

BINATIONAL BUI RE-DESIGNATION EVENT SPEECH

“Added Costs to Agriculture and Industry”

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Boozhoo/Hello My name is Naomi Williams and I work as the Environment Officer for Walpole Island First Nation. First of all, I want to thank the Great Spirit/Our Creator for providing us with the gift of water that is essential for sustaining all life. Gchi-Miigwetch Zheminidoo. As a member of Walpole Island First Nation, I welcome everyone to what is known as the homeland traditional territory to the First Nations people in this area. I am delighted to be able to participate and share in the celebration of the second Binational Beneficial Use Re-Designation Event that we've had for the St. Clair River. This reveals that our hard work is paying off and by working together we can accomplish a great deal.

Today we commemorate the efforts of those that have worked hard on bringing us closer to our common goal of delisting the St. Clair River as an Area of Concern on both sides of the Canada/U.S. border. Border...now there is an interesting concept. I say this because the environment and pollution have no borders. I have been involved with the St. Clair River Canadian RAP Implementation Committee and the St. Clair River Binational Public Advisory Council for a number of years, and feel honored that I can provide a First Nations perspective in this process. We have always had the capacity and the technical and traditional knowledge which makes this is a great way to be involved. I also want to say that I stand here as an Anishnaabe woman, in our culture women are given the traditional responsibility to protect, carry, and speak for the water and for those that cannot speak. This is because we are the ones that carry new life. The water has a spirit of its own and is life giving and it is a part of our first surroundings that we all had experienced as

babies within the womb. The water is the life blood of mother earth and the rivers are her veins, the rocks are her bones, the earth is her flesh, and the plants are her hair. We are all a part of Mother Earth, along with each four legged, two legged, and winged creatures, the fish and the plants. And what we do to her we also do to ourselves. We continue to assert our relationship with the water because we want to ensure that it is clean and available for the use of future generations. We are all related and must do our part to protect the water. When there is a spill, at first it is easy for us to only think of ourselves as we could just shut-down our water treatment plants or get our water elsewhere to avoid drinking it, but we also need to remember that all life is affected as they too live in that environment and do not have a tap they can shut-off.

In the past, one of our greatest obstacles have been the political will and good faith in regards to environmental protection. There has been the need to prod our political institutions to take action, and it had been less clear whether industry had been acting in good faith. Now, the key point is that we should recognize that the communities and all parties that have been involved have stepped up to the challenges of addressing environmental issues in the St. Clair River. But much like the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, there has been a great deal of progress, and there is still a long way to go. Remember the St. Clair River did not reach a state of being an Area of Concern over night, and the same could be said about its delisting. I close by saying “Let’s continue working together so we can reach the next milestone and I look forward to the next re-designation for declaring beneficial uses as unimpaired for the St. Clair River”.