



Feasibility Study

# Ojibwe Cultural History Center

*Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe*

September 30, 2005

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# *Ojibwe Cultural History Center Feasibility Study*

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## *1. Feasibility Study Overview*

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This study researched the feasibility of developing an Ojibwe Cultural History Center on the Leech Lake Reservation. This facility could include a working replica village, a museum and education center, and an artifact storage and conservation area. The study considered different aspects of the proposal including type, size and location of facilities, potential interpretive themes, facility construction and operating costs, and marketing.

One of the main goals of the proposed project is to share the past and current history and culture of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe with the local community and traveling visitors. It is believed that by sharing this proud history and culture in a high quality facility, the public would develop a greater recognition and awareness of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and tribal members would gain an increased sense of pride. Other potential benefits of the proposed project include increased educational programming and facilities for tribal members, local publics and tourists, increased employment opportunities and the addition of a tourism attraction that will draw visitors to the area and boost the local economy.

This study is meant to be used as a planning tool by the Leech Lake Tribal Council as they make decisions regarding proceeding with this proposed project. Recommendations and suggested next steps are summarized in Section X.

### **History of the Study**

This feasibility study was funded by a \$15,000 Rural Economic Planning Grant obtained by the U.S. Forest Service and was conducted by a committee under the direction of the Leech Lake Department of Economic Development. The Historic Preservation Office and the Leech Lake Tribal College also participated in the study and have expressed support for the project.

In April 2005, Split Rock Studios was contracted to research and prepare the study. The work included several informative meetings in Cass Lake, a two-day tour of three museums in Minnesota and Wisconsin, a survey of 25 tribal museums with attached villages, and a questionnaire distributed at Leech Lake Local Indian Councils (LIC) meetings. Progress of the study was reported this summer in two news articles published in the *DeBahjiMon*, the Leech Lake Band official newspaper.

## Additional Information

This document is a summary of the findings of the feasibility study. A full report with all the details resulting from this work is contained in a notebook, "Feasibility Study: Analysis and Documentation," that will be made available in the office of the Director of Leech Lake Economic Development.

## 11. Proposal

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In this feasibility study the proposed Ojibwe Cultural History Center is potentially made up of three closely related and complementary facilities.

1. A working replica Ojibwe village

This outdoor exhibit could have wigwams and other structures to demonstrate traditional Ojibwe life. A guided tour through the village would be like a "step back in time." Visitors could learn Ojibwe history while they watch staff members make a canoe, tan hides, weave mats, make arrows, and practice many other traditional life skills.

2. A museum with exhibits about Leech Lake history and culture

In addition, to exhibits that would tell the true history of the Ojibwe people, the building could have an education section or classroom where elders could tell stories, demonstrate various traditional skills, and teach language classes.

3. A curation facility or artifact storage unit

A curation facility is a place where professionally educated curators can clean, conserve, study, and store tribal artifacts. There could be a separate room within the facility for storing sacred and religious objects, accessible only to elders and other designated personnel.

These three parts of the Cultural History Center could be located together or separately. There are many options to consider, and the final decision may depend on the site or sites that are eventually selected. Location considerations are discussed further in Section IV.

### Primary Goal and Potential Benefits

A primary goal of the proposed project is to share the past and current history and culture of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe with the local community and traveling visitors. Through the achievement of this the goal, it is believed that a number of potential benefits will result, including the following:

- An increased sense of pride among Leech Lake Band members
- A village immersion experience in which Leech Lake children can experience the history, culture, and traditional lifeways of the Band

- The creation of a curation facility for the storage, preservation, and conservation of tribal artifacts, allowing the repatriation of objects important to Leech Lake history and culture
- An increased economic base in Cass Lake. Tourists who now just pass through will be encouraged to stop and spend time and money at the facility's gift shop and at local businesses
- More jobs for Leech Lake Band members, both at the new facility and at local businesses that will benefit from increased tourism
- The creation of new retail businesses. A new, successful attraction usually spurs new retail development nearby
- Enhanced curriculum opportunities for students at the Tribal Community College who might be able to earn college credits by working as employees or interns at the new center
- A place where Leech Lake history would be told accurately so as to dispel incorrect stereotypes in the minds of tourists and others

