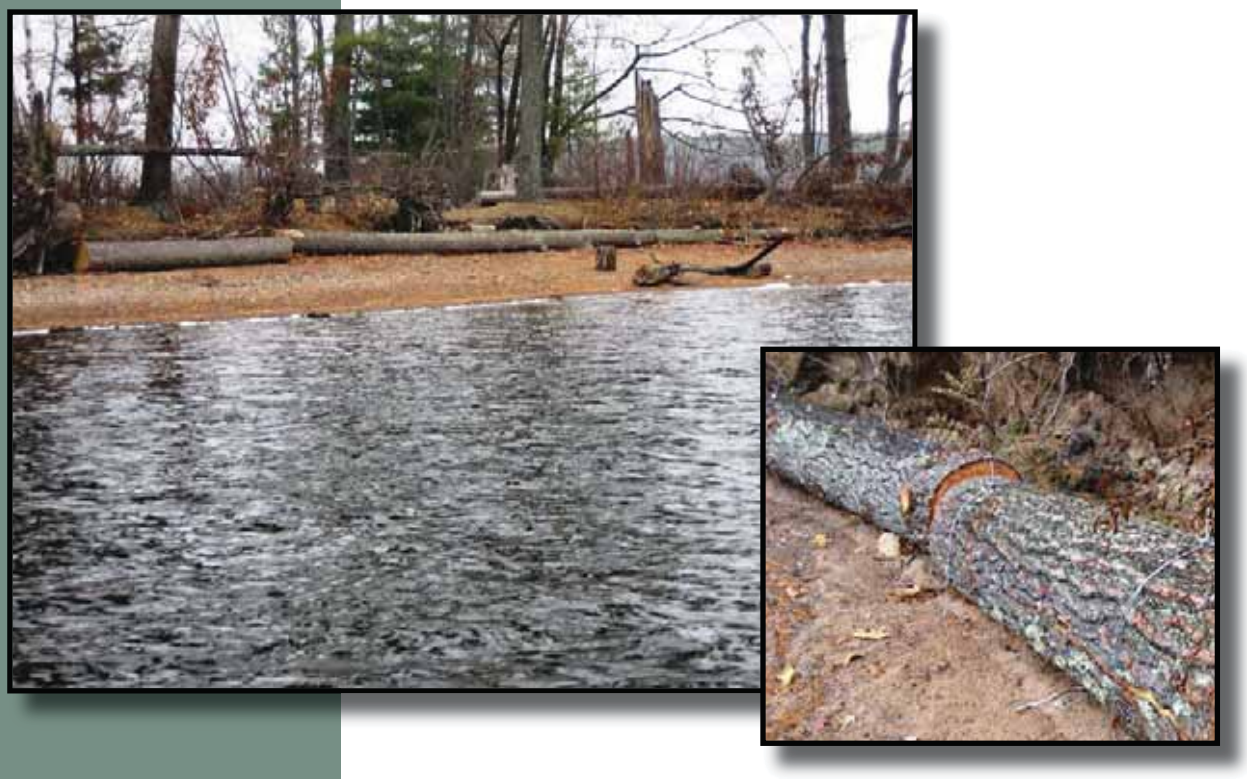
Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council

A report on protecting and restoring natural resources on Tribal lands in Wisconsin

Stewardship for the Future

Lac Courte Oreilles Band



Important cultural artifacts are more protected by reducing shoreline erosion on islands in the Flowage.

Tree Revetments on the Chippewa Flowage

Due to water level fluctuations brought on by the Hydro Dam, which forms the Chippewa Flowage, and increased recreational traffic on the water, many of the shorelines of these protected tribal islands are eroding away at an alarming rate. Some of the islands still have burial sites containing human remains and other cultural artifacts.

Trees that were uprooted or falling into the lake were cut into manageable lengths and anchored into the eroded banks. Over 900 feet of shoreline has been protected using this method. Through the EQIP program this shoreline is protected from further erosion.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program Enhances Fish Habitat

The majority of shoreline on all Reservation lakes has been developed in recent years. In turn, crucial littoral zone habitat used by an array of aquatic species has been diminished. Forty tree drops have been completed and anchored to the shoreline on several lakes. The tree drops provide ideal habitat for both fish and other shallow water aquatic species. They provide spawning areas, shelter for smaller fish and a food source because of all the vertebrate and invertebrate species that use them.

