

Jerilyn DeCoteau (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)
Director of Policy

Jerilyn is the Director of Policy (hired August 1, 2007). She will lead First Nation's policy and advocacy work at the tribal, state and federal levels developing policy, with emphasis on articulating a strategy for asset building in Indian Country.

Jerilyn has more than 25 years of experience working with Indian tribes as a lawyer and an educator. As a lawyer, she has held positions as clerk for the Federal District Court in Portland Oregon, staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund for nearly 10 years, trial attorney in the Indian Resources Section at the U.S. Department of Justice for more than 4 years, Director of the Indian Law Clinic at the University of Colorado for 2 years and counsel to her tribe for 2 years. She is an adjunct professor at the University of Denver law school where she teaches Indian law related courses. She is also an appellate judge for the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court. Before law school Jerilyn was academic dean at the Turtle Mountain Community College where she worked for 6 years.

Jerilyn has litigated and negotiated a breadth of issues concerning to tribal sovereignty and tribal government, including water rights, a land claim, treaty fishing rights, taxation, sovereign immunity and education matters. Her work has addressed tribal infrastructure, including policy and code development and serving as day to day legal counsel to her tribe.

Jerilyn has experience with reservation citizens on a grass root level as well. She was elected to the all Indian public school board for the Turtle Mountain Community School, one of the largest Indian schools, where she developed and wrote a school philosophy, which the board adopted. More recently, she assisted a grass roots committee which mounted a year long effort to revise the Tribe's constitution to provide accountability and stability to tribal government. She represented them in tribal court and documented their efforts in a template, which is available through the Turtle Mountain Community College.

Jerilyn's other publications include legal essays on the access of urban Indians' access to health care, and the effects of development and the Endangered Species Act on Indian Water Rights, and analyses of Supreme Court cases on tribal tax authority and tribal criminal jurisdiction.

Jerilyn also conducts anti-racism training as a volunteer for the grassroots organization Reading to End Racism, which operates in the Boulder Valley School District.

Jerilyn holds a B. A. ed. in English from Mayville State University in North Dakota, a M.A. in Educational Counseling from the University of North Dakota and J.D. from the University of Oregon.