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1485 MNO-BMADZEWEEN WAY, FULTON, MI 49052

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**Contact:**

Judi Henckel | 269.729.5151

### NHBP Holds Repatriation to Rebury More than 300 Ancestors

(Fulton, Mich.) - The Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi (NHBP) held a repatriation on May 17 to rebury 328 ancestors and 836 funerary objects. This was the largest recorded repatriation in the state of Michigan and perhaps in the Midwest.

NHBP set aside an area on its Pine Creek Reservation to be used exclusively as a cemetery for repatriating ancestral remains. The roughly 6-acre plot has been named "Hummingbird Spirit Land" in reference to the spiritual connection many Native Americans in Michigan have with hummingbirds. The remains and objects repatriated in the May event were the first burials in the cemetery.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed in 1990 to allow Native American Tribes to reclaim ancestral human remains, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony from museums and universities throughout the United States. The remains and objects reburied in this event were repatriated to NHBP from the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the St. Joseph County Sheriff's Office. Ten additional ancestors repatriated to the Pokagon Band from Dowagiac, Michigan were also reburied on the Pine Creek Reservation on their behalf.

NHBP's Director of the Cultural and Historic Preservation Office, Jeff Chivis, who led this repatriation effort, points out its significance. "This was one of the most historic and important events for our Tribe. As Anishinaabe people, we believe that we have a responsibility to care not only for our current and future generations, but also for those who came before us. The large number of ancestors, although impressive, is not what's most important here: the importance lies in finally placing these ancestors back into Mother Earth where they belong," Chivis said.

The 12 federally recognized Indian Tribes in Michigan have been working together to repatriate remains since they submitted a joint request in August 2011 to the University of Michigan and 18 other museums across the country asking for disposition of all culturally unidentifiable human remains and associated funerary objects. The NHBP repatriation event developed as a part of that process.

According to Chivis, it is often impossible to definitively determine to which Tribe these ancestors belonged. "Since almost all of these remains date to before European contact, we cannot say for sure whether or not they are affiliated with the Potawatomi, Odawa, Ojibwe, or another specific tribe. But we are confident in saying that they are the ancestors of all modern Anishinaabek. In recognition of this, we worked with many other Anishinaabek Tribes in Michigan and throughout the country to bring these ancestors home. This reinterment

was the product of this collaboration and we were honored to have completed this work on behalf of not only our Tribe but all of the Tribes in Michigan and those Tribes ancestral to the region as well,” Chivis said.

NHBP Tribal Chair Homer A. Mandoka also recognizes the importance of cooperation among Tribes to facilitate this process. “The leaders who strive to bridge relationships for the common good will revitalize our Grandfathers' dreams. The Repatriation and its ceremonies on the Pine Creek Reservation embrace our culture that turns dreams into reality,” Mandoka said.

Officials from several Michigan Tribes and affiliated organizations were on hand for the reburial and many have stated their support for this effort. “Michigan's Tribes continue to work cooperatively for the spiritual well-being of our Tribal communities and the future of our children through repatriation and reburial,” said William Johnson, Curator of the Zibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways and NAGPRA Representative for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. “(NHBP has) worked diligently to assist the Tribes aboriginal to Michigan by taking the lead on behalf of our Tribal communities. It gives me great pleasure to share in the joy that comes from their careful attention to our traditional beliefs and way of life. Only through respectful cooperation will we prosper as Anishinabe people,” Johnson said.

Chivis and Johnson both expressed appreciation for the cooperation of the universities, museums, the Michigan State Police, and several local law enforcement agencies. The respectful attitudes shown by the repatriation staff at these institutions were appreciated and were important steps towards developing and improving relationships between all respective parties. Select individuals from these institutions were encouraged to attend and rejoice in the reinterment of these ancestors.

Brittany Wheeler, Repatriation Specialist at The Field Museum, describes The Field Museum's participation in this event. “Helen [Robbins, Repatriation Director] and I very much appreciated being invited to the inclusive re-burial ceremony held at the Pine Creek Reservation. We were welcomed along with numerous tribal representatives, many of whom we had worked with during the several years of consultation and preparation for repatriation from the Museum.”

Toni C. Antonucci, Associate Vice President for Research at the University of Michigan, also expressed optimism for future collaborations between the Tribe and the university. “The reburial of human remains transferred to the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi under the auspices of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was a significant step forward in the University of Michigan's commitment to fulfilling the letter and spirit of the law. This is a deeply meaningful process, and by respecting the tribe's cultural perspectives and traditions, we hope to lay the groundwork for new collaborations that will advance the knowledge of Native American cultures for the benefit of all.”

Lastly, similar sentiments were shared by Tom Killion, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Wayne State University. “Our desire to work with the tribe and put the ancestors to rest was primary; however, we also felt privileged to have the opportunity to meet living members of the Potawatomi community and to better understand their view of repatriation and its importance to the well-being and future of the community. Everyone was friendly and respectful and the strong words that were spoken during the return were understood and appreciated. Those words and the gifts that were presented will be remembered for a long time to come.”

Well over 200 people attended NHBP's reburial event. Chivis states, “We were proud to see representatives from so many other Tribes attend our event and we are grateful for their support and the support of our Tribal Council and membership. We are also appreciative of the assistance of the universities, museums, and police departments that worked to bring our ancestors home and that participated in

our reburial ceremony. This event would not have been possible without the full support of all the Tribes and institutions that were a part of this process.”

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About The Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi

There are more than 1,200 Tribal Members. The Huron Potawatomi’s primary Indian Health and Bureau of Indians Affairs Service Area covers Allegan, Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, Kent and Ottawa counties. The Tribe’s administrative office is located at the Pine Creek Reservation in Athens Township, with a satellite office in Grand Rapids, Mich. to better serve Members. For more information visit: [www.nhbpi.com](http://www.nhbpi.com).