Applying knowledge to improve water quality
Great Lakes
Regional Water Program
A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Winter 2009

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 activities.

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. Numerous tribes, agencies, and organizations have been working to maintain and restore wild rice populations; however, these efforts have sometimes been disparate with limited regional sharing of information.

Rice Camp instructor Kathy Hoagland teaching traditional methods of processing wild rice. Photo by Scott Herron.

The Great Lakes Regional Water Program worked with project partners to form the Native Wild Rice Coalition to foster collaboration and identify multi-state initiatives to promote regional, sustainable wild rice populations. The first of these initiatives involves the regional sharing and transferring of a wild rice camp educational program developed by the Sah-Kay-Tay Indigenous Preservation Society in Minnesota. In summer 2007, key regional participants from tribal communities, 1994 tribal land-grant institutions, 1862 land-grant institutions, and other groups attended the 2007 Minnesota traditional wild rice camp, which focused on Anishinaabeg wild rice Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

Nine regional representatives attended the 2007 Minnesota wild rice camp. Participants included people from the University of Minnesota; Ferris State University; and tribal communities from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. During 2008, these camp participants were contacted to complete evaluations related to their wild rice camp experiences.

PROJECT CONTACTS

Patrick Robinson
University of Wisconsin-Extension
Phone: (920) 465-2175
Email: patrick.robinson@ces.uwex.edu

Scott Herron
Ferris State University
Phone: (231) 591-2087
Email: herrons@ferris.edu

Deborah Zak
University of Minnesota Extension
Phone: (218) 281-8684
Email: dzak@umn.edu

Rebecca Power
University of Wisconsin -Extension
Phone: (608) 263-3425
Email: rebecca.power@ces.uwex.edu

PROJECT PARTNERS

College of Menominee Nation
Ferris State University
Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission
Keweenaw Bay Indian Community
Sah-Kah-Tay Indigenous Preservation Society
White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa
White Earth Tribal and Community College
University of Minnesota
University of Minnesota Extension
University of Wisconsin-Extension

For more information about the Great Lakes Regional Water Program, please contact:

Rebecca Power
University of Wisconsin
Regional Water Liaison
Phone: (608) 263-3425
rebecca.power@uwex.edu

Project Goals

- regional sharing of the traditional wild rice camp educational model, with the expected outcomes of transferring of wild rice TEK and further integration of tribal and non-tribal knowledge into issues related to wild rice
- enhanced multicultural understanding and continue building key multicultural partnerships regionally

Outcomes

A curricular model on wild rice TEK was developd for the wild rice camps. Following the camps participants indicated a significant to comprehensive increase in knowledge in all the measured categories: wild rice ecology, the role of wild rice in Anishinaabeg culture, traditional methods of harvesting wild rice, traditional methods of processing wild rice, and methods of conserving wild rice. The majority of respondents (86%) indicated that the wild rice camps provided them with many opportunities to exchange information with people from different states and different cultures or communities. A majority (86%) also expressed a great amount of interest in assisting with development of a wild rice camp in their communities.

Participants identified "hands-on" learning opportunities as the aspect of the camp that contributed most to their learning. The knowledge participants gained through the wild rice camp has already been integrated into tribal community cultural workshops and school curriculums. Plans to expand the model regionally are underway.

Rice Camp instructor Bill Paulson demonstrating birch bark basket making techniques. Photo by Scott Herron.

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This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Integrated Water Quality Program, under Agreement No. 2004-51130-03111. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer, and prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.