### *III. Facilities Considerations*

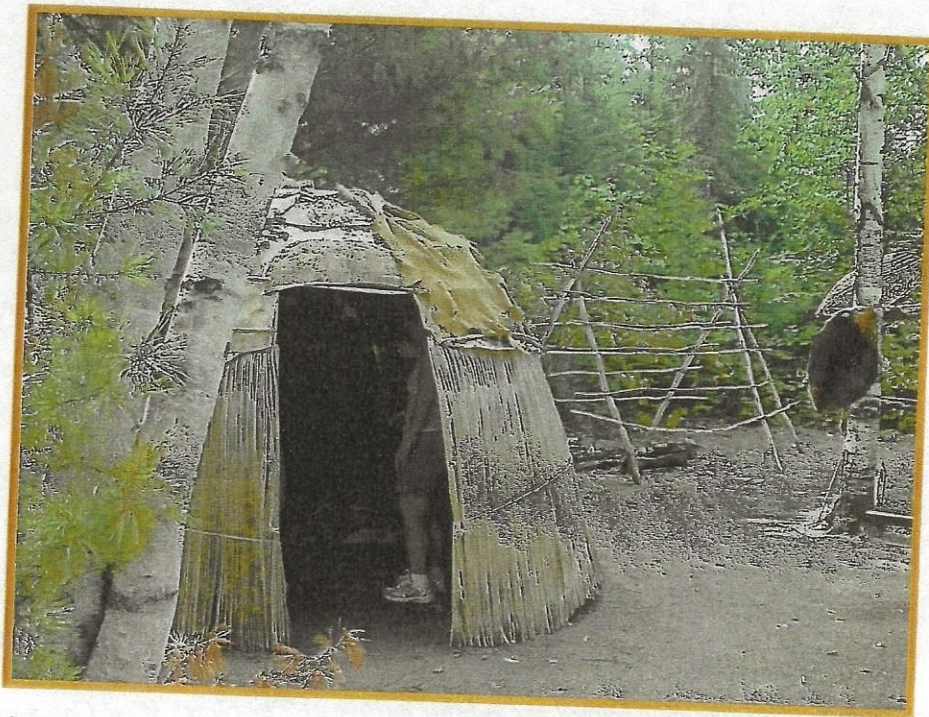
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#### **Replica Village**

The working replica village would give today's visitors a chance to step back in time and learn how the Ojibwe of an earlier day lived, worked, hunted, and had fun. They would learn what was important to those people, how they looked at the world, and how they interacted with others around them. This information can form a foundation for increased understanding of today's Ojibwe.

The village would be effective because it would give visitors an immersion experience. It would let visitors see and hear how things were done. Workers there would be able to demonstrate lifeways techniques. Depending on the time of year, they could show visitors how to collect and parch wild rice, make maple sugar, set snares for rabbits, tan hides, go berry picking, and do many other things.

The village could depict the early contact period (1750-1850) but other eras, such as the time of the Last Battle (1898) would also be interesting. There are many possible ways to make the Leech Lake village unique.



*The traditional summer village replicated at Waswagoning Village, Lac du Flambeau, Wisc., creates the desired "step back in time" experience.*

