ITCMI Environmental Services Division

QUARTERLY UPDATES (July - September 2026)

Bill Bernier, Environmental Services Director



Environmental Director's Summary

Environmental Services continues supporting Michigan Tribal communities through environmental health services, drinking water protection, food sovereignty, clean energy, and natural resource stewardship. Highlights this quarter include hiring a Certified Water Operator, Tribal approval of three Source Water Protection Plans, and continued preparations for lead testing in Tribal schools and childcare facilities. The department also advanced food sovereignty and Manoomin stewardship efforts while preparing for new energy engagement and youth watershed education opportunities. These efforts strengthen Tribal capacity and protect community health throughout Michigan.

Department Developments and Upcoming Opportunities

- **Water Operator Training and Technical Assistance Program**: Joey Stein joined ITCMI in August as our Certified Water Operator and has begun outreach to Tribal utilities statewide. The program offers training and technical assistance tailored to each Tribal water system's priorities.

- **Lead Testing in Tribal Schools and Childcare Facilities Program:** The Quality Assurance Project Plan has been submitted. Once final approval is received, staff can schedule participating schools, childcare centers, and Head Start facilities for sampling.

- **Great Lakes Tribal Energy Summit:** Planning continues for the October summit at Bay Mills. A quarterly webinar series with Slipstream is scheduled to begin October 12 with a session on residential energy audits and assessments. The second year of the program was authorized by DOE and planning for the second annual Great Lakes Tribal Energy Summit will begin after a kickoff meeting with DOE in November 2026.

- **Tribal Food Sovereignty Program:** Staff are engaging Tribes to identify food system needs and provide a road map to have those needs met.

- **Michigan Wild Rice Initiative**: The department was successful on securing funding to support the Michigan Wild Rice Initiative. Through MDHHS Community Funding, ITCMI will support Tribal-led Manoomin stewardship across Michigan, including education and outreach, monitoring, rice camps, and community engagement. Upcoming opportunities will include support for Tribal partners and MWRI subcommittees to advance shared stewardship priorities, strengthen coordination, and protect Manoomin as a culturally significant food and natural resource. Also, please be on the lookout for the new Michigan Wild Rice Initiative website which should launch within the next couple months. ITCMI will announce it on our social media platforms.

- **Energy Auditing**: Two staff have become certified as Building Analyst Professionals and are capable of performing energy audits. Please contact James or Lucas below for additional information.

Contact: Bill Bernier, Environmental Servies Director - bbernier@itcmi.org

Environmental Health Services



- Environmental Health Services continues to provide direct support to participating Tribes through food safety inspections, pool and spa inspections, healthcare facility surveys, life safety evaluations, and childcare facility assessments.
- During this quarter, inspections continued for Bay Mills Indian Community, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, and Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians.
- Food Safety Manager and Safe Food Handler training opportunities continue to be offered to participating Tribal communities as requested.

Contact: Tony Rinna, Assistant Director Environmental Services – Anthony.rinna@itcmi.org

Underground Storage Tank Program and Lead Testing in Drinking Water Program



- The Underground Storage Tank Program completed its grant cycle, with all assigned facilities inspected. Four facilities were inspected during the past quarter, and the majority of Tribally owned facilities continue to perform well in maintaining compliance.
- The upcoming quarter's priorities include beginning the next grant cycle and inspecting two facilities. Compliance assistance and support for new facility managers remain available to participating Tribes.
- The EPA-funded WIIN Lead Testing Program will test drinking water in participating Tribal schools, childcare centers, and Head Start facilities. The Quality Assurance Project Plan has been submitted, and sampling is pending final approval.
- Following approval, staff will contact facilities to schedule sampling, provide education and technical assistance, and support mitigation efforts where elevated lead levels are identified.

