



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Great Lakes

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Winter 2008

Multi-State Support for Sharing Wild Rice Traditional Knowledge in the Upper Great Lakes Region

**GREAT LAKES
REGION**



National Theme:
Environmental Restoration

Project Description

Wild rice populations have declined throughout much of the plant's native range, due in large part to human impacts. Beyond being a favored human and wildlife food, wild rice is a deeply important component of Native American culture in the Upper Great Lakes Region.

To better coordinate and prioritize regional efforts, a Regional Wild Rice Strategic Planning Session was held in 2007. At the session, participants formed a Native Wild Rice Coalition to help foster continued regional collaboration, and identified the following priority multi-state initiatives:

- regional sharing and transferring of a wild rice camp educational program developed by the Sah-Kay-Tay Indigenous Preservation Society in Minnesota;
- development and support of statewide and regional wild rice management plans and restoration efforts, with special emphasis on the remaining wild rice in Lower Michigan; and
- development and implementation of outreach and training programs related to small-scale wild rice harvesting and processing.

During the past year, the Great Lakes Regional Water Program worked with project partners to address the first initiative identified above and promote regional sharing of wild rice traditional knowledge.



Participants at the 2007 Regional Wild Rice Strategic Planning Session identified priority wild rice initiatives. Photo by Scott Herron.

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Actions

Key regional participants from tribal communities, 1994 tribal land-grant institutions, 1862 land-grant institutions, and other groups were invited, and offered funding assistance, to attend the 2007 traditional wild rice camp in Minnesota. The wild rice camp included both a five-day camp and a three-day camp in late August and early September and focused on Anishinaabeg wild rice traditional knowledge. Attendees learned about the methodologies of harvesting and processing the nutritious grain of wild rice. The methodologies included how to make, by hand, traditional wild rice processing equipment, such as knocking sticks, pushing poles and winnowing baskets. The traditional production methods used included harvesting, parching, jigging and winnowing.

Outcomes

Ten regional representatives attended the Minnesota wild rice camp. Participants included people from the University of Minnesota; Ferris State University; and tribal communities from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Formal evaluation of attendee learning and project impacts is still ongoing. Informal evaluation reports completed by several attendees indicated that the experience had greatly increased their understanding of wild rice traditional knowledge, created valuable networking opportunities, and generated interest in creating similar educational programming in their communities.

Anticipated Impacts

This project enhanced regional cooperation and collaboration among tribal communities, 1994 land-grant institutions, 1862 land-grant institutions, and other diverse partners interested in preserving wild rice. The project also further enhanced the multicultural understanding of participants and further strengthened the multicultural partnerships necessary to sustain this important grain. In 2008, wild rice camp participants will meet to discuss the specific steps necessary to develop a wild rice traditional knowledge educational program in their own communities and institutions.



Passing traditional knowledge to future generations is an important part of the wild rice camp educational program. Photo by Scott Herron.



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