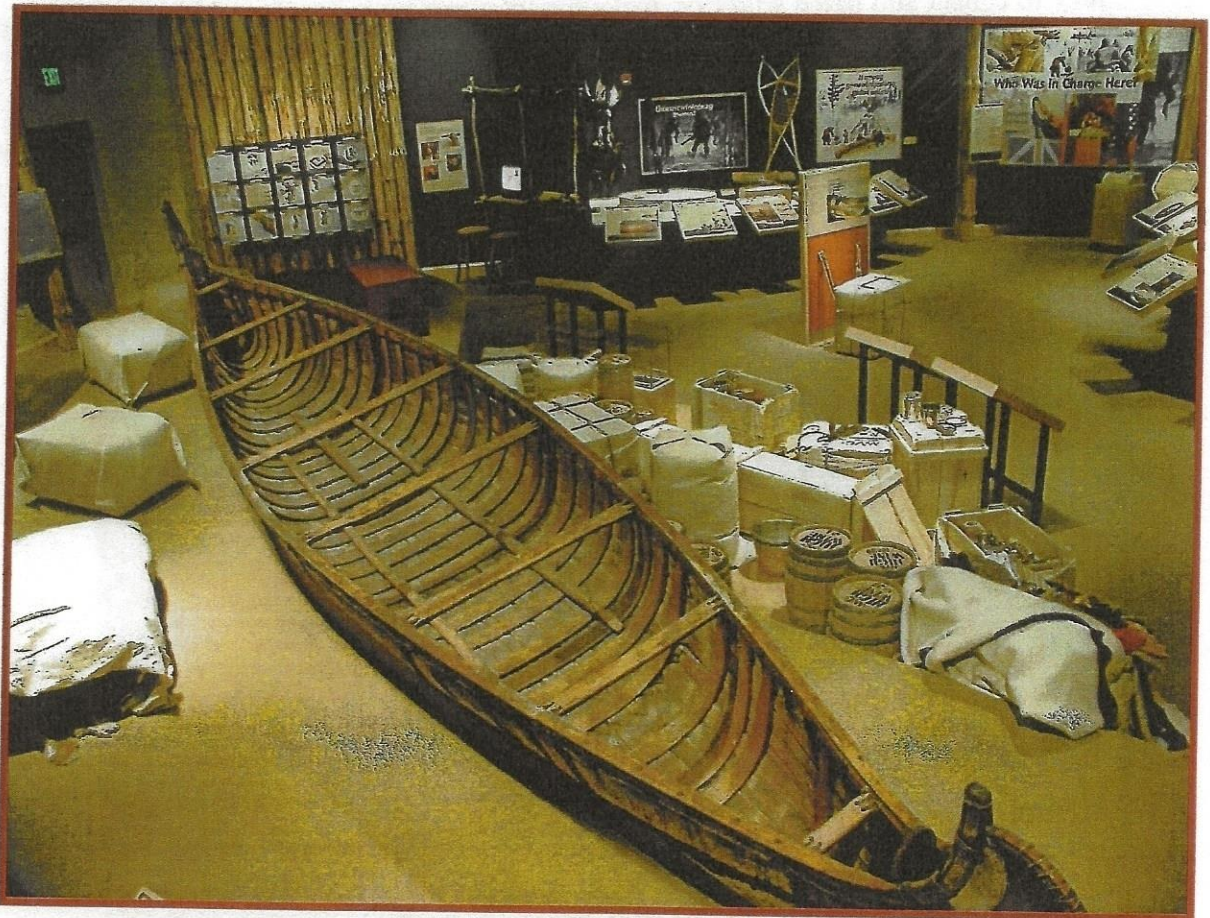
## Museum Building

The museum building could include an exhibit gallery, information counter, gift shop, offices and educational facilities such as classrooms. The main aspect of the museum would be the exhibit gallery.

Following are considerations for each of the proposed spaces that could be part of the museum building.

### Exhibit gallery

About 2,000 to 2,500 square feet would be an adequate size for interesting, interactive exhibits. The room should be a “black box” with a high ceiling and no windows. This design allows for dramatic, controlled lighting on the exhibits and also cuts down on ultra-violet light that can potentially damage the artifacts on display.



*The group from Leech Lake who toured the exhibit gallery at The North West Company Fur Post, Pine City, Minn. (shown here), liked the combination of things to do and things to look at. The exhibit has artifacts, touchable reproductions, and interactive displays. The design and dramatic lighting make the exhibit interesting and fun to visit.*



### **Foyer and information counter, restrooms**

An attractive foyer sets the tone for the exhibit experience. It gives visitors, especially school groups and bus tours, a place to gather and receive some orientation before going into the gallery, out to the village, or into a classroom.

The information counter is the place to greet visitors, answer questions, sell tickets and hand out maps to the village.

The most frequently asked question at any museum is "where are the restrooms?" A convenient location and clear directional signs will save staff headaches in the future.

### **Gift shop**

The museum gift shop should work with the existing tribal gift shop to complement their sales and inventory and to avoid unnecessary competition.

