

Affidavit of Aldo E. Salerno in Support of Federal Acknowledgment of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians as an Indian Tribe

The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have supplied sufficient evidence to meet the requirements for Federal acknowledgment as an Indian tribe. I base this conclusion on the voluminous evidence I examined while researching the tribe's petition for Federal acknowledgment as an Indian tribe from 2012 to 2017, while I was employed as a historian (from June 2001 to October 2017) at the Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA) in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs (AS-IA). During the evaluation, I was the head editor and historian on the draft report for the tribe. As part of this research, I examined thousands of pages of evidence, including government correspondence, documents, and reports; personal papers, photographs, and diaries from tribal members and their ancestors; newspapers; minutes of meetings; and scores of interviews from current and past tribal members. I also conducted a field trip to Michigan, with the team anthropologist, to find other critical records, including many tribal member interviews, in local and county historical records.

The finding the team produced in late 2016 on the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians contained 275 pages of analysis with almost 375 citations and over 75 pages of bibliographical references. The report, which was still in the Solicitor's Office for review when I left OFA in October 2017, involved over 5 years of analysis and the work and input of five OFA staffers. The proposed finding went through three full drafts and two full peer reviews, with a two-thirds majority of the OFA staff, including the Director, supporting acknowledgment of the tribe. Under the reasonable likelihood standard of the 1994 Federal acknowledgment regulations, the Grand River Bands supplied a combination of evidence amply sufficient to meet the criteria for recognition. The AS-IA also has applicable precedent for acknowledging the Grand River Bands in the 1980 finding for the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa, the first petitioner recognized by the Department under the Federal acknowledgment regulations, and a tribe which shares a similar history to the Grand River Bands. That precedent shows that the Department should also acknowledge the Grand River Bands as an Indian tribe given the evidence in the record.

The evidence in proposed finding the team and I drafted shows the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have had a well-defined social community connected by extensive kinship ties since first sustained contact with non-Indians. For example, the tribe maintained significant rates of marriage between members of the tribe, over 50 percent, into the late 1920s, and with members of other closely related Indian tribes from Michigan into the late 1930s. The tribe has also maintained its own cemetery since the 1920s and has organized many social events not only with its members, but also with members of other Indian tribes in Michigan. Most importantly, the tribal members suffered from harsh discrimination throughout most of the 20th century, especially in the public and parochial schools, aimed directly at preventing their maintenance of the Ottawa language. The members also share long-standing social activities involving most of the tribe through powwows, Kateri Circles, Christmas parties, spring and fall celebrations, and Ghost Suppers. While some of these activities involve other Indian tribes, they are rooted firmly within the historical tradition and circumstances of social interaction and political activity among Michigan Indian tribes, particularly urban ones like the Grand River Bands.

For many years, the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have provided important social welfare programs for its members and other urban Indian tribes in southern Michigan. These programs involve significant interaction and support from and to several federally recognized tribes in the area. These tribal interactions with other federally recognized Indian tribes in Michigan, and the mutual support they offer,

provide significant evidence of the maintenance of both community and politics for the Grand River Bands.

The evidence for political authority shows the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have been one of the most important Indian political groups in the state of Michigan since the treaty period. The tribe has led or dominated most of the political movements involving Michigan Indian tribes throughout this time. While much of the tribe's political activity from the 1870s to the 1990s focused on claims activities, often in alliance with other Michigan Indian tribes, the Grand River Bands never wavered in their commitment toward these efforts. For over one hundred years, these activities had the broad support of the tribe's membership. All the Indian tribes in southern Michigan, most of which were not then recognized by the Federal government as Indian tribes, participated in these activities along with the Grand River Bands and often followed their lead. The Grand River Bands and the other Michigan Indian tribes viewed these activities as crucial to their survival. The Grand River Bands and the other tribes employed these alliances as a means of exercising joint influence for non-recognized Indian tribes, which lacked both money and resources to organize on their own. The Grand River Bands' sustained pursuit of these claims, which the tribe's membership viewed as being of critical, long-lasting importance, is good evidence of political influence, as established in the precedent set in the Cowlitz Indian Tribe Proposed Finding (1997) and Final Determination (2000).

Since the 1990s, the Grand River Bands' tribal council has also mobilized significant support from members for conducting powwows, organizing cemetery cleanups, and hosting seasonal celebrations and get togethers. The council does this work through long-established extended families, member churches, newsletters, fund raising, and financial contributions from members. Despite a chronic shortage of funds, the tribe conducts all these programs inspired by a spirit of giving.

The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have also had a continual line of influential leaders, men and women, since the 1850s. These leaders include, to name just a few, Jacob Walker Cobmoosa, Henry Pego, Waunetta Dominic, Anthony Chingman, Mamie Battice, Joseph Genia, Patsy Beatty, Roma Battice, and current chairperson Ron Yob. These leaders and their followers have always maintained a strong sense of Indian identity expressed through an extensive kinship network of tribal members who recognize themselves collectively as the members of the Grand River Bands.

Finally, the evidence the team and I reviewed showed that 1) 92 percent of the tribe's membership had demonstrated descent from historical Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians listed on the 1908-1910 Durant Roll; 2) external observers had continuously identified the Grand River Bands as an Indian tribe since the 1870s; and 3) the tribe had previous unambiguous Federal acknowledgment in the 1870s.

In summary, the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have demonstrated all seven mandatory criteria for Federal acknowledgment.¹ Yet despite the strong evidence the tribe has submitted in support of its recognition and the positive evaluation by the OFA staff, its petition is currently suspended, and the tribe is still awaiting a proposed finding after almost 10 years of active consideration by the Department, longer than any tribe has ever waited for such a decision under the process. Such a delay is unconscionable and intolerable. It endangers the tribe's very existence and violates every principle of the Department's stated aims to make the Federal acknowledgment process and criteria more transparent, consistent, timely, and efficient. Therefore, I believe, based on abundant evidence, that the Department

¹For a fuller analysis of all seven mandatory criteria see my letter to Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, dated June 25, 2001, and enclosed document.

should immediately issue a positive proposed finding and recognize the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians as in Indian tribe as quickly as required—within one year—under the 1994 regulations.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Aldo E. Salerno".

Aldo E. Salerno. Ph.D.

Former Historian, Office of Federal Acknowledgment. 2001 to 2017

April 11, 2022