

# NORTHERN TRIBAL BORDER ALLIANCE

## Second Northern Tribal Border Summit Comes to a Close *Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Building Inter-Tribal, International, and Intergovernmental Partnerships to Improve Border Relations*

AKWESASNE, NY, May 3, 2018— The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (“SRMT” or “Tribe”) and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho announced the successful completion of the second Northern Tribal Border Summit (“Summit”) held on May 1, 2018 at the Akwesasne Mohawk Casino Resort in Akwesasne, New York.

For decades, SRMT has been actively engaging the U.S. Congress and various administrations to protect the right of Mohawks to cross the international border at Akwesasne in accordance with our inherent right, as memorialized in the Jay Treaty. The Tribe has been successfully working to introduce legislation that would amend and modernize Section 289 of the Immigration and Nationality Act to recognize tribal identification cards when crossing the border; instead of relying on 1950s termination-era language that requires Mohawk people to prove they are “50 percent or more blood of the American Indian race.” This language is offensive, an infringement on our right to determine our membership requirements as a self-governing nation, inconsistent with federal Indian law, and more importantly creates unnecessary tension between our tribal members and border security agents.

“To address this problem and other Northern border security issues, we are partnering with First Nations that reside along the U.S.-Canadian border to protect our inherent rights to access our own lands and to ensure the safety of our community members,” said SRMT Chief Eric Thompson, who spear headed the first and second Northern Border Tribal Summits.

Building from the August 2017 Summit held at the Mystic Lake Casino & Hotel in Shakopee, Minnesota; the most recent Summit continued important discussions on how tribes and First Nations living and working on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border can work collaboratively on a unified front to address border crossing issues and build relationships with U.S. and Canadian border officials. Approximately thirty (30) participants attended the daylong Summit; including representatives from both U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security and Canada Border Services Agency.

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**Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Assembly of First Nations, Blackfeet Nation, Cayuga Nation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville, Assiniboine & Sioux/Fort Peck Tribes, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Makah Indian Tribe, Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, Oneida Indian Nation of Wisconsin, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Seneca Nation of Indians, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.**

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The Summit opened with attendees sharing the difficulties they face when crossing the border; while touching on a number of contributing factors, such as the unwillingness of border agents to accept tribal government-issued identification documents, excessive interrogation and harassment, denial of entry for minor offenses, and the improper handling of sacred or cultural items. Additionally, the speakers discussed the need to continue building and strengthening alliances with northern border tribes, as well as to build allies within both federal governments who are willing to work with border tribes on practical solutions that respect the right of Indigenous people to travel within their ancestral territories in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and The American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ADRIP).

“I am pleased at the headway we have gained in this latest conference in beautiful Mohawk territory. The path forward is starting to take shape and we are building momentum. We have some work to do to gain more participation from the alliance but after the meetings I have a sense of progress and look forward to further efforts,” stated Chairman Gary Aitken Jr. of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho.

“We look forward to working in conjunction with the other nations and pressing our issues from a united group of tribal leaders to the respective governments of the United States and Canada. We welcome tribal governments and First Nations that are located on or near the northern border to join our efforts to protect our mobility, hunting and fishing rights as Indigenous Peoples. As the Alliance grows, we will have a stronger, unified voice that will assist us in accomplishing our goals,” add Chief Thompson.

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