

Ms. Sandra Sahguj

[REDACTED], ON, Canada [REDACTED]

August 5, 2025

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Washington, DC

R. Lee Fleming, Director  
Department of the Interior  
Office of Federal Acknowledgment  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. R. Lee Fleming

This letter is in response to Bill H.R. 3255, the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians Restoration Act of 2025, which seeks to reaffirm and clarify the federal relationship of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians of Michigan as a federally recognized Indian tribe. I write in opposition to the inclusion of the Maple River Band of Ottawa Indians' territory under the jurisdiction or claims of the Grand River Band. This letter does not seek to diminish the rights of the Grand River Band to pursue recognition, but rather to assert and reserve the territorial and sovereign rights of the Maple River Band of Ottawa Indians.

Attached is a letter I previously sent on August 17, 2023, to R. Lee Fleming, Director of the Office of Federal Acknowledgment; the Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior; and Mr. Ron Yob.

I am a direct descendant of Chief Pewamo, my great-great-grandfather, who resided in the Maple River Indian Village—a separate and distinct Ottawa settlement. Pewamo was born between 1805 and 1807, as evidenced by Canadian census records in the absence of a birth certificate. Census sources include: 1871 Census (Sombra, Bothwell, Ontario; Roll C-9894; Page 107; Family No: 411), 1881 Census (Sombra, Bothwell, Ontario; Roll C-13276; Page 40; Family No: 186), and 1891 Census (Walpole Island, Bothwell, Ontario; Roll T-6325; Family No: 48).

Pewamo is listed on the 1836 Annuity Payment Roll for the Maple River Village as "Pe way amo," alongside Muck-a-tay-o-quot and Wawpoose. On the 1837 roll, he is listed again along with "Muck-e-ta-quet." In 1839, "Muck-a-tay-way-quot" was designated Chief and "Pe-way-ah-mo" as a headman. These rolls confirm that the U.S. government recognized the Maple River Band as a geographically and politically separate entity with its leadership.

In the Treaty of March 28, 1836, between the United States and the Ottawa and Chippewa Nations (U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 7), Chief Muck-a-tay-o-quot (Black

Cloud) and headman Wawpoose (Rabbit) were listed for Maple River Village. The designation of Maple River under their names demonstrates their recognized autonomy. Muck-a-tay-o-quot's resistance to signing the treaty and his refusal to assent to the Senate's amendments show that the Maple River Band did not relinquish their traditional lands. We are members of the Three Fires Confederacy—a political alliance of the Ottawa, Ojibway, and Potawatomi. Still, the Maple River Band has always maintained a separate political and territorial identity. Assertions that the Maple River Band is a subgroup of the Grand River Band are inaccurate and contradict historical documentation.

Historical references supporting our separate identity include: the *Lansing State Journal* (May 17, 1942), which identifies Chief Makitoquet as the leader of about 300 people along the Maple River; the *Detroit Free Press* (February 22, 1887), which refers to Indian villages surrounding Lyons, Michigan, including Muck-a-to-quet and Pewamo; and the *Grand Rapids Press* (July 17, 1956), which notes Maple River as a separate Indian village with its own chiefs and history of territorial defense. Chief Coocoosh, another leader of the Maple River Band, is referenced in the Blanchard Papers and associated with territorial defense.

Chief Manitowaube of the Bear Clan (Kiskakon nation), a trusted ally of Tecumseh and a recipient of British Commission Papers in 1782, was Pewamo's grandfather. This hereditary lineage supports our traditional governance and leadership claims. A 1909 letter to the Department of the Interior from Ottawa residents of Walpole Island asserts their continuing rights in the United States and names Widow Pe-wa-moo (Pewamo's widow), aged 98, among 180 claimants. This letter includes several of my ancestors, including James Aquash and Sarah Aquash Shognosh.

Estate and family records support this legacy: the death of Wa-ba-ge-ne-qua (May 23, 1911; Ontario Canada Death Record; informant: Joseph Aquash, Walpole Island); Estate of Pewamo, File No. 471/37-2-7-X16 (Indian Affairs Branch, London District), in which Pewamo refers to his grandfather Manitowaube's commission; and a 1933 photograph showing Ada Aquash Smith, Sarah Shognosh, and Hyman Smith—descendants of Pewamo.

Manitowaube was commissioned in 1782 by Governor Frederick Haldimand for his loyalty to the British Crown and played a military role under Tecumseh. His descendants safeguarded his commission and medal, evidence of leadership passed through family lines.

Additional supporting documentation includes articles in the *Windsor Star* (November 19, 1937; August 15, 1941) and the *Lansing State Journal* (April 28, 1955), which confirm the Commission and lineage of Chief Manitowaube and the distinct identity of Chief Pewamo, namesake of Pewamo, Michigan.



