

St. Lawrence Environment Trustee Council (SLETC) Preferred Cultural Restoration Projects

November 2012



Site History

The Alcoa Aggregation (now Alcoa West), Reynolds Metal Corporation (formerly RMC, now Alcoa East) and the General Motors Central Foundry Division (GM) Sites are located on the St. Lawrence, Grasse and Raquette Rivers. The Alcoa Sites are active aluminum production plants, but the GM site is closed and formerly manufactured aluminum cylinder heads.

Contaminants of Concern

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), aluminum, fluoride and cyanide.



St. Lawrence River from Thompson Island.

Under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), Clean Water Act (CWA) and the Oil Pollution Act (OPA), state, federal and tribal agencies serve as natural resource trustees to assess and restore natural resources injured by hazardous substances and oil to

compensate for lost services, such as fishing or boating.

Identifying Preferred Restoration Projects

After reviewing existing information and conducting further oral history research as well as hosting community outreach meetings and soliciting projects from the community, it was determined by the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Trustees that two main components of restoration were necessary: an apprenticeship program and institutional funding. Both components would satisfy the injuries to the Traditional Cultural Practices.

Apprenticeship Program

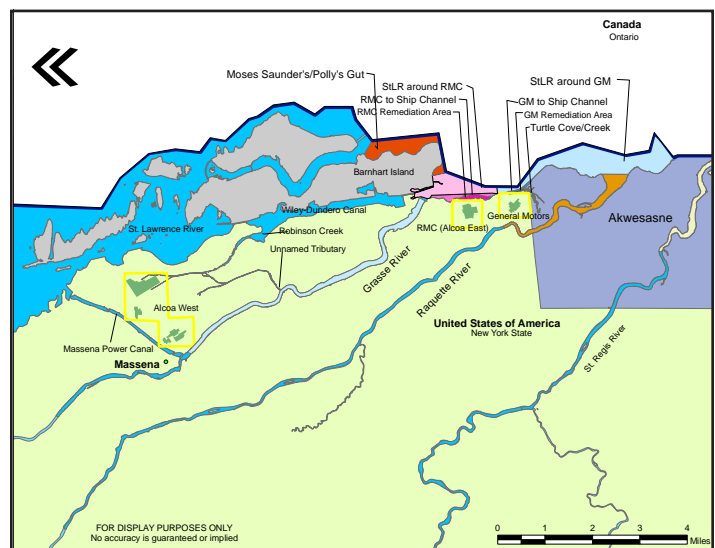
Akwesasne's approach to cultural restoration seeks to promote the restoration of land-based cultural practices and traditional economic activities within the community. This approach will establish and directly support long-term master-apprentice relationships in the four areas of traditional cultural practices that were harmed by the release of hazardous contami-

Natural Resource Trustees for St. Lawrence NRDA

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- New York State
- St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Cultural Impacts

- Water, fishing, and use of the river
- Horticulture and basketmaking
- Medicinal plants and healing
- Hunting and trapping



Map of assessment area.

nants and promote and support the regeneration of practices associated with traditions in these areas.

- Water, fishing and use of the river.
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The goal of this program is to provide hands-on experience for each category of traditional activity to the full extent, incorporating all its fundamental elements.

The program apprentices will acquire all of their knowledge from the people most experienced in their chosen activity, a Master. They will work together on a daily basis going through all components of a specific traditional activity so as to completely immerse the apprentice in traditional information. Hands-on experience would be provided through direct harvesting, preparing, preservation and production of traditional products by the apprentice.

The Mohawk language component is also infused into every aspect of apprentices' training.

Cultural Institutional Funding

In addition to the Apprenticeship Program, financial resources will be provided to a number of existing Akwesasne-based institutions and programs that have already begun the work of responding to the cultural harm caused by contamination. These projects are essential to the survival and regeneration of the cultural practices in the community. The table on the right describes the type of projects that could be funded and their resource-use benefits. In order to determine funding priority for these projects, a cultural evaluation tool was developed to screen for the projects with the highest criteria rating.

Evaluation Criteria

Apprenticeship Program

Several community advisory meetings were hosted to obtain ideas and comments on approaches for restoring and/or strengthening traditional cultural practices. The Apprenticeship Program was the most appropriate way to ensure that these practices were being transmitted back to the community.

Cultural Institutions

All proposals that were submitted from the public solicitation were evaluated based on a set of criteria. Proposals were ranked according to their strengths on: the degree to which they reflect the indigenous learning-teaching model outline in relation to the master-apprentice program and the extent to which they measure the four main areas of cultural harm.

Photos, from left, below: Raquette River; hunting, one of the cultural activities addressed in the Apprenticeship Program; collecting sweetgrass for basket-making; finished baskets; Akwesasne Freedom School students.

Resource-Use Benefits	Project Description
Horticulture, Medicine and Healing, Language	This institution is committed to the preservation of Mohawk language, traditions, culture and beliefs and serves as an educational center, a living community and a spiritual retreat.
Horticulture, Medicine/Healing, Hunting, Trapping, Language	The institution incorporates Mohawk language, traditional Mohawk culture and the natural environment into daily activities. This restoration ensures the regeneration of Mohawk language and culture in Akwesasne.
Horticulture, Medicine/Healing, Hunting/Trapping	This institution provides opportunities for Akwesasne youth as well as surrounding communities to receive outdoor educational experience. It is a natural and safe location for traditional teachings, respect for the land and survival skills.
Horticulture	The project will provide materials, plants and nutritional information for raised bed gardens to community members.

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