



2008 USDA-CSREES National Water Conference  
Sparks, NV

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

Patrick Robinson, Scott Herron, Rebecca Power, and Robin Shepard

### **Abstract Text:**

Wild rice is an aquatic plant that has experienced population declines throughout much of the Upper Great Lakes Region, due in large part to human impacts. It is a favored human and wildlife food, and a deeply important component of regional Native American culture. As such, wild rice provides an excellent example of the need to understand the human dimensions of natural resource management and highlights the ecological, cultural, and economic factors pertaining to university outreach efforts.

The Great Lakes Regional Water Program co-sponsored a regional wild rice conference to help foster the partnerships needed to sustain wild rice in the region. A diverse steering committee representing various institutional and cultural backgrounds was developed to assist with planning the conference. Special efforts were made to incorporate the human and biophysical dimensions of issues affecting wild rice into the conference design. For example, the conference included tracks related to wild rice ecology and conservation, the cultural importance of wild rice, and communication and networking. Conference activities were designed to foster interaction between participants and promote increased understanding of cultural and scientific perspectives. Techniques were also used to create opportunities for traditionally underrepresented audiences to attend and participate in the conference.

The outcomes of this approach have been very encouraging. The multi-state effort was able to leverage substantial financial and human resources. In addition, the conference fostered development of a Native Wild Rice Coalition, which is an active multicultural partnership that has continued working collaboratively on a variety of issues related to wild rice. The success of the project highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the human dimensions of natural resource issues. Further, the challenges that were encountered during this process provide important lessons for future work in the area of human dimensions and multicultural initiatives.

### **Impact Statement:**

Wild rice is a significant ecological component of many lakes and rivers in the Upper Great Lakes Region and, therefore, important to regional water resource management. This project was able to increase the knowledge of individuals regarding issues of importance to sustaining wild rice. Based upon post-conference evaluations, 94% and 80% of participants, respectively, learned a significant or great amount about cultural and scientific issues related to wild rice. The project has also been able to leverage resources in new ways, and has fostered an active partnership that is continuing to address issues related to water resource management.