We are North American Indians with ancestral territory in the United States. We have never signed a treaty that forfeits our inherent rights. The Maple River Band of Ottawa Indians remains a distinct and sovereign group, and the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians should not include us in their federal recognition efforts.

The legacy of our ancestors—Manitowaube, Muck-a-tay-o-quot, Coccoosh, and Pewamo—must be preserved and honored. We ask: when can we return to our homeland?

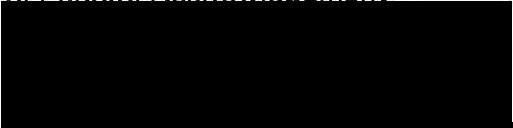
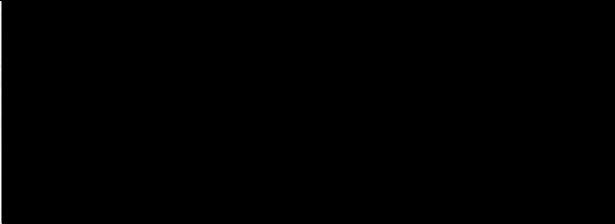
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, 

Sandra Sahgij

cc: Mr. Ron Yob

cc: R. Lee Fleming, Director, Office of Federal Acknowledgment

  
*Edison Isaac*  
*Lorraine TooshKenig*  
*Ricardo Ablin*  


Ms Sandra Sahguj

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[REDACTED], ON

[REDACTED]

8/17/23

Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians

c/o Mr. Ron Yob

P. O. Box 2937

Grand Rapids, Michigan

49501-2937

Response Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians

Dear Mr. Ron Yob

This letter is in response to the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians seeking to be federally recognized. I oppose the their intrusion into Maple River band of Ottawa territory. This letter shall not diminish the rights of the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians, regarding their federal recognition. I am reserving our rights to our territory.

I recently found a newspaper article in The Windsor Star, dated Friday, November 19, 1937, in the It's the Lore (Walpole Island items in the Wallaceburg News) section describing a Special Council Meeting. Held at the council chambers on November 15, 1937, all the councilors and both chiefs attended. The subject of the discussion focused on who will own the Commissioned Paper, a document issued to Little Chief Manitowabi in the year 1786 by the British government. This document proves that Little Chief Manitowabi and his people resided at the Maple River Village.

I am a successor to the heirs by blood through the lineage of Pewamo who is my great great grandfather. Pewamo born about 1805-1807, in other Native American stories that I frequently read that there were no birth certificates available. Following are the source citations: Year: 1871; Census Place: Sombra, Bothwell, Ontario; Roll: C-9894; Page: 107, Family No: 411. Year: 1881; Census Place: Sombra, Bothwell, Ontario; Roll C-13276; Page: 40; Family No: 186. Year: 1891; Census Place: Walpole Island, Bothwell, Ontario, Canada; Roll T-6325; Family No: 48. Or refer to the 1871, 1881, or 1891 Canadian Census. According to the 1871, 1881, 1891 Canadian Censuses, Pewamo probably was born between 1805-1807. Ottawa Indians of maple river band are referred to in the 1835 to 1837 Annuity Payments and the Durrant Report on the Michigan Indians.

The Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs received a letter showing received, dates of May 12, 1909 and June 15, 1909, the letter is signed by widow Pewamo with her mark, this was my great great grandmother, who was 98 at that time. Pewamos daughter Kah gah kme go qua married James Aquash, they are my great grandparents. Their daughter, Ada (Aquash) married Hyman Smith, they are my grandparents. Ada (Aquash) Smith's youngest son, Roy Smith was my father. Through this bloodline, I am a successor to the heirs of Maple River Band of Ottawa. Through Roy Smith's lineage is 100 plus living descendants. Also within that letter received in 1909, it was stated that at least 180 more who came to Walpole Island as strangers, during that the time that Pewamo did.

John C. Blanchard had a friendship with Pewamo and Pewamo's family and that friendship evolved into Pewamos family adopting John Blanchard and he was named Optupsue. Another denotation of that enduring family bond was, John C. Blanchard named a village after Pewamo. To me this friendship becoming a family relationship that Pewamos family actualized with John C. Blanchard represented a core value of our traditional way of life as an Ottawa, and Ottawa within the Three Fires Confederacy. Although historically, Maple River Band of Ottawa were treated in a polar opposite way by the government.

We are North American Indians with territory in the United States. We have

never signed a treaty foregoing or abrogating our birthright in any agreement. The Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians are not to infringe on our territory, the Maple River Band. This recorded history is important to the legacy of Chief Pewamo.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Sincerely

Sandra Sahgij

cc The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior

cc R. Lee Fleming, Director, Office of Federal Acknowledgement