

Gail Irish

I am part of a network of people who participate in Indigenous-led water walks or Nibi walks. We walk and pray along river banks and lake shores to express our respect, love and hope for the water and its health. In between the organized walks, we gather at Hidden Falls on Sunday morning at 9am for a ceremony taught to us by Sharon Day, Ojibwe elder, artist, activist, and leader of the water walks. We sing in Ojibwe and Dakota, the languages this land first knew and heard. The eagles who nest there greet us weekly.

It is vitally important to us now and for future generations that the cleanup of the toxic waste dump created by the Ford Company be addressed, not just for its impact on the health and well being of human communities, but also on all life forms that dwell in and along the river. We who gather there weekly know the waste dump is there and watch the water level rise and fall with the seasons. Our collective lack of respect for the earth and her waters is a lack of respect for all life – for ourselves. We request that Ford be held accountable for the mess it left behind. Alternative 4, removal of accessible waste and site stabilization, is not an acceptable solution. On behalf of our beloved Mississippi, a river that is alive and has rights, we can only accept Alternative 6, the removal of all wastes and site restoration.

Sharon said, "You only protect that which you love, and so we need to make that connection with people and water." Now is an opportunity to make that connection and express our deep love for this incredible river and for all water.

Thank you, miigwech, pidamayayé ye