
- Presented research at the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council to share insights on culturally responsive education

Licensure:

- Minnesota Tier 4 Teaching License- American Indian Language & Culture, Expiration: 06/29/2029

Training:

- Trail Building and Maintenance, North Country Trail Association & Trail Eyes LLC, '23
- Trail Crew leader, North Country Trail Association, '24

Leadership:

- GLITC American Indian Science Scholars Program Camp Counselor, '17
- Electa Quinney Institute Mooshkine Camp Counselor, '17
- "Young People For" Fellow, '17
- Mentorship in "Young People For" Fellowship, '18, '19, '20
- Presenter at "Young People For" Fellowship, '18, '19, '20
- Algonquian Language Conference Presenter, '19
- MIAD Service Learning Supervisor, '18, '19, '20, '21
- Ojibwemowin Quiz Bowl Coach, '22, '23, '24
- Minnesota Urban Debate League Coach '23, '24
- Augsburg University BWCA Teacher Institute, Indigenous Interpretive Guide, '24

Speaking Engagements:

- *Indigenous Digital Landscapes: Bridging the Community Gap*, Young People For, February '18
- *Anishinaabeg Star Stories*, Manfred Olson Planetarium, March '18
- *The Role of Art and Language in Healing from Trauma*, HIR wellness, October '18
- *Technology as Empowerment*, Young People For: National Summit, February '19
- *Research sovereignty: Integrating Data and Art*, Young People For, February '19
- *First Nations Representations*, University School of Milwaukee, April '19
- *Community engagement project panel*, Young People For: National Summit, February '20
- *Integration of Indigenous Sciences in the Classroom*, St Paul Public Schools, November '24
- *Integration of Indigenous Sciences in the Classroom*, MIEA, March '25
- *Integrating Indigenous Communities into Outdoor Education*, International Trails Summit, April '25
- *Indigenous Education For All*, Restorative Practices Circle Training, June '25

Research

- WPCA: Member Art Show, Milwaukee, WI '18, '19, '20
- WPCA: Featured Member Exhibit, Milwaukee, WI '20
- WPCA: Native Voices, Milwaukee, WI '18
- HIR Wellness: CAM event Featured Artist, Milwaukee, WI '18, '19

Attendee:

- Anishinaabemowin-teg, Sault Ste Marie Reservation, '17, '18, '19, '23, '24
- Algonquian Language Conference, '16, '17, '18
- Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium, Milwaukee, WI, '17
- Widening the Circle, LaCrosse, WI, '17, '18
- "Young People For" National Summit, '17, '18, '19, '20
- Moth Teacher Institute, Virtual '22
- Augsburg University BWCA Teacher Institute, '22, '23
- BIPOC Educators Institute- Metro State University, St Paul, MN '23
- Native Arts Institute- Minnesota Department of Education, '23-'24
- SPPS Culturally Responsive Expo, St Paul, MN. '23, '24

Education

University of Wisconsin- Green Bay
First Nations Education Doctorate- In Progress
Green Bay, WI

University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee
Bachelors in Arts,
Post Baccalaureate Teacher Licensure
Milwaukee, WI

Augsburg University
Master of Arts in Education
Minneapolis, MN

William Rainey Harper College
Associates in Arts
Palatine, IL

Introduction

This brief report is in supplement to the Letter submitted by Cyndi Bergloff for open comment and supports the federal recognition petition of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians (GRBOI), Petitioner #146, by synthesizing historical, cultural, and policy evidence. It draws upon the *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report* (May 2022), the Tribe's petition documents, and personal testimony to demonstrate the continuity, resilience, and survivance of the GRBOI community.

The response provided by the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians in 2024 provide ample amounts of evidence as to the existence of our Tribal Nation. I affirm and uplift this work and want to share additional perspectives for consideration to this case.

Historical Context and Federal Responsibility

In 1908, the Durant roll was conducted, creating a census of Tribal Nations in Michigan, primarily in the Lower Peninsula and Eastern area of the Upper Peninsula. The data from this roll includes states names, ages, Tribal Affiliation and location of the individuals at the time. When looking at the Data, it can be broken down by those who are under the age of 18, and where they were located. I had created a table using this information (see Table 1). This includes information as to which boarding schools children were being sent to at this time.

The Durant Roll reveals that the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians had the highest representation of children attending federal boarding schools among all listed bands. With at least 15 of the 36 recorded children enrolled across institutions like Mt. Pleasant, Genoa, Carlisle, and Haskell, this disproportionate attendance reflects a deeper historical trauma, one that continues to affect the band's political status today.