A successful gift shop will produce an essential revenue stream to support the center. It should stock a combination of books, T-shirts, artwork, and handcrafted items. Taking a cue from other museum stores, it should sell small things of interest to school children as well as more pricey items tourists would like.

### **Offices and staff areas**

Most tribal museums surveyed operate with a minimal staff, and this center will probably do the same. Possible full-time positions include a director, assistant director, and a volunteer coordinator. They will need offices.

In addition, the part-time staff, volunteers, and interns will need some office space, a break room, and lockers for their personal things. Ideally, they will also have a place to plan and prepare programs and store props for demonstrations.

If the village is to be staffed by people wearing traditional clothing, the center should have changing rooms with showers and laundry facilities. In this way, the volunteers and employees do not have to wear their regalia to and from work, and the center can maintain more control over the historical accuracy of what is worn. (The North West Company Fur Post has a policy of owning the historical costumes worn by their first-person interpreters. The center issues two sets of basic clothing to the employees who can add historically accurate details and decorations of their own, if they wish.)

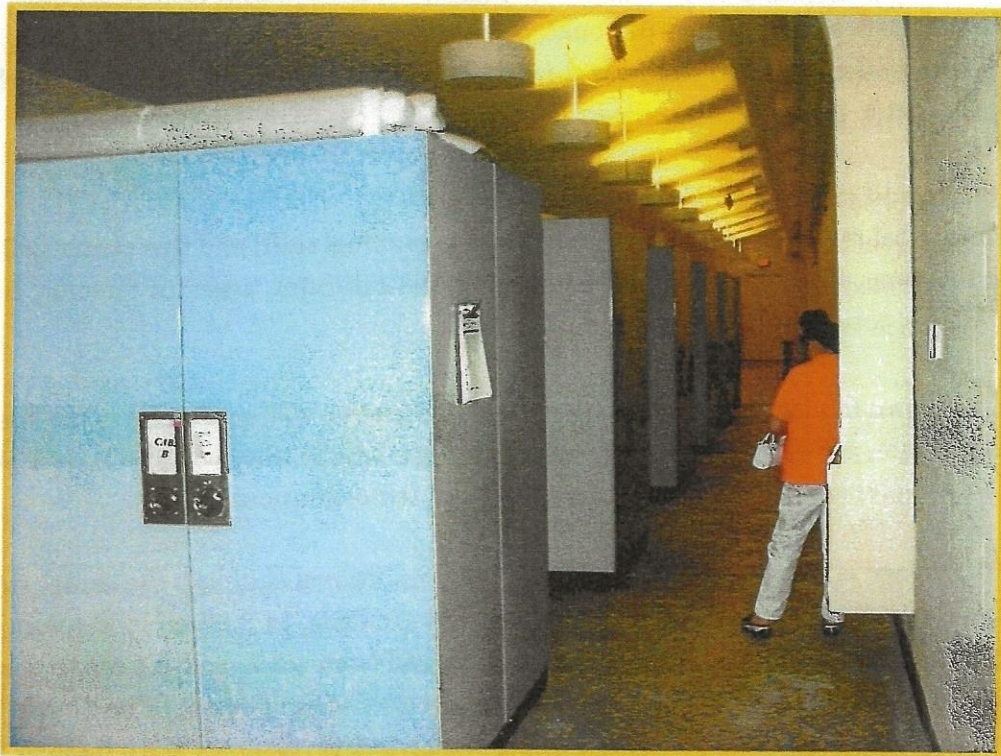
## Classroom

Kids learn by doing. Spending time in a classroom, making heritage artwork, or listening to stories told by elders will enhance their experience at the museum. The room can be lined with cupboards for storing supplies and shelves for reference books.

The classroom can also be rented for community meetings in the evenings and thus provide an additional source of revenue.

## Curation Facility

With the new Cultural History Center, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has an opportunity to provide an appropriate place to store and preserve tribal artifacts. With such a facility, the Historic Preservation Office could also begin the complex process of the repatriation of Leech Lake artifacts from other institutions.



