

OBSCURE LAND RECOVERY

By Gerald Vizenor

The White Earth Land Recovery Project, a proactive national charitable organization, does not meet certain standards of charity accountability according to a Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Report.

The Wise Giving charitable standards report, issued in September 2009, pointed out that the White Earth Land Recovery Project, or WELRP, does not meet the basic standards of financial statements “because it states it does not have audited financial statements for the past fiscal year.”

Moreover, the report indicated that the organization does not meet the recommended standards of “information for charity websites that solicit donations,” does not “include a list” of the “board of directors, and does not include the recommended financial information” in the annual report, or on a website disclosure.

WELRP does not provide “electronic access,” a standard practice of charitable website disclosures, to the “most recent” Form 990 of the Internal Revenue Service, a federal report by certain nonprofit organizations except from income tax. The annual report is a public document.

The White Earth Land Recovery Project was founded in 1989 by Winona LaDuke. The nonprofit organization is independent and is not associated or obligated in any way to the citizens or the elected government of the White Earth Reservation. The stated purpose of the organization is to “facilitate the recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage.” These are noteworthy objectives, but the website reports by the charitable organization do not reveal the actual “recovery of the original land base” of the reservation. The reports do not reveal the recovery of any land on or near the White Earth Reservation.

The White Earth Land Recovery Project has

apparently solicited donations for more than 20 years to “facilitate the recovery” of land on the reservation. The annual grants and contributions to the organization have been disbursed for education, cultural programs, retreats, the economic development and security of wild rice, and other purposes. The total annual program expenses for the year ending December 31, 2007, for instance, were more than a million dollars.

WELRP declared a total income of \$1,858,196 for the fiscal year 2007, according to a financial evaluation by the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Report. The assessment of revenue and expenditures was based on information provided by WELRP on Form 990, a public document, to the Internal Revenue Service. The financial information that follows is based on the WELRP financial report for the fiscal year 2007:

2007 SOURCE OF FUNDS:

Direct Public Support	\$1,341,227
Government Contributions	\$325,237
Gross Profit from Sale of Inventory	\$186,071
Other Revenue	\$5,660
TOTAL INCOME	\$1,858,195

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EXPENSES:

Programs	84 percent
Fund Raising	7 percent
Administration	9 percent

Total Income	\$1,858,195
Program Expenses	\$1,068,400
Fund Raising Expenses	\$94,860
Administrative Expenses	\$121,397

TOTAL EXPENSES \$1,284,657

INCOME IN EXCESS OF EXPENSES \$573,539

The White Earth Land Recovery Project website Annual Report for 2007 presents two graphic pie charts that show only the annual percentages of

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expenditures. There is no actual financial information in the report about the amount of income from donations and other sources, or the specific amount of expenditures. The 25-page annual report dedicates only one page of pie charts to the revenue and expenses of the organization.

The two graphic pie charts represent in nine slices of colors the percentages of apparent revenue and expenses, but the slices and percentages are not explained or compared in the report, and there are no references to actual dollars of revenue and expenses.

WELRP decided for some reason to present only obscure percentages on pie charts and to avoid the money numbers in the website reports for 2007 and 2009. The 2007 website report designates 23 percent for administration, 3 percent for fund raising, 2 percent for land, 10 percent for environment, and 16 percent for education on the first pie chart, but not the actual revenue or expenses. The second pie chart designates 2 percent for fund raising, 1 percent for administration, 36 percent for native harvest, and 4 percent for education. None of these categories are discussed or explained.

The 2007 and 2009 website annual reports do not provide financial information or an explanation of the categorical percentages on the graphic pie charts. The 2007 website report is an apparent evasion of almost two million dollars in annual income, but more specific financial information was required and necessary to complete the annual Form 990 for the Internal Revenue Service.

Winona LaDuke, the Executive Director of the White Earth Land Recovery Project, comments on treaty rights, a wind turbine, a “new crop of heritage corn,” a goat project, and the destruction of her home by fire, but does not provide financial information about the annual income, salaries, and expenses of the organization in the annual website report.

“As I write, I have a home. Many of you know that this past year was extremely trying for our organization and our

people. It was indeed a perfect storm. This is to say that my family’s home burned to the ground, several of my senior staff had to leave for medical reasons, and the demise of world financial markets almost cost our organization, our financial well being. As I write to you now, I can say that we have survived. We have changed, we are stronger, more lean, and soon we hope to be more virtual and versatile, as this woman and an organization which is founded in the last millennium begins to move squarely into this millennium, and the age of Facebook, Twitter, and the internet. We hope you will join us.”

WELRP presents only selective financial information about the income and expenses of the nonprofit organization. The income and expenses of the executive director and the salaries of the employees are not revealed in the two website reports. The annual reports are elusive, and the absence of critical financial information creates doubts about the management of the organization.

The White Earth Land Recovery Project should release more specific financial information and provide easy access to website financial disclosures of revenue and expenses, and the actual salaries of the executive director and other employees of the organization. The director should also provide electronic access to the most recent Form 990 reports to the Internal Revenue Service. These annual reports are public documents.

The citizens and elected government of the White Earth Reservation should demand audited annual reports and more specific information about the actual number of acres, parcels, and descriptive sections of land recovered in the name of the reservation by the White Earth Land Recovery Project.

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