Table 1												
Tribal Nation/ Band	Mt. Pleasant	Genoa (NE)	Tomah (WI)	Carlisle (PA)	Haskell (KS)	Chillicothe (OK)	Hayward	Sac Fox (OH)	Total Age ≤17	Total in Schools	% of Children in boarding schools	
Sault Ste. Marie Band	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	28	6	21%	
Mackinac Band	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	22	4	18%	
Traverse Band	5	2	3	2	1	1	1	2	41	17	41%	
Grand River Band	4	3	2	1	2	1	0	2	36	15	42%	
Cross Village Band	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	18	7	39%	
Petoskey Band	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	11	2	18%	
Beaver Island Band	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	17%	
Bois Blanc Band	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	20%	
Drummond Island Band	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	25%	
Sugar Island Band	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	2	22%	
Garden River Band (Canada)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	1
Walpole Island Band (Canada)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	1
L'Anse Chippewa Band	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	7	2	29%	
La Pointe Chippewa Band	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	20%	
Saginaw Band	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	33%	
Potawatomi Band	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	14	5	36%	
Total	25	8	10	4	5	2	5	6	209	65	31%	
Data in this table was pulled from the 1909 Durant Roll.												

The BSI Investigative Report (May 2022) confirms that the federal boarding school system was not merely educational—it was a tool of assimilation and erasure. Children were forcibly removed from their families, stripped of their language, culture, and tribal identity, and placed in environments designed to break tribal cohesion. Schools like Haskell Institute intentionally mixed children from dozens of tribes to dismantle tribal affiliations, replacing them with artificial communities that lacked cultural continuity.

For the Grand River Bands, this meant that multiple generations of children were disconnected from their community, their language, and their governance structures. The report documents how such disruptions led to intergenerational trauma, loss of cultural knowledge, and weakened tribal infrastructure—factors that are often used to evaluate federal recognition.

Federal recognition requires proof of continuous political and cultural existence, yet the very policies enacted by the U.S. government, through boarding schools, systematically undermined that continuity. The Grand River Bands' high boarding school enrollment is not a sign of compliance or progress; it is evidence of targeted assimilation, which fractured their ability to maintain the visible, documented cohesion that federal recognition demands. Thus, the legacy of boarding school attendance is not just personal, it is political. The Grand River Bands' lack of federal recognition is not due to a failure of identity, but rather the success of a federal policy designed to erase it.

Cultural Survivance and Revitalization

The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians (GRBOI) community continues to exemplify cultural survivance—a concept introduced by Gerald Vizenor to describe Indigenous peoples’ active resistance and continuity of lifeways in the face of colonial disruption. GRBOI’s commitment to language and cultural revitalization is evident through its Anishinaabemowin education programs, youth camps, snow snake competitions, annual powwows, and curriculum development. These initiatives are community-led and serve as direct responses to the harms outlined in the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, aligning with its recommendations for healing and policy transformation.

The Boarding School Report calls for federal support in language and cultural revitalization, protection of burial sites, and acknowledgment of historical trauma. GRBOI’s petition reflects these priorities, offering extensive documentation of community continuity, governance, and cultural integrity.

One critique raised in the Proposed Finding concerns the GRBOI membership’s familial ties across multiple Indigenous communities. Specifically, the report notes that intermarriage among Anishinaabe peoples, without regard to political boundaries, complicates the Bureau’s analysis of tribal affiliation and membership rolls (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2023, p. 52). While this complexity may challenge

administrative categorization, it is essential to recognize that intermarriage among Anishinaabe communities is a cultural necessity. GRBOI is predominantly turtle clan (Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, 2024), and traditional norms prohibit marrying within one's own clan, as it is considered incestuous and taboo. Therefore, forming relationships outside the band is not only culturally appropriate but vital to maintaining social and political health. These practices reflect longstanding Anishinaabe values and reinforce the integrity of GRBOI's community structure.

Conclusion

The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians meet the criteria for federal acknowledgment under 25 CFR §83.7 and §83.8. Our history, community structure, and cultural resilience are well-documented and affirmed by federal records. Recognition is not only a legal obligation—it is a moral imperative rooted in treaty promises and restorative justice. I call upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs to do the right thing, especially with the continued work around Boarding School Initiative, by acknowledging the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians.

References

- Durant, H. (1909). Durant Roll [A census roll in 1909 of the descendants of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan who were parties to the 1836 and 1855 treaties].
https://www.academia.edu/31965154/The_Durant_Census_of_the_Ottawa_and_Chippewa_Indians_of_Michigan_Part_3_The_Durant_Census_Roll
- Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. (2024). Response to Proposed Finding Against Acknowledgment. Grand Rapids, MI: Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians
- U.S. Department of the Interior. (2023). Proposed Finding Against Acknowledgment of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior
- U.S. Department of the Interior. (2022). Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior