

## **Little Rock District of the Red Lake Nation Background Information**

Little Rock is one of four districts or communities located within the boundaries of the Red Lake Reservation now most often referred to as "Red Lake Nation." The Red Lake Nation or Reservation is located approximately 25 miles north of Bemidji and is almost entirely within the Beltrami County with a small portion in Clearwater County. The people of Red Lake, the "Red Lake Band," reside on aboriginal land and have lived in the area since the Dakota moved from the region in the mid-1700's. The Red Lake Band, through various treaties and land agreements from 1863 to 1902, gave up millions of acres of land but never ceded the current, diminished reservation; meaning the land remaining was never allotted out in parcels for personal use, sale, and development by its members or others. This fact makes Red Lake unique in Indian Country throughout the United States. In summary, all remaining land is held in common by the members of the Band.

The present-day Red Lake Reservation is considered the diminished territory of the original reservation and is approximately 636,954 acres. Other holdings include the Northwest Angle at 156,900 acres, which totals 825,654 acres still held in common ownership by the Red Lake Band. This entire land base is larger than the state of Rhode Island. Red Lake is the largest freshwater lake in the country, wholly contained within one state, Minnesota, and is within the boundaries of the diminished reservation. The lake, whose original name remains "Miskwaagamiwi-Zaagaiganing" to the Red Lake Ojibwe, is held sacred and thus treated in this manner which will benefit its membership and all people and life through time immortal.

The Little Rock District is located about five miles west of the town of Red Lake. Little Rock holds little infrastructure itself, mainly consisting of housing with a community center and one Indian-owned store. There are two "District Representatives" who are elected every four years to represent the best interests of the Little Rock community members who live both on and outside of the district. It is important to note that Tribal Members of Red Lake Nation are free to live where they choose and remain fully represented by their district representatives from the Little Rock district or any of the four districts considered their home. Current Representatives are Thomas Barrett Jr., and Harlow Spears.

## **Wastewater Lagoon in Little Rock District Project Overview**

The homes within the Little Rock community use individual septic tanks with drain fields for wastewater. The existing wastewater systems were installed around the 1960's/70's. These systems have passed their usual useful lifespan, are too close together, and are failing. The resulting archaic, failing systems cause drain fields to become saturated with nowhere for the wastewater to flow safely away from residences and require weekly pumping. Often, homes needing to be pumped weekly are missed; thus, creating even more drain-field saturation and problems. Irreversible damage to homes, surrounding lands, and the ongoing concern for the health of community members is an ongoing and growing concern.

Current efforts of the Red Lake Nation Tribal Council are focused on constructing a Wastewater Lagoon in the Little Rock community which is crucial to alleviating the rising potential for possible health issues and safety concerns for the members of the Little Rock community. A new Wastewater Lagoon will serve the current homes and will allow for any future expansion of housing in the community, which is necessary to keep up with the current demand. An updated Wastewater Lagoon would add capacity to handle 200 homes. The Wastewater Lagoon in the Little Rock Community is a shovel-ready project with all the required documents, plans, specifications, and environmental clearances in place.

The Wastewater Lagoon is one of two essential projects currently underway. The Individual Hookup Project, which is the other essential project, will be the installation of the wastewater lines that will connect the homes to the lagoon and stub out for further expansion within the community. The current Wastewater Lagoon project is estimated at \$3.3 million dollars and is ready to go as funds are made available. The Individual Hookup Project is also designed and shovel-ready for construction with an estimated cost of \$3.8 million, currently projected to receive funding directly from the Band.

The Tribe is also planning to rehabilitate the Little Rock Water Tower.

#### **Special Note Regarding Funding:**

When seeking funding for this project, a common question potential funders ask is, “Why doesn’t the Band seek the entire funding amount from Indian Health Services (IHS)?”

The reason we are often turned away for IHS funding is due to the large land base of the Red Lake Nation and the fact that the IHS formula for determining which projects are funded caters to smaller land-based tribes. Therefore, the costs per unit on our projects often exceed the levels set for the typical IHS-funded projects. We do receive some funding but for many projects such as the Little Rock Waster Lagoon and corresponding projects, we must seek funding elsewhere.

#### **Summary of Important Points:**

- The existing wastewater system, built around the 1960/70’s, is old and outdated and at high risk for damage to homes, adjacent lands, and the health and safety of its members.
- An essential, updated Wastewater Lagoon would allow for the expansion to 200 homes, which attempts to meet the current demand of the Red Lake members who are moving back to Red Lake homelands and wish to reside in their own homes in the Little Rock District. It also addresses the homelessness problem.
- The Wastewater Lagoon Project planning portion is complete, and the project is shovel ready as soon as funds are made available.

#### **Next Steps:**

WE INVITE THE BONDING COMMITTEE TO VISIT THE RED LAKE NATION DURING YOUR SUMMER BONDING TOUR!

The Red Lake Nation Tribal Council members extend a welcoming invitation to the Bonding Committee to tour and meet with the Tribal Council and Tribal Infrastructure Planning Committee this summer, as you tour potential facilities to fund in the 2026 legislative session.

The Red Lake Nation Infrastructure Committee will make available all plans and documents necessary for review and consideration of this funding. In addition, we will continue to meet and work with the Tribal Grants Department and other sources to search for funding for corresponding projects to complete all necessary infrastructure projects.

Thank you for your time and consideration for HF2819, the Little Rock Wastewater Lagoon Project.

**Red Lake Nation Project planners, collaborators, project leads:**

Robert "Bob" Smith, Red Lake District Representative and Director of Public Works

Infrastructure Committee

Tribal Grants Department

Tribal Council Members