

Petition seeks to 'remedy' Mille Lacs

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Isle, Minn. — A whitehouse.gov petition seeks a “remedy to eliminate bilateral control of” Lake Mille Lacs’ walleye management.

That’s a roundabout way of asking President Donald Trump to wade into the controversy – and a settled U.S. Supreme Court decision – surrounding Lake Mille Lacs, where state anglers can’t keep walleyes for a second open-water season in a row.

As of *Outdoor News* press time Tuesday, the petition (<http://bit.ly/2tXQ4KS>), with 178 signatures, was well short of the 100,000 needed to trigger a White House response.

The 130,000-acre lake’s walleye population is managed jointly by the Minnesota DNR and Chippewa tribes as a result of a 1999 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case *Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians vs. State of Minnesota*.

The petition’s creator, Jon Knudsen, a launch boat captain at Nitti’s Hunters Point Resort, is the Lake Mille Lacs walleye activist behind the website www.banthehillnet.com. He’s an advocate for a president of the United States revoking the bands’ privileges of hunting, fishing, and gathering wild rice in the ceded territory, which, as the 1837 treaty with Chippewa bands states, “is guaranteed to the Indians, during the pleasure of the President of the United States.”

In the majority opinion, which concluded, “President Taylor’s 1850 Executive Order was ineffective to terminate Chippewa usufructuary rights under the 1837 treaty,” retired Justice Sandra Day O’Connor wrote, “We do not mean to suggest that a President, now or in the future, cannot revoke the Chippewa usufructuary rights in accordance with the terms of the 1837 treaty.”

Knudsen asks, If any president would wade into the dicey issue, why not Trump? He hangs on the terminology of the treaty, specifically the words, “pleasure of the president.” He says the current system isn’t fair to state anglers and surrounding businesses.

“We can’t have anything for the table, and the Indians can go out and keep 10 fish, any size,” he said. “There is inequality there. How can you recognize the Indians’ right to fish and not our right to keep fish?” A representative from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, which represents the eight Chippewa bands with harvest

rights in the 1837 treaty area, said the commission would not comment on the White House petition.

“You won’t ever find a better fishery than what we have here on Mille Lacs, but because of treaty management, we’ve had to come up with this quota system,” said Knudsen, who adds that the petition is his second attempt at drumming up support from President Trump.

In order to get an official response from the White House, a petition must receive 100,000 signatures in 30 days. Knudsen launched his petition June 13.

It has the blessing of Proper Economic Resource Management, which bills itself as a nonpartisan watchdog group and conservation club. PERM has long been involved in the issues of fisheries management on Mille Lacs.

Doug Meyenburg Jr., president of PERM, said the group last week voted to place a link to the petition on its web page.

“We are in favor of anybody doing anything positive to straighten out the situation on Mille Lacs,” Meyenburg said.

Asked if PERM was doing anything to directly reach out to the Trump administration, Meyenburg said the group is examining its options.

“We are always working continually to straighten the mess out,” Meyenburg said.

Knudsen, who said he is not a card-carrying member of PERM, said he appreciates what the group has done (it has also linked Knudsen’s anti-netting web page, though that page hasn’t been updated since 2013).

“It’s a political powder keg that none of our elected officials or representatives want anything to do with,” Knudsen said, hopeful that Trump, who has rallied on lifting regulations to help businesses, could be the one modern president to get involved.