

Transcript of Shane Drift - Nett Lake Origin Story

Recorded December 17, 2025 on the Bois Forte Reservation, Nett Lake, MN

My name is Shane Drift. I am the District 1 representative for the Bois Forte Tribal Council. I have lived on the Bois Forte Reservation, Nett Lake side, my whole life. I grew up on Nett Lake. I was raised by my grandmother, Margaret Jesse Drift.

How our people, the Bois Fort people, came to be here at Nett Lake and surrounding areas is that—the history that was relayed to me through my family and teachings and stories—is that at one time the Indian people were one big tribe up by the Hudson Bay ... and individual bands or tribes, if you will, started to break off. Some tribes went over and across the Great Lakes and out. Some tribes came down and under the Great Lakes and across—migration.

Our tribe, as the way it was explained to me, came down under the Great Lakes and migrated across what is now Michigan and Wisconsin and Minnesota. And when bands made up their fires, like the ones in Michigan, as the way it was told to me, that's where they set up their home. Other tribes kept migrating, like the ones in Wisconsin, as I was told, and that's where they made their home. Now keep in mind that my origin story that was handed down to me through my family is going to be different from the ones of the tribes of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and on. We all have our own different origin stories of how we came to be where we're at. And, with that, our story is broken up into two parts.

The first part of our tribe was staying down in [the] Hibbing and Chisholm area. There's a place where three different rivers run in three different directions. That's how our people got here. At that same time, an old man had a vision of this place here, Nett Lake. They said he was following a *miigis* shell and he was having dreams—visions or dreams—seeing a special place that was where his people were supposed to go to. So he kept leading his people further. Now, the people who were down in the Hibbing and Chisholm area, that stayed there in that area—a young man tracked a moose north, followed him for like two days, two nights, went to the south side of Nett Lake and he looked down at what he thought was a field, he could see right down there. They said he went running down that hill, and when he got to the edge of the water he realized what he had found. And he walked east around the lake to look—came back to his original spot. Went west to look around at the lake—came back to his original spot. And he made up a camp. The next morning, he folded up his camp and packed up all his stuff, traveled back down south to where the people were, told them what he had found. They, in turn, followed him up north.

Around the same time, that old man that was leading the people came up through Lost River and they said, the teaching is, as he got closer and closer to this place here, he started to see things that he saw in his dreams. And when he came out at the mouth of Lost River, he realized that he found where they were meant to be, and the people came out and they found the food on the water. Rice, wild rice. So that's how the condensed version was told to me by my grandmother, Margaret Jesse Drift.