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Step by step tribal members bring awareness to Great Lakes

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Josephine Mandamin is a woman on a mission. In fact, she's an Ojibway First Nation woman on a mission to preserve the Great Lakes for future generations.

Her mission has been to create awareness of the lakes' plight by walking around them - all five of them- from town to town carrying a pail of the lake water. She is joined by other tribal members and supporters.

Last Monday she passed through the White Lake area on the Mother Earth Water Walk.

Starting the morning at 3:30 a.m. and getting on the road by 4:30 a.m. each day of the walk, Mandamin and her fellow walkers, take shifts in traveling until sunset when the pail and staff of eagle feathers are put to rest at night. The group, which is followed by vans, takes rest days along the trip.

In the final year of the six-year effort, the Mother Earth Water Walk is traveling around the southern end of Lake Michigan and along the Wisconsin shoreline from Manistee, Michigan to Hannaville, Michigan near Escanaba.

This year's walk began at the Little River Casino in Manistee on Saturday, April 26. Two days later they were in the White Lake area. At 9 a.m., Mandamin and her group were walking steadily along Fruitvale Road between Whitbeck Road and old U.S. 31.

They plan to finish in Hannaville on May 11.

“Lake Michigan has been very prostititionalized by the money changers,” Mandamin, a resident of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, said. “Our water is not for sale.”

Mandamin said the walk brings attention to the lakes for those who pass by.

She said the lakes are like women who hold life inside them. “Water is life,” Mandamin added.

The walkers pass out brochures explaining the Mother Earth Water Walk, providing simple facts about water and recommendations in preserving water.

The Mother Earth Water Walk started in 2003 by circling Lake Superior. In 2004, the upper half of Lake Michigan was the route of the walk. In 2005 it moved to Lake Huron, then moved on to Lake Ontario in 2006 and Lake Erie in 2007.