

Native American Tourism of Wisconsin holds annual conference

By Anne Thundercloud, July 2013

A magnificent view of Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands served as the backdrop of this year's Native American Tourism of Wisconsin Conference.

Native American Tourism of Wisconsin (NATOW), a longtime member of the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA), is an inter-tribal consortium that was launched as a state wide initiative in 1994 by the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council. The mission of NATOW is to promote tourism featuring Native American heritage and culture.

NATOW is comprised of representatives from each of the eleven Wisconsin tribal nations. The tribes work together throughout the year on tourism initiatives and rotate hosting the annual conference. This year's conference was hosted by the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

“Sustainable Tourism: Naturally Attractive” was a suitable theme for this year's location, Legendary Waters Resort & Casino.

This certified Travel Green Wisconsin resort, which opened its doors in August 2011, is nature-lover's casino. Large windows viewing the marina line the dining room and gaming room floors. Each hotel guest can draw back the curtains of their stylishly designed hotel room to reveal a stunning view of the world's largest freshwater lake, also known as Gitchigumee by the Ojibwe people.

The three day event coincided with the Indian Arts Show, where woodland artists demonstrated their skills and crafts like flute playing, birch bark canoe making, wood carving, basket weaving and raised beadwork.

The JEM (Joint Effort Marketing) Grant from the Wisconsin State Department of Tourism was awarded for the marketing of water and land tours of Red Cliff and the surrounding area. Tours were completely booked and the weather could not have been more agreeable.

It is not uncommon to see black bears, lynx and bald eagles while visiting the Red Cliff reservation and the nation's first tribally owned national park, Frog Bay Tribal National Park. Frog Bay is not affiliated with the National Park Service, but was designated as such by the Tribe because of the general public access to the land and the conservation values it instills.

AIANTA President Mary Jane Ferguson made the trek to northern Wisconsin to join the convergence of the travel professionals at Red Cliff.

“Travel and tourism is a means of sustainability for Wisconsin's tribes and tribes across the nation,” said AIANTA President Mary Jane Ferguson. “Creating the infrastructure for sustainable tourism will help American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian cultures thrive for generations to come.”

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa say Chief Buffalo canoed all the way to Washington, D.C. to preserve the land for his people.

Today, his descendent Robert Buffalo, works in hospitality at Legendary Waters Resort & Casino and helped host guests while serving as master of ceremonies for the NATOW conference. Whether it was the fish boil cooked and served by the tribal council, the sighting of eagles along the shores of Gitchigumee, or the local lessons in tribal customs, the Red Cliff Band of Chippewa stayed true to its roots and provided the best in Native hospitality.

The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin will host next year's NATOW conference in June 2014.

To learn more about NATOW, visit www.natow.org, follow us on Twitter at @NATOWisconsin, visit us on www.facebook.com/NATOWisconsin and join our tourism professionals group on LinkedIn.



From left to right: Miguel Real, general session speaker, CBS videographer and independent producer; AIANTA President Mary Jane Ferguson; and Kirby Metoxen, Oneida Nation Tourism Coordinator, NATOW Chairman and AIANTA Midwest Region Board Member.