Re-seeding/Erosion Control Project

Over the past several years, the LCO Tribe has taken part in an aggressive harvesting campaign to manage tribal forests. Hundreds of acres of overly mature Aspen and mixed hardwood have been harvested. In the process, miles and miles of logging roads were created, many in close proximity to delicate watersheds, rivers and streams. Re-seeding of these roads with different mixtures of seeds help in controlling erosion and provide a nutritious food source for all kinds of wildlife.

Lac du Flambeau Band

Environmental Quality Incentives Program Helps Control Water Levels at the Sugarbush Impoundment

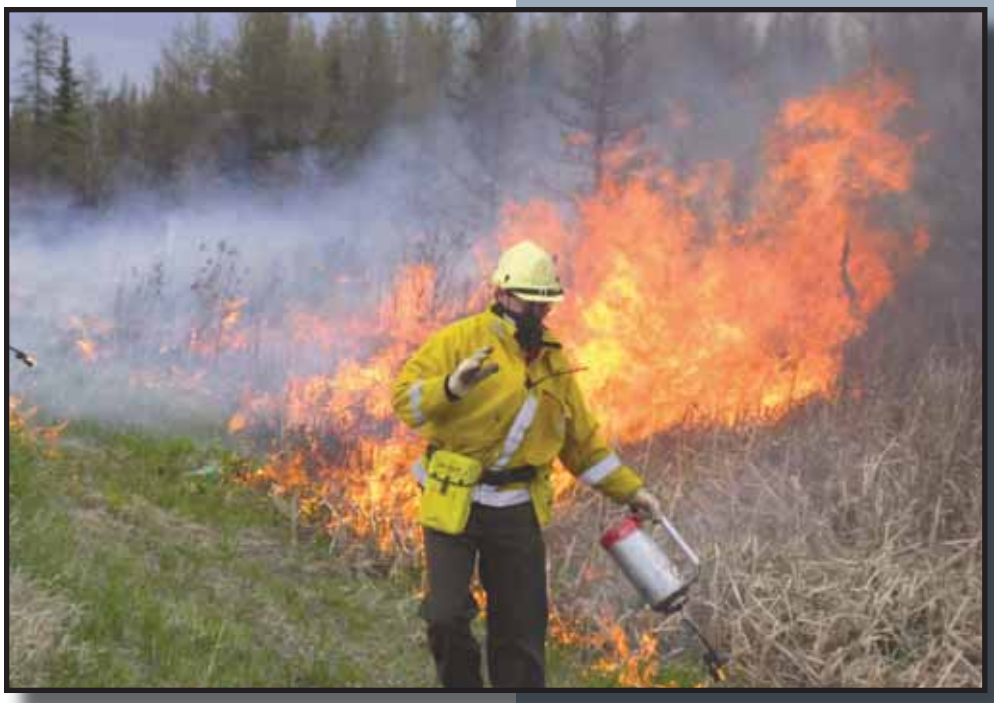
The Sugarbush Impoundment is located in Vilas County, part of the Lac Du Flambeau Reservation. This 400-acre impoundment was built in 2000 with the placement of a levee, a spillway and a stoplog water control structure. The original water control structure was damaged and needed to be replaced.

Through EQIP, NRCS installed a new screw-gate water control structure on the Sugarbush Impoundment. NRCS staff surveyed and engineered the new structure and spillway. This structure will allow for the water levels to be controlled more accurately and the maintenance of the structure will be much easier. Construction was completed in 2008.

The Sugarbush Impoundment is part of the Powell Marsh. This 14,000-acre area is an important emergent marsh wetland system that annually supports hundreds of thousands of migratory waterfowl and songbirds. The results of the project will have long term benefits for migratory and local wildlife in northern Wisconsin.

