

A Human Dimensions Framework for Sustaining Wild Rice in the Upper Great Lakes Region

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National Water Conference 2008

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What Do We Mean by Human Dimensions?

Understanding, integrating, and addressing
the social aspects of natural resource
conservation in a deliberate, meaningful way

A Brief Overview of Wild Rice

- An annual grass
- Grows in shallow water
- Produces a grain that is enjoyed by humans and wildlife



Ecological Significance

- Important food for wildlife
- Supports diverse, abundant biological communities
- Helps bind substrate and protect water quality and clarity



Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe) Importance

- Deeply important component of the culture, central to migration stories and prophecies
- Important nutritional staple
- Manoomin or spirit food, name derived from “Manitou” (Great Spirit) and meenum (delicacy) (GLIFWC, 2007)
- No other plant is believed to have contributed to more geographic names in North America (GLIFWC, 2007)



Artwork courtesy of Dick Gameau



Photograph: Kenneth M. Wright

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The image is the cover of a book. It features a photograph of two people in a traditional wooden canoe on a body of water, surrounded by tall green grasses. The person in the foreground is wearing a red and blue jacket and is using a long wooden pole to navigate the water. The person in the background is wearing a yellow t-shirt and is also using a long wooden pole. The sky is overcast with light clouds. The title 'the Sacred Harvest' is written in a large, stylized, yellow font with a drop shadow. Below the title, the subtitle 'Ojibway Wild Rice Gathering' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, the author's name 'Gordon Reggulnti' is written in a white, sans-serif font, followed by 'Photographs by Dale Kakkak' and 'With a Foreword by Michael Dorris' in a smaller white font.

the **Sacred Harvest**

Ojibway Wild Rice
Gathering

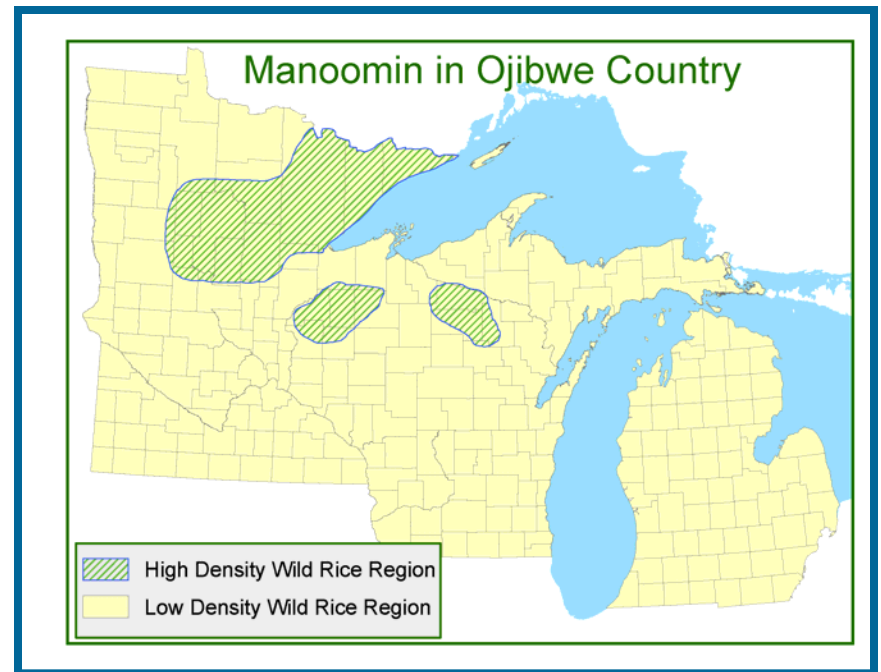
Gordon Reggulnti

Photographs by Dale Kakkak
With a Foreword by Michael Dorris

A Decline in Abundance

- Historically present throughout the Western Great Lakes
- Impacted by pollution, boating, exotic species, habitat alteration
- Substantial declines in abundance have occurred

Current Range



Courtesy of Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission



Why Address Wild Rice?

- Wild rice decline is inherently a multi-state issue
- Opportunity to work with tribal Land-Grant institutions
- A need for increased dialogue and multicultural understanding
- Important aquatic resource

Human Dimensions of Wild Rice

- Impacts from human activities such as dams, boating, exotic species introduction, and pollution
- Cultural importance to indigenous and non-indigenous people
- Nutritional, economic, and recreational value

Developing a Framework for Sustaining Wild Rice

- Identified and contacted knowledgeable people to learn about the issue
- Identified appropriate, diverse partners
- Listened and learned about what each partner could offer
- Utilized shared leadership based on partner resources

Creating a Strategy

- Convened partners to discuss current efforts for sustaining wild rice
- Identified priority needs
- Top need was a regional wild rice conference to:
 - Develop partnerships that could lead to a sustained regional effort
 - Improve cross-cultural understanding of wild rice importance
 - Identify and prioritize information needs and delivery mechanisms

Planning the Conference

Integrating Human Dimensions

Diverse membership in steering committee
and six subcommittees



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Wild Rice Conference Design

Integrating Human Dimensions

Cultural, ecological, and communication tracks all within one conference format

- Path A: Wild Rice Ecology and Conservation
- Path B: Cultural Importance of Ricing and Subsistence Use
- Path C: Communication and Networking

Wild Rice Conference Design

Integrating Human Dimensions

- Developed methods to encourage attendance by traditionally underrepresented audiences
 - Financial Assistance Program
 - Northern Michigan University Center for Native American Studies Assistance Program









Outcomes

- 109 attendees
- 94% of attendees learned a significant or great amount about cultural values of wild rice
- 88% would be likely or very likely to seek more information on the cultural values of wild rice
- 80% learned a significant or great amount about the ecological values of wild rice
- 84% learned a significant or great amount about wild rice management

Outcomes (continued)

- Increased understanding of target audience interests and communication preferences
- A sustained regional partnership between universities (including 1862 and 1994 land grants), tribes, state and federal agencies, NGOs

Moving Forward

- Wild Rice Strategic Planning Session, March 2007
- Native Wild Rice Coalition
- Multi-state exchange of wild rice cultural and ecological knowledge



What Have We Learned?

- The power of integrating biophysical and human dimensions information
- Ability of “human dimensions” approaches to galvanize lasting partnerships
- The importance of diversity and multicultural approaches

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