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2013 American Rivers Most Endangered Rivers
“South Kawishiwi River and the Boundary Waters”
Sustainable Ely Center
Ely, MN
June 1, 2013

According to my Grandfather, there was a time . . .

. . . a time long ago when the animals could talk. The Creator called them together to tell them a “great change” was coming. The Creator said some of them might not survive and those that would needed to qualify themselves because from the change a new creature would emerge naked, weak, hungry, and in need of wisdom and skills necessary to survive in this world.

According to my grandfather, one by one the animals appeared before the Creator to qualify themselves. Mule deer spoke, “From my hide there is clothing, and tools can be made of my antlers.” Creator agreed and the deer became qualified. Wolf said, “I will teach them of the natural constitution so they will respect the rules of society and learn how to function as a clan”. With those words wolf qualified. The Chinook salmon said that its flesh would provide food and in its skin could be found glue for making bows and spears; salmon qualified. Other creatures came forward and they too became qualified.

According to my Grandfather, there was a time when all the animals of the land and sky and waters came forward to make a pledge. As different as they were, each answered to the call and committed to a common purpose. When the great change occurred the human beings arrived in this world. As promised, the animals cared for them to the best of their ability however the animals would no longer talk.

According to my Grandfather, that was their time. Today it is our time. It is our time to make the commitments, to take action and to speak on behalf of the natural world . . . to become qualified.

I understand your challenges. I am Nez Perce from the Pacific Northwest where the Columbia and Snake Rivers and their tributaries are heavily taxed for their hydropower, irrigation, barging and industrial uses. The dams create a series of lakes that settle out toxic substances that eventually infiltrate our fish affecting the most vulnerable people of our tribal society: our children, women of child bearing age and our elders. These issues divide our communities, too.

American Rivers recognizes the South Kawishiwi and the Boundary Waters as a national treasure approaching a major tipping point. Those of you who live here stand up for all of us across this country, who love wild, free flowing, pure waters. I thank you.

This is my first encounter with the Kawishiwi. I asked Becky Rom for a map so I could trace its existence. Believe me, no map can tell the story of the Kawishiwi. The Kawishiwi twists and turns and even splits in half. It hides among the many lakes and among the towering white pines. Here is a river that still

celebrates this country's first symbol of freedom: nature, and lives by this country's first rule of law: natural law.

However, the threat is real. The "generations" of jobs that mining creates is likely indisputable. But if our existence is only dependent on mining jobs and mineral revenues what happens when the ore is gone. For sure there will no longer be jobs and the revenues will dry up but more importantly what will become of the Kawishiwi's existence and the families of today's grandchildren?

I'm a grandfather – I have two healthy granddaughters. I used to take time for reflection down by the river or up in the mountains of my homeland. Today, reflection is found with my granddaughters in my arms or on my knee. I reflect in the sound of their joy and the sight of their tears. Without words they speak on behalf of the children of their generation. They say, "Grandpa, don't disappoint us."

Someday my grandchildren will have grandchildren of their own. They will be students of my history. I wonder what they will learn about us – those in this generation gathered here today. Will they learn about how we failed to respond or how poorly we acted? Or, will they learn about how we were qualified in our time to rise to the challenges with fairness, honesty and hard work? When our history is written I hope we are proud to share it.

I've heard that for some wisdom comes with age, and for others age just shows up alone. With age I think I've come to understand when the best time of my life will be. It is yet to come. If we make a difference, a truly lasting difference, like planting a tree, protecting a river's wildness, or responding to the challenges, then the best time of our lives will be lived long after we are gone.

This is a lesson I hope my granddaughters will learn. And, when they are old enough to understand there is another lesson I will teach them. I hope someday they will share this lesson with their grandchildren and perhaps even with yours.

They will teach them that:

"According to my grandfather, there was a time"