Prescribed Burns Preserve Rare Peatland

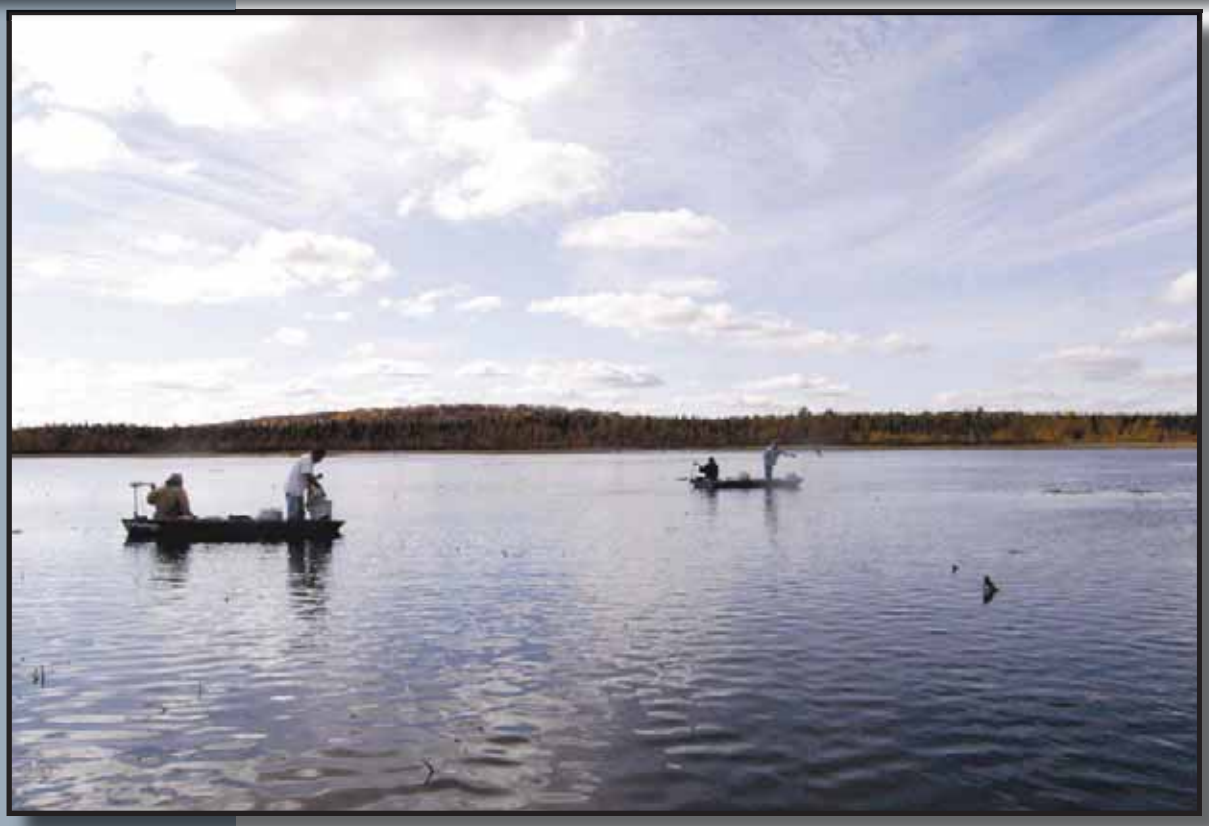
The Lac du Flambeau Chippewa own 8000 acres of wetland habitat adjacent to the 4000 acre DNR-managed Powell Marsh. Sedge meadows like those found in these wetlands offer favorable conditions for many bird, mammal, and amphibian species. Migration can bring numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds and other passer-bys into sedge meadows for short periods of feeding and resting. About 50 species of birds regularly nest in northern sedge meadows, including the Yellow Rail, LeConte's Sparrow and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow; three species of special concern found in consistent numbers at the Powell Marsh area.



Large open peatland is rare in northern Wisconsin. This wildlife area is regionally important because of its large size and open character. Without management, this open peatland will succeed to tamarack forest and black spruce muskeg. A combination of prescribed fire, hand cutting, mowing and shearing can be used to limit the growth of shrubs and tamarack.

The Lac du Flambeau Forestry Department, in cooperation with the NRCS, attempts to burn about 250 acres annually. Along with the prescribed burning, NRCS has worked cooperatively with the Tribe on wild rice seeding and brush management. These cooperative agreements go a long way to help manage this unique environment.

