

SOUTHERN CHIEFS' ORGANIZATION SPECIAL PROJECTS

Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) established the area of Special Projects due to the increasing need for representation in areas of Environment, Fisheries and Agriculture, Housing, Economic Development and Treaty Land Entitlement.

ENVIRONMENT

SCO Resolutions

At the September 2004 Chiefs-in-Summit, a Resolution was passed regarding Environmental Stewardship:

**THEREFORE THE CHIEFS-IN-SUMMIT RESOLVE: that First Nations must participate as active partners in any public or private environmental stewardship programs and initiatives; and
THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: that all southern First Nations perform their own environmental research and studies in regards to environmental stewardship in their traditional territories; and
BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED: that the Grand Chief support and lobby for financial support from the federal and provincial governments to participate fully in all environmental stewardship programs and initiatives.**

At past Summits, a number of Resolutions on Lands and Natural Resources have been passed. In general, these Resolutions gave direction to compile and disseminate information with regard to natural resources, to enable our people to make well-informed decisions for the generations to come. More specific directions were also given and carried out through the former Natural Resources Secretariat at SCO.

WATER

The critical state of health of Lake Winnipeg is an indication of many local and international environmental issues that must be addressed. Water is essential to life, and Lake Winnipeg, the largest freshwater lake in Manitoba, is under considerable threat from both localized and non-point sources of pollution. The Southern Chiefs' Organization has prepared a draft *Environmental Strategy* which is guided by a focus on providing solutions to Lake Winnipeg environmental problems.

There are a number of opportunities for First Nations to take a significant role in protecting Lake Winnipeg, identified in the *Environmental Strategy*:

- Increase awareness of Lake Winnipeg environmental issues in First Nation communities, especially those communities located within the Lake Winnipeg watershed.
- Ensure that the perspectives (both traditional and local knowledge) of First Nation fishers are included in processes aimed at better understanding the science of the lake.
- Assess the effectiveness of First Nation wastewater facilities/systems with respect to phosphorus and nitrogen discharges and take action to upgrade substandard systems.
- Adopt agricultural techniques that are environmentally sensitive and that reduce the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen entering waterways.
- Increase capacity with respect to First Nations' environment expertise and organization in Manitoba, especially as it concerns the protection of water and water-related resources.
- Take action to ensure that First Nation people and their beaches are protected from excessive levels of E. coli contamination.
- Support developments that improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas and toxic emissions.

Environment Information for Southern First Nations

In March 2005, a First Nations Water Protection Council was formed via Resolution at a Special Chiefs-in-Summit meeting. The role of the Council is to guide implementation of the *Environmental Strategy* and to exercise jurisdiction over matters pertaining to water and related resources.

FISHERIES

SCO Resolutions

At the September 2004 Chiefs-in-Summit, a Resolution was passed regarding Taxation of Treaty Status Fishers Fishing on Traditional Territories:

THEREFORE THE CHIEFS-IN-SUMMIT RESOLVE: the Chiefs-in-Summit hereby direct the Southern Chiefs' Organization to initiate legal and other research with respect to the taxation of the income earned on traditional territories by Treaty fishers in the Province of Manitoba.

Many Resolutions dealing with fishery issues have been adopted at past Summits. In 2001, a Resolution gave SCO direction to pursue a Fisheries mandate, in asserting Treaty rights and providing up-to-date information to First Nations. Other Resolutions have given direction to advocate for First Nation fishers on specific issues.

First Nation Fisheries

Fishing has been a part of the First Nation way of life since time immemorial. Our treaties include the right to continue to hunt and fish for survival as we always have. Fishing is an integral part of First Nation economies and diets. The Southern Chiefs' Organization is active in advocating for First Nation fishers' rights in dealings with the federal and provincial governments.

Fisheries Information for Southern First Nations

In April 2005, on the Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation at the Manitoba Commercial Inland Fisheries Conference, a Commercial Inland Fishers Federation was formed to represent fishers' interests. The federation includes all commercial fishers in Manitoba, and is being chaired by Sam Murdock on an interim basis.

