



# Minnesota GreenStep Tribal Nations

Fall 2017

## Background on the GreenStep Tribal Nations Pilot Program

**During summer 2014** Minnesota's Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs, a GreenStep Cities program partner organization) funded University of MN-Duluth students Veronica Kingbird and Lucas Bratvold. Natives of the Red Lake Indian Nation, they worked with the Leech Lake Band to advance and document Tribal sustainability and clean energy actions. Leech Lake's Department of Natural Resources – especially Brandy Toft - was very engaged and, on August 20<sup>th</sup> submitted a *Letter of Commitment to Participate in the Minnesota GreenStep Tribal Program*.

- See an article and video of Veronica and Lucas at <http://tinyurl.com/LLBandvideo>

**Prior to 2014**, staff of the Indian Health Service and the Leech Lake DNR had used the list of GreenStep best practice actions to prioritize implementation of select solid waste management actions. That experience led Leech Lake to request formal participation in the GreenStep program.

**Despite the fact that GreenStep actions are designed to work for Minnesota cities**, not tribes, the GreenStep program steering committee enthusiastically welcomed Leech Lake and has developed an evolving set of guidelines for other tribes who wish to join the program as members of a GreenStep Tribal Nations pilot program. Tribal members utilize GreenStep information resources and are recognized for their accomplishments as added to their GreenStep web page.

**Currently three tribal nations are participating:** Leech Lake, Red Lake, and Fond du Lac. Given this tribal interest in the GreenStep framework, the GreenStep partner organizations plan to better clarify and define guidelines and issues for tribes. On an ongoing basis, as we learn from tribes, we will update our learnings, below, on how the GreenStep Program can be best utilized by Tribal Nations as a way to link tribal priorities for their local ecosystem and economy.

## Evolution of the Tribal Pilot

**The ideal evolution of this pilot work** would result in a program and website that looks very much like the GreenStep Cities program and web site – and which is closely connected to it – and yet which is carefully written to speak to the unique issues and features of tribal governance and activity. We imagine this effort would cost at least \$50,000 in one-time funding and require a tribal steering committee composed of mostly tribal staff and one GreenStep Cities staff person once it was launched by a consensus of tribal leadership.

**GreenStep staff do not at this point** have the capacity to seek out funding, but are most willing to assist a tribal effort that would seek one-time funding. We estimate stable on-going funding would be at least a half-time tribal staff person funded by a coalition of tribal governments, to assure stability in a GreenStep Tribal Nations Program once it would be launched.

## **Guidelines and Issues for Tribal Participation in the GreenStep Tribal Nations Pilot Program**

### **Tribal Commitment to Participate in GreenStep**

Recognition of a city at Step One participation in the GreenStep program requires a city council resolution. For Indian Nations a Letter of Intent or a Resolution to Participate is equivalent, and for legal and process reasons need not come from the Tribal Council, but could come from a division of tribal governance – from example, from the director of a tribe’s Division of Resource Management.

In the case of Leech Lake, the tribe’s DRM director speaks for the entire Nation. In the case of Red Lake, the Tribal Council adopted a GreenStep participation resolution. A tribe wishing to join GreenStep can click on each Tribal Nation listed at <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/allCities.cfm> to view a copy of their resolution to use as a guide for their own resolution.

### **Geographic Extent**

Cities and reservations have explicit boundaries. Tribal Nations may choose their entire reservation territory, or choose to define discrete portions or types of land within their reservation territory where they intend to focus implementation of Green Step best practice actions. Portions could include specific tribal facilities, multiple cities within the Nation’s boundaries, a region within the Nation, or the entire Nation. The choice depends upon the vision and leadership of reservation leaders. If, however, only one city wishes to join, that city would come in under the GreenStep Cities program.

Currently all three GreenStep tribal participants have chosen to work within their entire reservation territory.

