

Burnett County Success from the Field

Wild Rice (Manoomin) Seeding



The Environmental and Natural Resources Department for the St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin are focused on conservation activities and programs to ensure sound management of soil, water, air, plant and animal (SWAPA) resources and enlist information and assistance from their local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office.

Autumn is a time to reflect on all that there is to be thankful for, as you enjoy the harvest of nature’s bounty during gatherings with family and friends. In Indian Country, culture and tradition are sustained through shared meals with family and the community. Traditional foods are a powerful way for each new generation to connect with and honor its history and its ancestors.

A decline in wild rice production was observed and documented by department and Tribal members in Burnett County. Concerns were also expressed by Tribal elders about the loss of unique wild rice seed that various water bodies provided. In 2008, the first wild rice seeding project was contracted through the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) to include eight acres of planting completed on Rice Lake in Burnett County, Wisconsin. Seeing the benefits of native wild rice harvesting and seeding, four additional contracts were developed between 2008 and 2018, through WHIP and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). To date, a total of 44.4 acres of planting has been completed on five different bodies of water in Burnett County, Wisconsin.

Clam Lake, in northwestern Wisconsin, had been the premier wild rice gathering water body in the state, with almost 300 acres of the lake covered with dense wild rice in most years. In 2007, the St. Croix Tribal Environmental Natural Resources Department, along with staff from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission observed a very sharp decrease in wild rice growth and harvest. Clam Lake was down to 207 acres of very sparse wild rice. By 2009, wild rice was restricted to 84 acres located in only isolated regions of the lake. The primary factor limiting wild rice growth was narrowed down to common carp. Over 656,300 pounds of common carp have been removed from Clam Lake. NRCS and partners continue working to reduce the common carp population on Clam Lake to the lowest possible level. This will provide a benefit to wild rice, the native fishery, which includes sturgeon, a clan species, native aquatic vegetation and waterfowl. Tribal, federal, state, county, local partners and volunteers have helped make this project possible.



For generations, Native Americans in the northern Great Lakes have harvested wild rice. It is an important food source and a cultural touchstone that tribal members are trying to pass on to younger generations.



Jeremy Bloomquist, Land and Water Resources Manager for the St. Croix Environmental and Natural Resources Department, states “Working with the staff from the Spooner NRCS office under the EQIP program has helped address several resource concerns here at St. Croix, especially wild rice restoration. The genetics of Clam Lake wild rice is also very important to the St. Croix Tribe. Only seed from Clam Lake or Long Lake, which is connected to Clam Lake, is used for seeding on Clam Lake.” NRCS and partners will continue to work with Tribes to support wild rice populations in the future.

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