*This photo shows the long row of locked cabinets in the artifact storage area at Mille Lacs Indian Museum. The museum also has a restricted-access room where sacred objects are stored. When the museum was being developed, the Minnesota Historical Society consulted with Mille Lacs elders and asked them how the restricted room should be situated within the museum and what direction the door should face. The elders also determined the placement of the storage cabinets inside that room.*

The size of the storage facility should be based on an artifact survey by the Historic Preservation Office, including the number and sizes of artifacts currently owned by the Band, those in temporary storage in Duluth and the Twin Cities, and an estimate of the potential number of artifacts that can be repatriated under NAGPRA.

There should be a separate storage room for sacred objects so that access to these items can be restricted to authorized personnel and elders.

If the museum and artifact storage unit are located in the same building, it would be good to have separate entrances, one for visitors to the museum and another for Band members and staff who will be working with the artifacts. Locating these two parts together could produce some savings in the cost of construction and parking lot.

In later phases of this project, the Historic Preservation Office can work with the architect to ensure that the storage unit has the right kind of climate-controlled environment, working space, shelving and cabinets, and security provisions for the protection of the artifacts.

There is potential for a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service regarding artifacts that the agency is currently storing in an approved curation facility at the University of Minnesota in Duluth. Combining the Leech Lake and Forest Service collections at the new Ojibwe Cultural History Center could be of benefit to both parties. The specific arrangements would need to be negotiated by both parties and the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office.

## *IV. Location Considerations*

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The Feasibility Study Committee suggests that the following criteria should be considered in the selection of a site. At a minimum, the site needs to have 4 acres or more for a building and parking lot, with an additional 10-20 acres for the village. (More than this would be even better.)

- The site should be easy to access by car.
- The site should be visible from the highway and have maximum exposure to tourist traffic. A center located along U.S. Route 2 in Cass Lake would be good, but if such a site is not available, then signs along Route 2 could be used to direct tourists to the location.
- The site should include a naturally wooded setting so that the village can create the illusion of stepping back in time. Although it would be good for all parts of the Cultural History Center to be in one location, there might not be enough wooded land adjacent to the place where the museum is built. The village might have to be located separately.
- If the village is built in a separate location, consideration should be given to signs that will direct visitors to the place. Busses might be provided to get tourists to go there.
- If possible, the village site should be located near water so as to reflect traditional choices for encampments and facilitate interpretation of canoeing and wild rice harvesting.

No location has been selected for the Cultural History Center, but with the help of the Division of Resource Management, the committee reviewed several possible sites. These range in size from 3.7 acres to 92 acres. Some are located along U.S. Route 2 and in other places in Cass Lake; one is near the Northern Lights Casino and Hotel. Two beautiful, wooded sites in the Chippewa National Forest have been identified as possible locations for the village. These are somewhat remote (5 to 10 miles east of Cass Lake) and would require a Special Use Permit from the U.S. Forest Service.

## V. Interpretive Theme Considerations

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The Feasibility Study Committee identified the following topics that could be included in the exhibits and working replica village. The details of these stories and the method of presentation will be developed in future phases of this project. Some topics may be deleted and others may be added. In all, it is believed that the exhibits should work together to show that the Ojibwe people have a long history, rich traditions, and a close relationship with nature.

Some of these topics would be better suited for the village and others for interior exhibits. They are not listed in any special order.

- History of the Ojibwe people, including the early migration from the East Coast
- Traditional lifeways: How the early Ojibwe lived in harmony with nature
- How the fur trade and diseases changed history, especially the history of the Ojibwe
- Treaties that created the reservations
- Reservations today, explaining the fact that the Ojibwe own a very small portion of the land on the reservation
- History of various locations on the reservation, such as the location of the agency at Onigum, history of the buildings there, and the move to Cass Lake
- How boarding schools changed the Ojibwe people
- The Last Battle (1898), respectfully told in a way that will protect historic and archaeological sites
- Interviews with elders (including those printed in *DeBahJiMon*)
- Stories about important historical leaders
- Clans, family, and kinship
- Roles within the family of men, women, children, grandparents
- Traditional tribal government; today's constitutional government
- Spirituality, traditional Native American religions, Christianity
- Traditional medicines, plant knowledge

## VI. Financial Considerations

The Feasibility Committee cannot project exact costs for the construction and operation of the Ojibwe Cultural History Center at Leech Lake, but has gathered information on potential construction and operations costs and income for the Tribal Council to take into consideration.

