

2009 MSUE Diversity Award
Barb Barton, Michigan Natural Features Inventory

Barb Barton, Conservation Associate for Michigan Natural Features Inventory, has intentionally invested time, energy and resources over the past 2 years helping tribal communities in Michigan establish or re-establish rice camps to help preserve this traditional practice. The goals of the rice camps have been to assist participants with gaining a better understanding and appreciation for ricing culture, increase the competency of organizations like MNFI, MSUE, CSREES in their work with Michigan's tribal communities, to share knowledge about wild rice from the traditional knowledge perspective and the western science perspective and to increase trust between state and university based organizations and tribal communities for future educational programming and relationship building.

In 2008 Barb helped to coordinate an inaugural rice camp in Lac Vieux Desert and in 2009 Barb, and members of a project team, held two rice camps in Tubbs Lake in Mecosta County and in Lac Vieux Desert. The camps have been a collaborative effort between such organizations as Great Lakes Water Regional Water Program, Ferris State University; Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Natural Features Inventory; Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; University of Wisconsin Extension; USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. These rice camps have been attended by both tribal and non-tribal participants, have included participants across generations and have had Tribal community representation from the Saginaw Chippewa, Menominee, Potawatomi, Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and the Little River Band of Odawa Indians.

The rice camps have provided the opportunity for participants and tribal communities to continue to incorporate ricing into their lifestyle, support the education of future generations to preserve this important cultural practice and helped to support the ongoing relationship and trust building that will increase organizational cultural competency and capacity to work authentically in diverse communities. A testament to the importance of these camps are the words of a tribal member who chose to attend a rice camp instead of attending his tribe's annual meeting, who said, "What is more important for future generations, what is more important for you, what is more important for the rice? I am sure it [wild rice] has some memory of people out here doing this...it wants to be part of our lives. To me, if you want to respect that, you've got to bring that into your life... I want my kids to think this is the norm".