Contact: Greg Shubel, Program Manager - gshubel@itcmi.org

Source Water Protection Program and the NOAA B-WET Program



- Through funding from the U.S. EPA, ITCMI continues assisting Michigan Tribes with updating and developing Source Water Protection Plans. Ten Tribes are currently participating in the program. Plans have been completed and approved for two Tribes to date.
- The NOAA B-WET Program continues providing meaningful watershed education opportunities to students at Ojibwe Charter School. Students have participated in field experiences across multiple watersheds, educational field trips, greenhouse projects, and hands-on activities focused on water resources, fisheries, and environmental stewardship.
- Three high school students and two teachers are scheduled to attend the AISES conference in Portland in October, with conference fees and travel supported by the program. Two more outdoor field days are planned before winter.

Contact: Dustin Paras, Program Manager – dustin.paras@itcmi.org

Tribal Clean Energy Communication and Engagement Program



- The program continues providing Michigan's twelve federally recognized Tribes with energy resources, technical support, and connections to regional partners. A second year of funding has been approved.
- Staff continued planning the Great Lakes Tribal Energy Summit at Bay Mills in October and scheduled a quarterly webinar series in partnership with Slipstream. The first webinar, scheduled for October 12, will address residential energy audits and assessments.
- Next-quarter priorities include promoting the webinar series and beginning early planning for the second year's summit.

Contact: Jenna Killips, Program Manager – jkillips@itcmi.org

Climate Pollution Reduction Program



- The program's previously developed greenhouse gas inventories, emissions projections, and reduction targets support participating Tribes' climate planning and identification of future implementation opportunities.
- The department continues supporting Tribal climate resilience and clean energy priorities through coordination with related energy and environmental programs.
- Please contact Lucas for assistance with program development or energy audits.

Contact: Lucas Roff, Program Manager – lucas.roff@itcmi.org

Department of Energy's Resilient and Efficient Codes Program



- ITCMI continues partnering with Slipstream and six Tribal Nations—Bay Mills, Sault Tribe, Lac Vieux Desert, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Little Traverse Bay Bands, and Nottawaseppi Huron Band—to support building energy code education, training, adoption, and compliance.
- A Tribal Advisory Group has been formed, and program resources are available through the ITCMI website. Staff sent check-in emails to participating Tribes and continue gauging interest in future training resources.
- The upcoming Great Lakes Tribal Energy Summit offers an opportunity for engagement. Approval of the next budget period remains pending DOE review.
- Please contact James for assistance with building codes and energy audits.

Contact: James Bremer, Building Code Specialist - james.bremer@itcmi.org

Michigan Tribal Seed Collection Network



- The network continues building Tribal capacity for native seed collection, forest stewardship, and climate adaptation in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and National Forest Foundation.
- Staff continue coordinating with Tribal and regional partners to support training, collection opportunities, and long-term forest resilience.
- Jack Pine cone collections will be scheduled in the winter. Please contact Emily if there is any interest to have a snow shoe adventure and collect cones this winter.

Tribal Food Sovereignty Program and the Michigan Wild Rice Initiative

- The Tribal Food Sovereignty Program is engaging Tribes statewide to identify priorities and strengthen food systems, food safety, and access to culturally relevant foods. Needs assessment surveys have been developed for Tribal departments and community members.
- ITCMI continues supporting the Michigan Wild Rice Initiative and Tribal-led efforts to protect and restore Manoomin through stewardship, education, monitoring, and community engagement.
- Emily Kemp is supporting these efforts alongside the Tribal Seed Collection Network, helping connect related food sovereignty and natural resource priorities.

Contact: Emily Kemp, Program Manager - emily.kemp@itcmi.org

Tribal Water Operator Training and Technical Assistance Program



- Joey Stein was hired in August as ITCMI's Certified Water Operator and has begun reaching out to Tribal utilities to arrange introductory visits and learn about system needs.
- The program supports operator training and certification, emergency response and asset management planning, compliance needs, and other drinking water system priorities through technical assistance and coordination.
- Upcoming work will focus on building relationships with Tribal operators, touring water systems, and identifying training and technical assistance priorities with each participating Tribe.

Contact: Joey Stein, Program Manager - joey.stein@itcmi.org