It is anticipated that there would be potential funding support in the form of grants, partnerships and/or sponsorships for the construction, as well as for the operating costs of the proposed facilities.

### Construction Costs

The Feasibility Study Committee learned the size and construction costs of three Minnesota museums and one other that is currently under construction. The chart is followed by current ball-park cost estimates from architects and the museum industry.

Size and Cost of Four Native American Museums

<i>Location</i>	<i>Bldg Size</i>	<i>Gallery</i>	<i>Artifact Storage</i>	<i>Total Cost</i>
Mille Lacs Built 1995	28,000 square feet	4,500 sf + 2,000 sf in Four Seasons Room	2,800 sf (archival HVAC conditions) 23 closed cabinets, each 4 ft x 8 ft x 2 ft. + 250 sf restricted storage space with 2 enclosed cabinets	\$6 million (including \$750,000 for exhibits \$400,000 for exhibits in Four Seasons Room \$250,000 Trading Post renovations/ furnishings)
North West Fur Company Built 2002	10,460 sf	2,700 sf	None	\$1.7 million
Bois Forte Heritage Center Built 2001	14,400 sf (on 2 levels)	3,360 sf	675 sf	est. \$4 million
Three Affiliated Tribes, New Town, ND To open August 2006	40,000 sf (on 2 levels)	6,400 sf	1,800 sf	\$5.6 million (not including \$850,000 for exhibits)

*Locations and owners of museums on the above chart:*

- *Mille Lacs Indian Museum, Minnesota Historical Society, Onamia, Minnesota*
- *North West Company Fur Post, Minnesota Historical Society, Pine City, MN*
- *Bois Forte Heritage Center, Atisokanigamig, Legend House, Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, Tower, MN  
Designed by DSGW Architects, Duluth*
- *Cultural Center, Museum, and Offices, Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) New Town,  
North Dakota  
Now under construction, DSGW Architects, Duluth*

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### Construction and Exhibit Costs, Estimated in 2005

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Museum/artifact storage buildings cost about \$175 per square foot  
*\* These costs may go up because of the building materials shortages due to rebuilding after recent natural disasters*

Interpretive exhibits cost about \$350-\$400 per square foot;  
2,500 square feet @ \$350 = \$875,000  
2,500 square feet @ \$400 = \$1,125,000  
*\* The costs vary according to the number of high-tech or computer interactives, models, sculpture, etc. that are used in the exhibit.*

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### Operating Costs

The annual operating budgets of two separate facilities were researched. These annual budgets included salaries, programming, utilities and other operating expenses. There are many variables that would apply to the actual operation costs of the proposed facilities. Typically, the main operations cost for cultural history centers involves staffing, with utilities and facility maintenance also being major expenses.

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#### Annual Operating Budgets

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Mille Lacs Indian Museum	\$385,000 to \$400,000
North West Fur Company	\$320,000 to \$340,000

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The main reason for the higher annual operating budget at Mille Lacs is the increased cost of electricity needed to maintain the artifact storage space at optimum temperature and humidity. The temperature varies no more than 3 degrees year round, and the humidity is also carefully controlled.

Staffing is about the same in both locations. The maintenance costs are a little higher at North West than at Mille Lacs because they have the outdoor structures (replica fort and wigwam, etc.), and they have the expense of historical costumes for their staff.

Neither of these locations generates enough revenue to pay for its operation. Within the Minnesota Historical Society system, revenues from the high visitation sites like Fort Snelling and Split Rock Lighthouse subsidize the other locations.

### Income - Revenues

In the 2005 survey conducted for the Feasibility Study, tribal museums were asked to "break down all sources of income by percentages for the last complete fiscal year." These are their responses. (This list shows averages and is not meant to total 100%.)

#### Sources of Income: Tribal Museum Survey 2005

Gift shop	48%
Tribal government	40%
Admissions	23%
Gaming	17%
Grants	12%
Individual contributions	10%

In addition, the study found a national survey of tribal museums that was conducted in 2002 by the American Association for State and Local History. With 36 museums responding to questions about yearly budgets, the survey yielded the following averages:

#### Source of Income: Tribal Museum Survey 2002

Tribal government	41% (ranges from 10% to 100%)
Grants	17%
Gift shop and admissions	16%



In this survey the remaining 26% of income is derived from interest on endowments, individual donations, foundations, membership dues, facilities rental, special events, and food services.

