

Native Owned Cannabis Company Expands into Michigan Market

Michigan Approves First Tribal-State Cannabis Compact, Opening New Doors for Tribal Operators

A Historic Agreement Sets the Stage for Tribal Cannabis Expansion in Michigan

Michigan has taken a groundbreaking step in cannabis regulation with the announcement of its first formal cannabis compact with a Native American tribe. State regulators and the Bay Mills Indian Community (BMIC) finalized the agreement on July 25, allowing BMIC's cannabis business, Northern Light Cannabis Co., to integrate fully into Michigan's regulated marijuana industry.

This landmark compact marks a new era for tribal cannabis in Michigan and opens the doors for more Native tribes to participate in the state's flourishing marijuana economy.

Northern Light Cannabis Co. to Enter Statewide Wholesale and Distribution Channels

The compact enables Northern Light Cannabis Co., owned and operated by BMIC, to distribute cannabis products through Michigan's licensed wholesale and retail channels. This places the tribal business on par with other recreational licensees in the state, a significant achievement in terms of market access and economic opportunity.

Northern Light Cannabis Co. will also operate under the same regulatory framework as other cannabis businesses in Michigan, adhering to safety, compliance, and tracking systems administered by the state's Cannabis Regulatory Agency (CRA).

A Long-Awaited Path to Collaboration and Recognition

BMIC's cannabis journey began in 2020 when the tribe opened the first tribally owned adult-use dispensary in the Upper Peninsula. Since then, the tribe has sought ways to expand its cannabis footprint beyond tribal lands.

The compact signed this July reflects a long-anticipated breakthrough. It allows BMIC to:

- Sell cannabis products across Michigan via licensed distributors and retailers.
- Participate in compliance inspections, product testing, and CRA-led oversight.

- Integrate into the state’s Metrc seed-to-sale tracking system.
- Access the same rights and responsibilities as Michigan’s other cannabis licensees.

CRA Executive Director Brian Hanna called the agreement “a model for tribal-state cooperation in the cannabis industry” and emphasized its potential to promote equity and tribal self-determination.

Tribal Compacts Made Possible by 2023 Cannabis Legislation

The compact was made possible thanks to legislation signed into law in 2023 by Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Two pivotal bills created a legal pathway for Native American tribes and the state to form agreements regulating and taxing cannabis operations.

The new law also allows reciprocal cannabis commerce between tribal and non-tribal businesses—meaning both can legally buy and sell cannabis products from one another.

This cooperative regulatory structure is particularly important for tribes seeking economic self-sufficiency through cannabis, while still adhering to state-level standards for public safety and business integrity.

More Tribes Expected to Follow the Trail Blazed by BMIC

Michigan is home to 12 federally recognized tribes, several of which have expressed interest in pursuing similar agreements. The compact with BMIC is expected to serve as a blueprint for future collaborations that can bring tribal cannabis into the regulated fold.

The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians joined the state’s adult-use market in 2021 under a separate ordinance-based model. Meanwhile, the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians has also established itself in the recreational cannabis space.

But until now, no tribe had formalized its participation in the statewide market through a cannabis compact.

The BMIC compact signifies a new level of cooperation that could inspire other tribes to pursue regulated cannabis partnerships that combine tribal sovereignty with broader economic opportunity.

Economic, Cultural, and Legal Significance for Native Tribes

For tribal communities like BMIC, cannabis is not only a business opportunity but also a means to exercise sovereignty, invest in community development, and create jobs for tribal citizens.

This compact helps ensure that tribal cannabis businesses are not excluded from the regulated marketplace due to jurisdictional hurdles or outdated legal structures.

It also affirms the ability of tribes to engage in economic enterprises that reflect modern market realities while honoring their legal status as sovereign governments.

The CRA’s inclusive approach could pave the way for more equitable participation across the cannabis industry something often lacking in both state and federal policies.

What This Means for Michigan’s Cannabis Market Moving Forward

With Northern Light Cannabis Co. now able to operate across Michigan, the market can expect increased product diversity, improved regional access, and enhanced consumer choice.

The integration of tribal cannabis operators into the state market could also strengthen supply chains, bolster local economies—particularly in rural or underserved areas—and provide new opportunities for cooperative business models.

As Michigan’s cannabis industry continues to mature, tribal participation will likely become a key driver of inclusive growth, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

A Promising Start with a Roadmap for Expansion

The cannabis compact between Michigan and the Bay Mills Indian Community is a milestone moment that reflects a broader trend of evolving state-tribal relationships in the cannabis space.

With more tribes expected to explore similar agreements, the future of Michigan’s cannabis market is likely to become more diverse, collaborative, and representative of its Native communities.

As CRA Director Brian Hanna noted, this model is built on mutual respect and shared commitment, a foundation that may soon see other tribes joining the regulated landscape under similarly empowering agreements.

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