



Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community

340 River Rd
P O Box 50835
Mendota, MN 55150

Phone: 651-452-4141
email: mmdc01@comcast.net
www.mendotadakota.com



May 21, 2012

Robert Finley
Southeast Regional Manager
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
12 Civic Center Plaza,
Suite 2165
Mankato, MN 56001

Dear Robert:

We are writing this letter to inform you of a problem that affects Lake Pepin, the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. As you may know the increases of sediment that is occurring in Lake Pepin is due primarily to the impact from the Minnesota River. Data such as Daniel Engstroms, study indicates that the sediment has increased substantially since the early 1940's. The sediment build-up blocks vital sunlight to plant growth and alters the eco-system and has had a direct impact on the wildlife and fisheries of the region. We as a community through the generations have seen the quality of the water and wildlife degrade to its current existing condition. We feel the MPCA along with the help of the Federal government can change this for the good of our community both here in Mendota and also to our neighbors downstream. We believe the sediment increases are due partly to the alterations made to the Minnesota river in the 1940's at Mendota and slightly upstream. The removing of three critical bends in the Minnesota river prior to reaching the Mississippi river has minimized and eliminated the opportunity for the sediment to collect in these last bends of the river. In addition, the changes to the river has had a cultural affect on our community and prevents us from freely accessing our sacred land.

Our members of the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community (MMDC) can be traced back to Mendota, Minnesota. The Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community is working on preserving our cultural heritage for our future generations.

The village of Mendota and its surrounding areas are to us "Sacred Lands". The name Mendota is a French misinterpretation of the Dakota word Mdo-Te. Mdo-Te (pronounced Bdoh Tay) means the mouth of a river or a meeting of waters. Mdo-Te of the Wakpa (River) "Mni-sota" which means less than clear or smoky water, and the Mississippi River (See photo below). Note lack of river flow and current.



MMDC- Current



"Mdo-Te"

Seth Eastman - 1848



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This is considered by us the Mdewakanton Dakota People to be the middle of all things and the exact center of the earth and a sacred sanctuary. Our people have been here for centuries and return to this area and perform ceremonies including the lighting of the sacred fires of the Ochetti seven council fires and also the yearly remembrance ceremonies of our ancestors who were imprisoned and encamped and perished in the harsh winter of 1863 with-in sight of Mdo-Te. Our ancestors who passed onto the spirit world are buried with-in walking distance and in proximity on top of the sacred hills surrounding Mdo-Te such as Pilot Knob “to the south and also on Pike Island “We-Ta-Tan-Ka”. Also with-in walking distance and to the north of Mdo-Te is our sacred Coldwater Springs and Minnehaha Falls and to the South and West and upstream two of our Dakota villages “Black Dog’s” and “Bad Hails” village is also affected with it being cut-off and isolated due to the river alterations. The alterations to the river has affected the flow of water to these sacred areas especially where the rivers meet. The Mendota people recognize *“The Meeting of the Waters” as a sacred sanctuary which is currently being minimized in both capacity and energy. We are asking that the bends be put back into the river returning it to it’s natural beauty and energy flow.* Currently the re-routed river is preventing this from happening.



Pilot Knob Hill

Seth Eastman



Indians harvesting rice

Seth Eastman



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The three areas that need to be addressed are the three bends on the Minnesota river upstream preceding Mdo-Te, see maps below.



Plympton 1839



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Bend #1



Bend #2



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Bend #3

These three bends capture the sediment prior to reaching the Mississippi and thus Lake Pepin. These three bends are the last walls of defense for sediment capture. In the 1940's the Minnesota River was dredged and re-routed to allow tanker ships to be built and transported from Savage to the Gulf of Mexico for the war effort. The Army Corps of Engineers created three channels between the cities of Mendota and Savage eliminating these three bends. (see maps noted Bend #1, Bend #2 and Bend #3 above).

It is important to note that during the spring flooding of 2011 the Minnesota river rose to a height and forced its way through the old channel thus capturing hills of sediment in the bends of the river. (see photo below)



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It is of great importance to the MMDC to return the landscape and river course to its original natural form and allow our people to access our sacred lands between Mdo-Te and Pilot Knob. "The Meeting of the Waters" is to the Mendota Mdewaketon Community as the Vatican is to the Catholics of the world. This change would help solve Lake Pepins sediment problems. The change would have minimal to no impact on the barge ports upstream which are currently linked to rail lines for supply. The cost to make this big difference is minimal. Data indicates a spike in the 1940's when the Minnesota was rerouted for the war. As stated previously we believe it is the main reason. I have included the following photos of what the area looked like prior to the 1940's:





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We look forward to the opportunity in meeting with you and discussing our concerns regarding this matter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Perry J. Altendorfer
MMDC