### **Self-Selection into GreenStep Categories**

Criteria for recognition of GreenStep participants at Steps Two and Three depends in part on what “capacity,” or in which Category, a city falls. Cities answer 11 questions on a spreadsheet and a Category – A, B or C – is automatically calculated. In general, Category C cities are small – under 1500 people – and Category A cities are large – over 3000 people. For Indian Nations, some of the questions are not relevant, and so tribes should use their judgment in categorizing themselves.

Currently all three GreenStep tribal participants have categorized themselves as Category B tribes.

### **Best Practice Actions**

The GreenStep program challenges cities and tribes to complete actions, that accelerate sustainability and improve tribal efficiency, from a list of about 170. Between 4 and 8 actions fall under each of 29 best practices. Some actions focus on internal city/tribal operations, such as reservation-wide environmental management, transit, local energy. Other actions focus on the more local level - actions occurring in one or more specific hamlets, cities, or other tribal areas analogous to county land. The goal behind taking these actions is to utilize tradition, land, resources, collaboration and planning to improve efficiency and reinforce healthy choices for the Band's future.

Tribes should feel free to interpret each action within a tribal context and report their completion accordingly. Since tribes do on-line reporting along with cities, using actions that were

written for the city context, some actions as written do not quite fit the tribal context. Thus tribal GreenStep coordinators should broadly interpret each action and report tribal accomplishments under the closest existing action on the GreenStep web site. As needed tribal coordinators should contact the GreenStep program coordinator in St. Paul for guidance (see <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/contact.cfm> ).

Each action has city-specific implementation guides/resources, but not tribal-specific resources. Unfortunately, current GreenStep staff in St. Paul do not have the time nor skill to pick out the most useful tribal-specific resources. But many of the city-specific resources are still useful.

An example of tribal-specific resources that would be part of a GreenStep Tribal Nations web site is the EPA Region 5 - Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa joint creation of a *Community-Based Social Marketing Training Guide* (see <https://www.epa.gov/tribal-lands/tribal-community-based-social-marketing-training-guide> ).

### **One High-Impact Best Practice Action: the B3 Building Energy & Water Use Tool**

The first GreenStep action (best practice action 1.1) is to record monthly energy and water use at (city) tribal government buildings and facilities on what's called the Minnesota B3 Benchmarking database, at <https://mn.b3benchmarking.com/> When tribes join GreenStep they will be given B3 access. This powerful, free web-based tool helps tribal staff pinpoint energy waste so they can spend improvement dollars where they will return the best investment in energy and dollars saved every month. This tool enables tribal leaders to quickly identify the most efficient tribal investments.

### **GreenStep Tribal Recognition**

Tribal Nations are publicly recognized along with cities at the annual League of Minnesota Cities conference in June. This recognition – at Steps 1 through 5 – is formally given by the LMC. Additional recognition of GreenStep Tribal Nation accomplishments may happen in the future at a Minnesota-wide tribal gathering, as determined by tribal leaders in Minnesota or at individual ceremonies at tribal meetings or events, as desired by individual tribes.

Tribes should use the criteria for recognition at Steps 2 through 5 that are written for cities, but these Step criteria should be interpreted liberally to fit the tribal context. As needed, tribal coordinators should contact the GreenStep program coordinator in St. Paul for guidance.

### **Supporting Native Leaders through Extension, Tribal Colleges, Indian Health Service, CERTs**

Some of the GreenStep work on Leech Lake was supported through a paid internship arranged by CERTs. Future work in tribal nations could be funded by a tribe, by Minnesota Extension, with work-study funds at Tribal Colleges or community colleges, and through funds from the Indian Health Service office out of Bemidji.

As needed, the GreenStep program staff will support any tribal fundraising for GreenStep participation.

### **Improvements / Corrections to this GreenStep Tribal Nations Pilot Program**

GreenStep Tribes and those working with them should feel free to offer corrections, suggestions and improvements to this current summary of and guidance to tribal participation in the GreenStep program. Please send feedback to the GreenStep program coordinator in St. Paul via <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/contact.cfm>

