Friends,

Let me wish you a Happy New Year. That's to say that it's time of the maple syruping moon, “Iskigamizige Giizis,” is the beginning of our new year, when Mother Earth wakes up. Our Anishinaabe calendar is based on Mother Earth, and this cyclical land based economy is indeed what we must move-towards, or return-to. Wii Giiwewag. They are going to return home. This is also the time when we made our prayers and plans for the year ahead. And, that’s this story.

Following the summer of 2021 which had the deepest drought in my lifetime, we were grateful for the deep cold and snow of this winter because it will help us heal the land and bring back our water table. We need water to survive.

Throughout 2021, water protectors were arrested for standing for the water as the Enbridge corporation forced a tar sands crude oil pipeline through our homeland. More than 1,000 people have faced charges and many or most of those are still in process as I write. It is a time of repression and also of promise.

Water protectors are right to protect this sacred gift of water. We learn more each passing month about the trail of frackouts and aquifer breaches Enbridge left behind.

In July of 2021, I stood (and after a while sat, chained together in lawn chairs) with other women on the banks of the Shell River in my treaty territory, in the path of the destructive Line 3 pipeline.

We were met by law enforcement officers, who if they might have formerly been called public servants, were now being paid by Enbridge, in an unusual and dangerous arrangement, to militarize the company's battle against the water protectors, violating our freedom of religion and speech.

In April of 2022, I attended my “omnibus hearing” in Wadena, Minnesota for the supposed crime of standing in opposition to Line 3’s attack on the Shell River. There, my tribe argued that I could not have trespassed, as the “private property,” was “public lands,” within the 1855 treaty territory, in a town and County named after one of our great leaders of old.
My charges, like those of six other women, are misdemeanor trespass and resisting arrest. We will continue to challenge these charges because we believe in justice for water protectors and we continue, with a collaborative of attorneys, to support us.

Visit www.weprotectthewater.org to take action.

Ironically, Enbridge—the corporation which broke the law and is now known to have had at least 5-aquifer breaches—currently faces NO charges.

They have spilled over 200-million gallons of artisan water, sacred water from the time of the glaciers, and the loss of that water has had a ripple effect on the environment. That’s criminal.

Honor the Earth is committed to a continued battle against Enbridge, and after witnessing the errors and issues with Enbridge Line 3, we oppose Line 5. So we are supporting the resistance to the Canadian corporation’s continued push to justify their existence in Wisconsin and in Michigan.

Honor the Earth has deepened our environmental work in the Great Lakes region, continuing our challenges to Enbridge, but also joining with Native and non-Native allies to oppose more dirty destructive projects, including so-called “green mining” endeavors pushing ahead with Rio Tinto Zinc, another Canadian extraction corporation. Talon touts promises that Elon Musk will purchase the nickel to be exported for batteries that might be used in for batteries in certain luxury EVs. We are tired of extractive economies and know there are better alternatives, including recycling, other battery materials and new technologies.

We are ready for a New Green Revolution and we know that hemp is one key. The hemp plant is very promising for health and home but the nature of the plan holds a green path for both batteries and super-capacitors.

Honor the Earth’s work is at a landscape level. For almost 30 years, we have built indigenous community strength locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Now, we continue to leverage support for allies on the front lines, and have deepened our legal team and our administrative team for the times ahead—because we are always going to stand up for native people’s culture and communities.
With Anishinaabe values at the core of our mission, we've given birth to Honor's sister organization, Akiing—our long held dream of creating a regional community development initiative, supporting the restoration of a regional Indigenous food economy, and the renaissance of the hemp economy. Akiing will be a critical step to helping us move to the Green Path in a way that supports a just transition for the tribes as well as the planet. In the upcoming months and year, we will move significant resources into this work, the just transition, to create the New Green Revolution beginning in our own home community.

We don't have to look far, to feel the effects of extractive industry as we look at scorched agricultural fields surrounding our village of Pine Point. We see the deadly proposals for more industrial agriculture expansion which will only adds more poisons to our water and our village. Gaawiin–stop! We want to be the change we seek to make because we see the answer; it's hemp.

Drum roll here. Can you hear the liilii's? We have exciting news! With the help of generous donors, we were able to buy 300-acres of adjoining our village! That is to keep the polluters away.

Part of the land we bought was owned by Enbridge and the other land was owned by Offutt, the largest independent potato producer in the US agribusiness industry; so those lands are toxic. One company spills the precious water out of the aquifers and the other one sucks our aquifers dry with the expansions of industrial agriculture in our region.

The clear threats to our water, including the sacred Shell River where we made camp and faced arrest last year, continue and so does our need to protect our waters. Therefore, we are not only planning an aggressive regulatory and legal set of challenges towards polluters, but we also have an integrated Land Back strategy, focused on hemp and organic agriculture.
We know hemp can help heal Mother Earth, and in the lands which surround our village, and adjoining the Shell River, we find that industrial agriculture needs an antidote. That's hemp. The carbon is in the air, not in the soil and we need it the other way around. Hemp is a miracle plant for carbon sequestration, removing the carbon from the air many times faster than trees.¹

With our new organization Akiing, in the year ahead, from hemp to solar, we intend to grow the solutions to the problems of industrial society. As we approach problem-solving we intend to focus on our community, at the Headwaters of the Mississippi River, creating a strong and replicable model of what a sustainable economy should look like from the perspective of the people living on our rural reservation lands. We want to grow our land base in order to both grow a green economy and to stop the deforestation by the extractive industries of Big Agriculture. Purchasing more land surrounding our village helps protect our community, land, forests and our watershed from the ravages of industrial agriculture. And, our people, who die from cancer in ways we should not. For that, we continue to need support.

Our hometown team of water protectors gained many new supporters and allies from near and far in the last year. We are grateful to everyone who stood with us. We intend to strengthen and expand a sustainable new green economy based on Indigenous wisdom, while we work with our allies across the country and beyond to protect our water for future generations.

That's our story, full of the promise of making a future sustainable by planting the seeds of justice for the rights of nature. This is the story of an organization which is growing and changing to respond to the needs of Mother Earth and our community. Thank you for your support, we are hopeful you will join us in taking the Green Path, purchasing the land around our village for this work ahead, as we work with our allies to protect our water and grow a New Green Revolution in Akiing, this land where we belong.

These are indeed challenging times. And, in the midst of this, we remember the Zapatista proverb - “They buried us, they forgot that we were seeds...”

Miigwech,

Winona LaDuke

¹ According to research, one hectare of industrial hemp can sequester potentially 10.5 tons of CO2 per hectare each year. (http://eiha.org/media/2019/08/Catherine_Wilson-CannaWellness-EIHA_2019)

Hemp is also being used to help in the bioremediation and healing of soils. That's to say, that the prolific root growth, which accompanies the above ground growth requires a significant intake. That intake is also heavy metals, radiation and oil. Hemp has been used in a number of places for this work, and has good potential in the needed clean up. This takes several generations of plants, and it’s also important to note that the low levels comparatively which are now largely contained in the roots and hurd can be turned into construction materials, and not pose a hazard.