Tribal members were reported as contributing in the form of volunteer hours, oral histories, artifact donations and loans.

## *VII. Tourism and Marketing Considerations*

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Available facts and figures on existing tourism indicate that a strong tourist base already exists in the Cass Lake area.

- A significant percentage of Minnesota tourists visit scenic areas and parks and go fishing and camping. Others enjoy visiting historical sites, fairs, and museums.
- The Chippewa National Forest, in a slow year (figures based on visitation from October 2000 to September 2001), drew 2.29 million people. Of those, 90 percent said the national forest was their primary destination, and 25 percent planned at least one overnight stay.
- Spending for recreation, accommodations, and food service and drinking totaled more than \$368 million in the five counties surrounding the reservation, with businesses in Bemidji alone generating \$41.5 million in these tourist-related categories.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has an opportunity to carve a niche in the rising cultural tourism market by creating a new museum and village. The ongoing success of the operation can be enhanced by teaming up with existing attractions—such as the national forest, casinos, resorts, and scenic areas—to create attractive vacation packages.

In addition to these vacation packages, marketing could include highway signage, Minnesota Tourism publicity, a full-color brochure, and an excellent website.

Please refer to the full report in the “Feasibility Study: Analysis and Documentation” located in the office of the Director of Economic Development for more detailed information about tourist destinations, spending and traffic, visitors to Chippewa National Forest, cultural tourism, and marketing.

## *VIII. Organizational Considerations*

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The organization of a tribal museum is an important concern because the museum has legal responsibility for cultural artifacts, must meet standards for repatriation of sacred objects, and must define what will happen to its assets and the artifacts if it should go out of operation. Luckily, tribal museums have many options.

Museums can incorporate under the laws of the state, or they can be “stand alone” institutions, meaning they have no external organizing structure other than the tribal government. They can be established as a business enterprise of the tribe, or they can be chartered by a tribal college.

Most museums opt for non-profit status in order to take advantage of tax benefits and attract donations of cash and collections. They usually register as 501(c) (3) not-for-profit institutions.

Museums are usually established with written by-laws that define whether the museum will be governed by a Board of Trustees, by a director who hires the staff, or directly by the Tribal Council. The by-laws tell how the new board members are selected and define their terms, and duties. Board members are often tribal elders, although some museums are organized with both a Board of Trustees and an Advisory Board of elders. Usually, the trustees hire (and fire) the museum director and take an active part in the programming and marketing. They refer cultural decisions to the Advisory Council of elders.

## *IX. Summary*

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The Feasibility Study Committee recommends that the Tribal Council consider continuing this project.

It is felt that having a working replica village, museum, and curation facility will generate many positive effects, both economic and cultural, in the Cass Lake community and on the Leech Lake Reservation.

The Ojibwe Cultural History Center can capitalize to some extent on tourism that is already strong in the region as well as attract increased visitation to the area. The initial construction costs and on-going funding that may be required from the Tribal Council would be offset by the increased tourism, as well as by the non-monetary, educational benefits to Leech Lake tribal members who would have a place to learn the true facts about their history and will be able to feel increased pride in their heritage.

### **Recommended Next Steps**

1. The Tribal Council should select a Project Development Committee. This committee should consist of dedicated people who will capture the vision of this project and work to make it a reality.
2. The committee will continue to research ideas and bring issues before the Tribal Council for decisions. Their work will include the other steps listed here.
3. Continue to research and define the needs for the building and village structures. The committee should take a closer look at specific aspects of three facilities visited by the Feasibility Study Committee. These comprise good examples of each of the three components recommended for the Cultural History Center, as follows:
  1. *A museum with interior exhibits* like those at the North West Company Fur Post museum, Pine City, Minnesota
  2. *An artifact storage and conservation facility* like that housed in the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, Onamia, Minnesota
  3. *A working replica village* like the one at Waswagoning, Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin