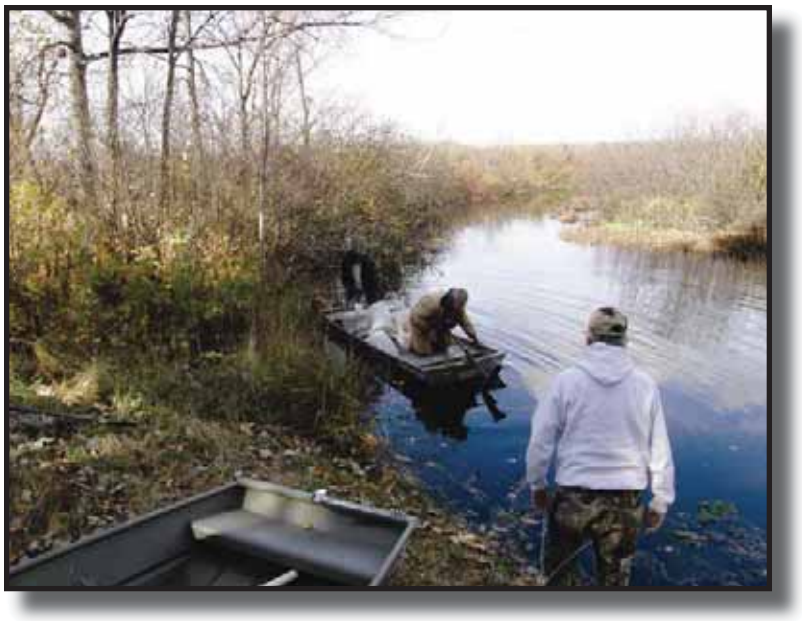
Sokaogon Mole Lake Band



Wild Rice represents the spiritual, cultural and economic centerpiece of the tribe for the last 300 years.

Restoring Wetlands and Wild Rice

With funding from WHIP, NRCS partnered with the Sokaogon Mole Lake Band to complete a wetland restoration and improve 30 acres of wild rice beds in Rice Lake in Forest County in northeastern Wisconsin. The reservation is adjacent to Rice Lake, or Zaaga-i'-gan Manoomin. The Ojibwa refer to the rice as "manoomin" meaning the food that grows on the water. Wild rice has always been a staple of the Chippewa diet and is still harvested and processed today, in the traditional way. It thrives exclusively in the stillness of this approximately 320-acre mineral-rich lake. This natural ecosystem maintains the necessary and orderly combination of consistent water level and temperature to sustain the annual crop.



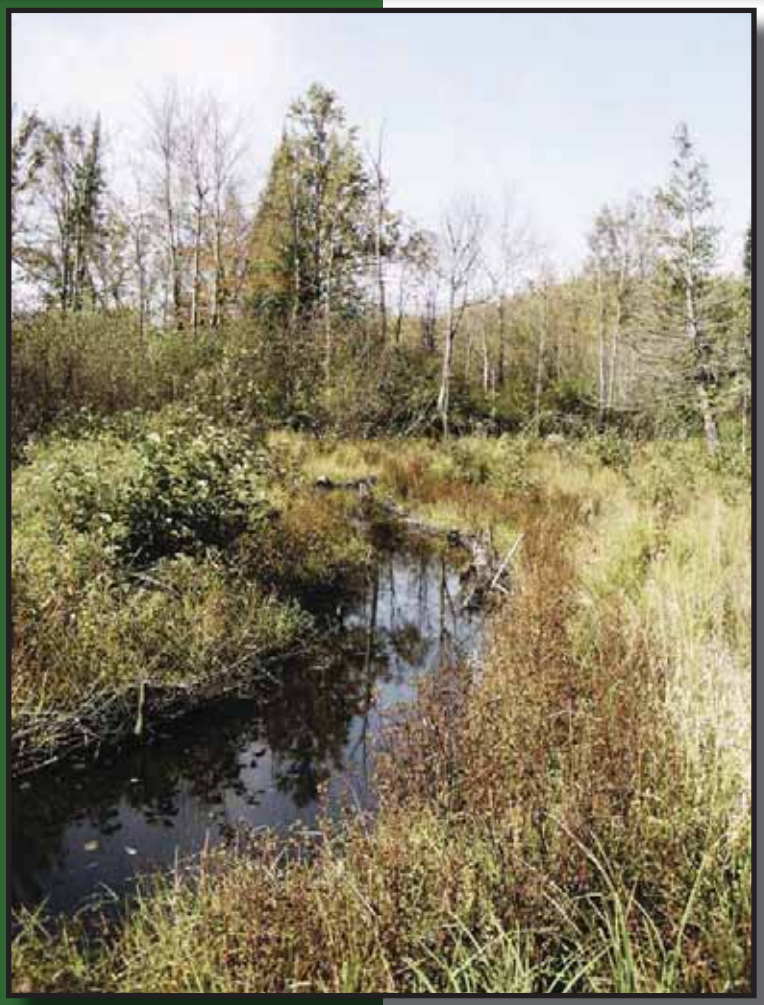
Manoomin is a sensitive plant and does not tolerate chemical pollutants or drastic changes in water level during the growth cycle. Scientists have determined that wild rice is the only naturally occurring grain in North America. This is a very special place, yet hardly visible for the most part even though it lies just a few hundred feet from a main highway. This is one of the last remaining ancient wild rice beds in Northern Wisconsin.

