



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Great Lakes

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Winter 2007

Multi-state Wild Rice Restoration and Preservation Conference: Sustaining Wild Rice in the Upper Great Lakes Region

GREAT LAKES
REGION



*National Themes:
Environmental Restoration*

Project Description

Wild rice populations have declined throughout much of the plant's native range, due in large part to human impacts. Besides being a favored human and wildlife food, wild rice is a deeply important component of Native American culture in the Upper Great Lakes Region. Numerous tribes, agencies, and organizations have been working to maintain and restore wild rice populations; however, these efforts are often disparate, with limited regional sharing of information. Achieving a long-term goal of regional, sustainable wild rice populations requires a multi-state effort that includes engaged long-term partnerships, coordination, and cooperation.

Until recently, a 1999 regional wild rice conference coordinated by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission had been one of the only opportunities to share information across the Upper Great Lakes Region. The Great Lake Regional Water Program, in partnership with Ferris State University in Michigan and the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, brought together representatives from tribes, universities, agencies, non-profit organizations, and private interests from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to discuss the need for a sustained regional effort related to wild rice.

As a result of those meetings, a regional wild rice conference was planned in 2005 and mid-2006 and held in August 2006 in Watersmeet, Michigan. A primary goal of the conference was to share information related to both the scientific and cultural aspects of wild rice with the hopes of promoting understanding and appreciation of wild rice culture and developing partnerships among the groups involved.



Participants learned about the traditional practice of 'dancing' on wild rice to remove the husks (above). Conference presenters taught participants how to fan, or winnow, wild rice (top).

All photos by Patrick Robinson

PROJECT CONTACTS

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CONFERENCE COLLABORATORS

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Environmental Leadership Program
Ferris State University
Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission
Indigenous Environmental Network
Keweenaw Bay Indian Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Little River Band of Ottawa Indians
Menominee Indian Tribe
Michigan Anishinaabek Cultural Preservation and Repatriation Alliance
Michigan State University-Extension
Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc.
Muskegon River Watershed Assembly
Northern Michigan University
Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe
USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service
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Outcomes

The conference brought together Native American communities, universities, tribal colleges, nonprofit groups, tribal and local governments, and federal and state agencies to share information and experiences. It developed new partnerships among Land Grant colleges and universities and tribal communities across the Great Lakes Region, and built a solid foundation for future initiatives. The 109 attendees learned about wild rice identification, management and restoration, ecological importance, harvesting, processing, nutrition and recipes, and the role wild rice plays in the spirituality of Great Lakes tribal communities.

Based upon evaluation results, respondents learned a great deal regarding most of the presented topics. For example, 94 percent stated that they learned a significant or great amount about the cultural values of wild rice. Respondents also generated a wealth of ideas for future coalition building and networking. Participants frequently commented that they appreciated the hands-on elements, the interesting speakers, trips to lakes and rice beds, and the union of science and spirituality themes in the conference. There was also strong interest in more conferences like this in the future. The conference committee will use the participant information to help determine potential next steps and regional collaborative efforts toward achieving sustainable wild rice populations across the Great Lakes Region.

For presentation descriptions, speaker biographies and other information from the wild rice conference, visit:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/regionalwaterquality/wildrice>



Scott Herron, conference co-chair, instructs participants on the method for making rice knocking sticks.



One of the conference goals was the sharing of traditional wild rice knowledge with youth.



www.uwex.edu/ces/regionalwaterquality

This publication is on the web at:

www.lco.edu/public/ext/water/waterquality.htm