AGRICULTURE

SCO Resolutions

Resolutions dealing with Agriculture have been adopted in the past, such as the following from January 2001:

THE SOUTHERN CHIEFS GATHERED IN SUMMIT, HEREBY RESOLVE: that we, the Chiefs of Southern Manitoba voice our dissatisfaction to the situation where our people must pay for their treaty rights to take up a modern agricultural lifestyle; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: that we hereby mandate the SCO Grand Chief to undertake whatever measures necessary to pressure government to uphold its Treaty obligation to assist our people that have chosen to take up a modern agricultural lifestyle...

First Nations Agriculture

Agriculture provides employment and food for many Southern First Nation people. Treaties included provisions for First Nations to take up agricultural lifestyles, but First Nation farmers still face many obstacles to operating a successful farm. First Nation agricultural producers are facing difficulties with high interest rates, a lack of disaster insurance and financial assistance programs, and very low livestock prices.

Agriculture Information for Southern First Nations

In July 2005, on the Waywayseeccappo First Nation, at the Southern First Nations Agriculture Forum, a First Nations Agriculture Committee was formed to represent farmers' interests. The committee includes three (3) producers and three (3) elected leaders from different agricultural regions, and is being chaired by Sam Murdock on an interim basis.

HOUSING

SCO Resolutions

At the September 2004 Chiefs-in-Summit, a Resolution was passed regarding the development of a Housing Strategy:

THEREFORE THE CHIEFS-IN-SUMMIT RESOLVE: that the SCO Grand Chief make southern First Nation housing a priority and to develop a southern First Nation Housing Strategy which will include, a) meeting and networking with Federal and Provincial Ministers responsible for housing and with the Assembly of First Nations office and other Manitoba political organizations; b) research into the current statistics for southern First Nation housing in Manitoba; and c) consulting and providing updates to the SCO Chiefs.

Resolutions have been made in the past on topics such as mould contamination, CMHC Section 95 housing, and creating a housing capacity within SCO. These issues continue to be addressed in the *Housing Strategy* developed in 2004.

First Nations Housing

In accordance with the direction received under the September 2004 Resolution, the Southern Chiefs' Organization has prepared a draft *Housing Strategy* for Southern First Nations.

In an April 2003 report, the Auditor General stated that:

Numerous studies over the last 20 years have noted that poor housing negatively affects the health, education, and overall social conditions of individuals and communities on reserves [...]. They have all called for action to address the shortage of adequate housing on reserves.

As pointed out by the Auditor General, most of the housing programs currently in place are under funded, too complex and/or inefficient. Moreover, the policies of different departments are too often in conflict with one another. Therefore, SCO strategy is geared toward the replacement of all current housing programs with a First Nations Housing Authority that will obtain better results in terms of sustainable dwellings built.

Currently, several First Nations political organizations are working on different housing projects at the regional and national levels. The model being pursued at the national level would allow regional authorities to organize themselves under a national "umbrella" housing authority.

The *Housing Strategy* prepared by SCO also includes interim measures for the provision of housing and stimulating economic development through local purchasing arrangements and training a skilled workforce.

TREATY LAND ENTITLEMENT (TLE)

SCO Resolutions

At the September 2004 Chiefs-in-Summit, a Resolution was passed regarding TLE Land Conversion:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: that the Southern Chiefs in Summit direct the SCO Grand Chief to research the options and opportunities for First Nation communities, either individually and/or collectively, to speed up the processes of getting land bought and transferred to reserve status so as to benefit the communities now and for future generations.

First Nation Treaty Land Entitlement

Historical land claims led to Treaty Land Entitlement agreements for First Nations whose Treaty land commitments were never fulfilled. A First Nation with TLE must have the claim accepted by the federal government and negotiate through the Additions to Reserve process to have land converted to reserve status. TLE agreements include provisions for an entitlement First Nation to select Crown land or purchase lands on a willing seller-willing buyer basis. Any First Nation can have land converted to reserve status under Addition to Reserves agreements.

SPECIAL PROJECTS:

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