The tribe settled in this area because the wild rice fulfilled the prophecy of Tribal ancestors, in which they "were told to find the food that grows on water" during the migration from the east. Rice Lake was the primary reason for determining the location of the present Reservation.

The restoration, protection and management of Rice Lake restores the centerpiece and the spirit of the Sokaogon Band of Mole Lake.

Sokaogon Mole Lake Band

Stockbridge-Munsee Community



The restoration of a priority coldwater stream brings back spawning grounds for brook trout.

Stream Habitat Improvement and Management

NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds were used to restore an isolated spring pond outflow that once provided critical fish passage to a small spring pond. Brook trout would utilize the creek for spawning in the fall and for thermal refuge during the winter. The Spring Pond was a prime target of local fishermen until beaver activity flooded riparian forests and destabilized the creek banks. The creek was quickly choked with woody debris and sediment, brook trout stopped using the creek, and fishermen stopped visiting the pond.

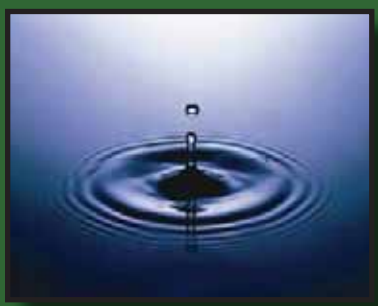
The Stockbridge-Munsee Community identified the creek as a priority coldwater resource and applied for EQIP for technical and financial assistance to restore Spring Pond. Tag alder brush bundles were created from shoreline stands, staked into the eroded shoreline, and then filled with excess spoil from the stream channel. Brush bundling and spoil removal redefined the main channel and provided a foothold for shoreline plants to grow upon. A total of 750 feet of stream channel was reconstructed over the course of two summers. The project was proven successful when brook trout spawned in the creek in the fall.

Cleaner Drinking Water

Safe drinking water is a major concern for people around the world and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community is no exception. Parts of the reservation where farming practices were prevalent in the past have groundwater contamination due to nitrates from animal waste. In December of 2007, the Tribe purchased a 160-acre dairy farm which had a clay-lined manure pit. It was believed that this was a major contributor to the high groundwater nitrate levels.

Through NRCS, an EQIP project provided the technical and financial assistance needed to properly close up the manure pit. A local contractor removed the clay liner and filled the pit with clean soil. It was discovered during excavation that the clay liner was damaged some time in the past and raw manure may have been leaching into the groundwater. All of the contaminated soil was removed and disposed of properly. This may have been a major cause for the high nitrate levels in the groundwater. Now that the possible source of the contamination has been removed, it is anticipated that the nitrates in the groundwater will gradually decline thus providing safer drinking water for future generations.

Water quality is improved by sealing this source of nitrate contamination.



Published in cooperation with the

Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council

USDA NRCS
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

Wisconsin 2009