

Sault Ste. Marie Tribe passes resolution on rights of nature

Interlochen Public Radio | By [Ellie Katz](#)

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Cedar trees in winter. Amy Aamoo McCoy, a Sault tribal member who first drafted the resolution, says she was inspired to write it by the threat pesticides posed to plant relatives, and later, by the desecration of several cedar trees in Hiawatha National Forest. *(Photo: IPR News)*

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians has passed a new resolution recognizing nature's inherent rights. It's the first tribe located in Michigan to do so.

While it does not change tribal code, it does acknowledge the Sault Tribe's responsibility to its "First Family of More Than Human Relatives."

Amy Aamoo McCoy is a tribal member who first drafted the resolution after she grew concerned about the use of pesticides and learned about the desecration of several cedar trees.

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“The significance of this law is a shift in Anishinaabe thinking – our own ways of thinking about our relationships with the rest of creation,” McCoy said. “Those beings need to be respected, not relegated as resource commodities. They need to be cared for, respected, protected. And now that’s the law.”

McCoy says the resolution is an important first step towards more tribal environmental protections, including legal standing for nature in court.

“It’s definitely picking up our embedded responsibilities as Anishinaabek, legally,” she said. “From my perspective, the federal government – they’ve severed our own ways of governing ourselves, and required us to operate under, and according to, their methods of organization.”

But she says thanks to elders and knowledge keepers, the foundations of that self-governance, like language and beliefs, were not lost.

“So it was never gone,” McCoy said. “But it just now made it to legislation.”

Other tribal nations in Michigan are considering [similar resolutions](#), including the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians.

It’s part of a broader “rights of nature” movement led by indigenous communities around the world – meant to acknowledge the rights nature has long had in many tribal communities and bolster environmental protections as western legal systems fall short.

McCoy says this resolution is just the first step in reaching those goals.

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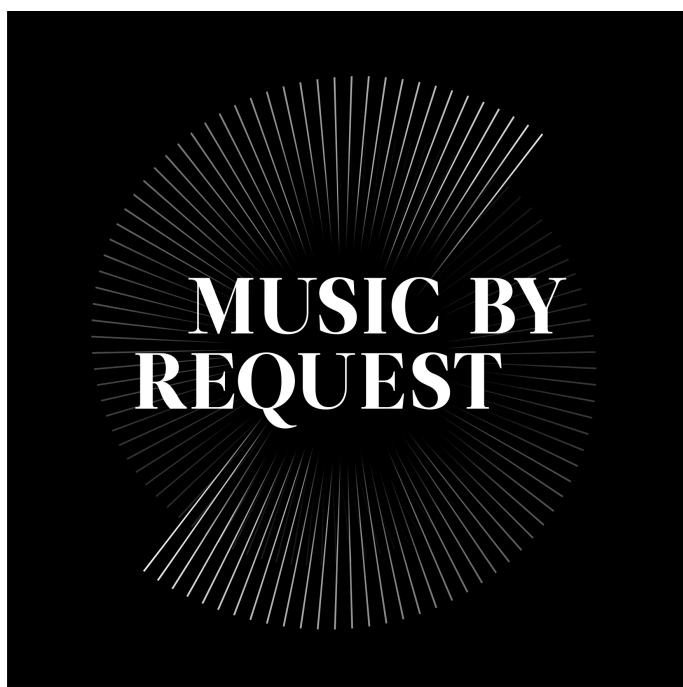
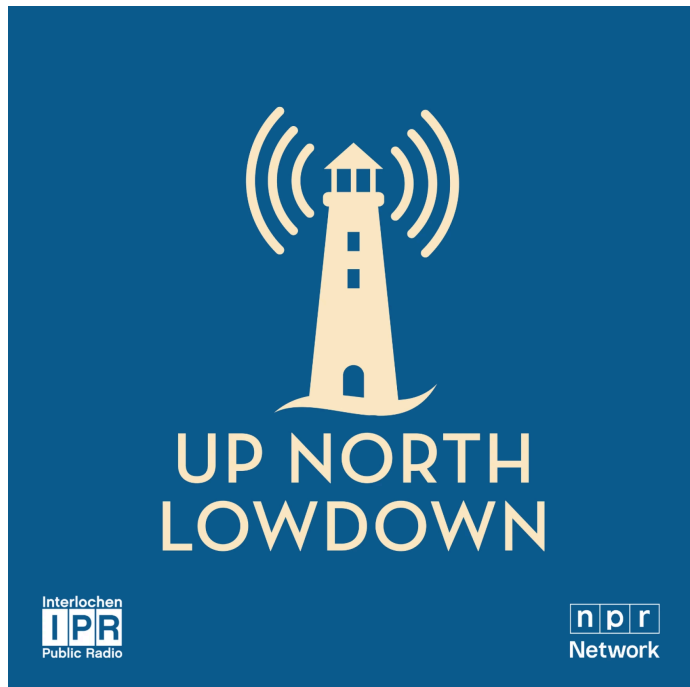
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