

Where is the leadership for 1837 and 1855 Treaty issues?

In his August 26 Outdoor News column, "Big 'n fishy issues rising to the surface," Joe Fellegy highlights critical treaty-related developments.

1855 Treaty Lawsuit

Last summer's illegal gill-netting and wild rice harvests in the 1855 Treaty's ceded territory was intended to "ascend the court ladder and win off-reservation fishing, hunting, and gathering rights," according to Fellegy. "It would also bring tribal co-management of natural resources across the vast 1855 Treaty ceded territory."

There are also "huge implications for the DNR's state, regional, and area fisheries and wildlife offices." What will be the impact on state government's resource-management authority?

Fellegy asks whether state officials will "have legal and political response plans to protect the interests of Minnesota's government and citizens." Leadership is critical for heading off a replay of the 1837 Treaty case, "where Chippewa harvest rights, co-management, and impacts on state citizens have played out in horrendous and costly fashion, with no end in sight."

The 1855 Treaty rights lawsuit-in-the-making is almost entirely below the radar, having been postponed six months. It's now scheduled for Nov. 8, when election news will obscure most everything else.

Mille Lacs fiasco

Fellegy describes ongoing Mille Lacs state-tribal co-management as a "debacle," and "the biggest mess in the history of Minnesota fishing, fisheries management, and fishing-related tourism." He faults the "Mille Lacs-unique treaty management system, which no treaty envisioned."

Fellegy describes it as "ever-evolving management acrobatics," with an ongoing threat of a walleye-fishing shutdown. These spawn "widespread misperceptions about Mille Lacs"

Fellegy again raises the question of leadership. He asks "when there's a leadership void, what fills the hole?" His list includes misperceptions, nonsense, and distrust of DNR expertise and data. "What's problematic now is how the data is used under extremist treaty management." Fellegy also wonders why "Minnesota government is defending a flawed system instead of fighting it."

Finally, Fellegy anticipated more controversy if the walleye quota overage continues to climb, and from the pressure of a threatened lawsuit from the Mille Lacs band increases. Then came Governor Dayton's abrupt reversal of extending the walleye fishing season.

That certainly fits Fellegy's definition of "management acrobatics." The reversal came before Fellegy could even publish his comments on the extended season.

PERM's take: It's obvious Mille Lacs has a low priority with Governor Dayton. He is more concerned about issues such as the possible impact of losing the Southwest Light Rail line than he is about things like losing the tried and true economy around Mille Lacs.