4. Hire a director for the Cultural History Center. It is important to find this person very early in the project so that he or she can have input from the beginning.
5. Research potential funding support in the form of grants, partnerships and/or sponsorships for the construction, as well as the operations, costs of the proposed facilities.
6. Determine a suggested budget for the construction and operation of the facility and present it to the Tribal Council so they can earmark funds and identify grant possibilities.
7. Narrow the choice of locations and present them to the Tribal Council.
8. Based on the selected site, determine if the three components will be located together or separately.
9. Work with the Tribal Council to establish a deadline when the facility might open. Based on the available funds, decide whether to build it in phases (such as the village first) or whether to build it all at once.
10. Engage an architectural firm to develop plans for the building and present actual cost figures for construction.
11. Hire an exhibit firm to work with the committee and tribal elders to write a mission statement for the museum and to identify interpretive themes for the exhibits. They will also prioritize these topics and group them according to interpretive themes that will tell the Leech Lake history accurately. The exhibit firm would also design and build the exhibits.

## X. Appendix: Summary of Surveys

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### LIC Questionnaires

In July and August 2005 Director of Economic Development Vicki White visited five Local Indian Councils (LIC) to explain the proposed Ojibwe Cultural History Center and obtain the reaction of elders and tribal members to the idea. She asked those present at the meetings to fill out a brief questionnaire that had been prepared by Split Rock Studios. Because several of the local councils meet at the same time, she was not able to visit all of them, but will do so as the project continues.

The tribal communities favor the idea of establishing a Cultural History Center. Here are the questions and a summary of the responses:

*1. If we made a replica Ojibwe village, what buildings, activities, and demonstrations would you like to see included there? (People could circle as many as they wanted on a list of suggested activities.)*

- 83% voted for: wigwams, storytelling, and demonstrations of sugarbush, traditional foods, and medicine/herbal healing
- 66% canoe making, wild ricing, tanning hides, fishing, beading and quillwork, games, and ceremonies/powwows
- 54% bow and arrow making, information about hunting and trapping, traditional burial grounds (replicas), gardening, drum making, and dance

Other suggestions: Ojibwe language, sweat lodge, traditional clothing, treaty dates, teaching children respect

*2. The village will be a step back in time. What time period would you like to see represented there? (Some people voted for more than one.)*

- 37% Pre-contact (before 1600)
- 37% Fur trade (after the Ojibwe arrived in Minnesota)
- 45% 1890s reservation and Battle of Sugar Point

*3. What part should the guides play? (Check one.)*

- 28% Dressed in simple uniforms, giving tours

- 18% Dressed in traditional regalia, giving tours
- 54% Dressed in traditional regalia, acting as though they were villagers, doing the activities and explaining things to visitors as they come by

4. Other suggestions included locating the village in the woods, mentioning things from all reservation communities, telling about Sugar Point, and being sure to involve the elders by asking their opinions first.

## Surveys of Tribal Museums and Villages

In July 2005, with the cooperation of the offices of Economic Development and Historic Preservation, Split Rock Studios sent an on-line survey of 48 questions to 25 Native American museums, chosen because they also have a village or at least one exterior traditional dwelling. Most are owned and operated by tribes, others by the National Park Service. The response—17 out of 25—was excellent (an unusually high percentage). The answers are summarized here. For the complete responses, see the full report in the “Feasibility Study: Analysis and Documentation” in the office of Economic Development. (The financial information gleaned from this survey is included above in Section VI.)

- Size of the sites of the museums and villages averaged 40 acres
- Annual visitation averaged 27,600 people
- Size of the exhibit gallery:
  - 39% 1000 to 2500 square feet
  - 31% more than 5000 square feet
- Exterior attractions in addition to village:
  - 69% trails
  - 69% gardens or interpretive plantings
- Organization:
  - 50% are governed by a board of directors
  - 36% are governed by a director
  - 67% have written by-laws
- Activities in the villages include guided and self-guided tours, living history enactments, storytelling, demonstrations of bread baking, carving, beading, and other arts, traditional life skills, etc.

- Respondents generously included their mission statements, interpretive and educational goals, programming topics and much more information that will prove useful in the next phases of this project. To summarize, most museums interpreted tribal history, traditional and modern culture, stories and legends, and relationship to the environment.