



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

Issue #24 October 1, 2017

Manoomin - the 'green gold' we love to eat

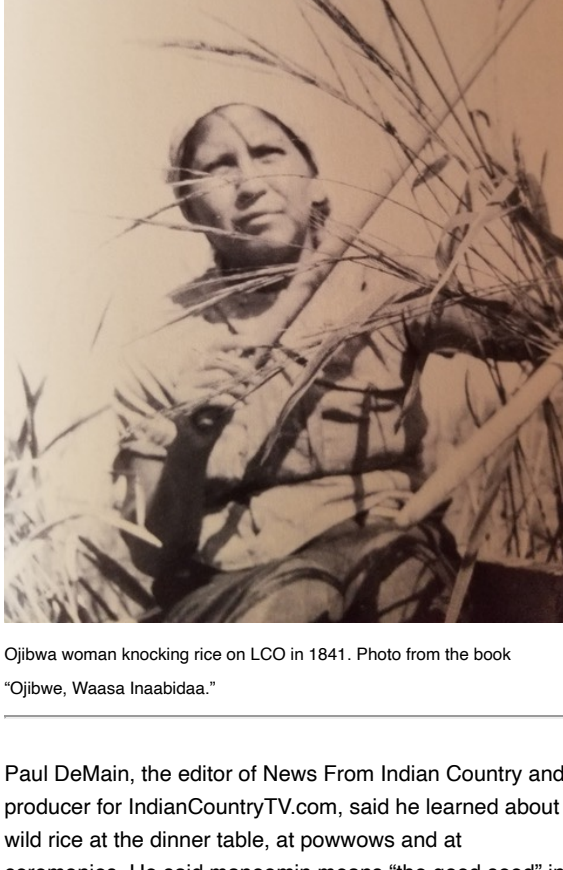
By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

It is "manoomin" in the Ojibwe language and its cultural/ceremonial, religious, economic and social importance cannot be overestimated to tribal members who have been harvesting it for more than one thousand years. It is wild rice—we harvest it, we process it, we cook it and we eat it.

Technically, wild rice is not a rice but the seeds of aquatic grass, called *Zizania palustris*. Most commonly sold as a dried whole grain, it is extremely nutritious, packing 14 grams of protein in just a three-and-a-half ounce serving. It is a good source of minerals and B vitamins—and it is low in fat and gluten free.

Little wonder that recipes containing wild rice abound: soups, salads, casseroles, dressings, puddings, muffins and even desserts highlight wild rice as the main ingredient, although most prefer it in its most fundamental form of just cooked wild rice, boiling it until it is tender and firm.

Up until the late 1960s the age-old technique of gathering wild rice and then processing it was done by hand, and the Ojibwe and Chippewa tribes continue that today, even though machine harvesting has come into much of the production for retail purposes.



Ojibwa woman knocking rice on LCO in 1841. Photo from the book "Ojibwe, Waasa Inaabidaa."

Paul DeMain, the editor of News From Indian Country and producer for IndianCountryTV.com, said he learned about wild rice at the dinner table, at powwows and at ceremonies. He said manoomin means "the good seed" in English and he prefers his with blackberries and maple syrup.

Paul is also the Special Projects Director for the Inter-Tribal Agriculture Council, Oneida/Ojibwe; his knowledge of wild rice is expert.

"There are many wild rice lakes in this area. LCO people came to establish the reservation here because of the lakes and fish, maple trees, cranberries and other resources, including the abundance of wild rice," DeMain said.

He also explained that historically, before the Chippewa Flowage was established, it produced over 20,000 pounds of wild rice a year. Other lakes had wild rice too but because of the diking that lifted the water level for recreational use and higher real estate values, the rice was destroyed.

Paul also explained that on the reservation there are many family operations for harvesting wild rice whose goal is to provide food for the table.

"Traditional methods of processing rice is wood-fired kettle parched, hand winnowed," he said.

Russ and Lori Warwick live within hollering distance from the Billy Boy Flowage that runs only a quarter mile behind their house, next to Little Lac Courte Oreilles.

Russ moved to Hayward in 1967 with his parents who bought a dairy farm north of Lac Courte Oreilles. He was seven years old and loved to hunt and fish.

Newly retired in April of this year from the Wisconsin DNR where he was an Advanced Fisheries Technician for Sawyer and Rusk Counties, Russ also care takes for 14 homes on big Lac Courte Oreilles. His ties to wild rice run deep.

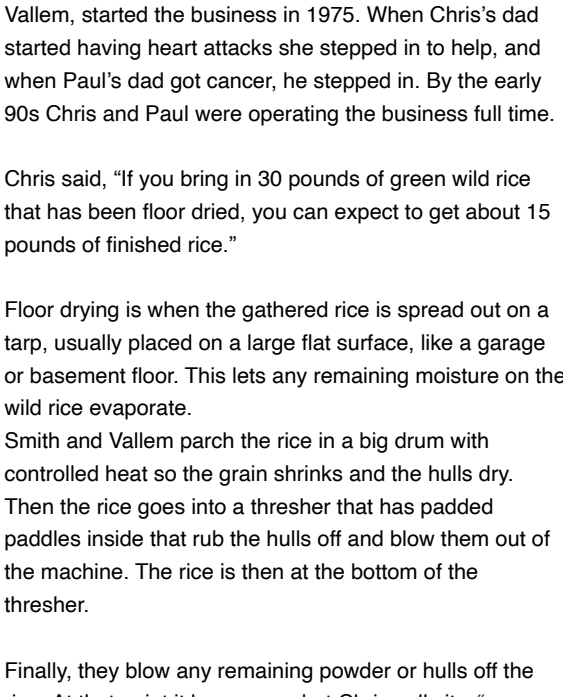
"Wild rice interested me at age 18. I worked at Beechmoor and the Natives would come in and talk about ricing, Russ recalled.

At age 21 he and his fiancé Lori (now his wife) went ricing, and they tried it in the traditional way. They then put a cauldron on an open fire and stirred it with an old canoe paddle.

Russ said 40 pounds of green rice will yield about 40 percent of finished rice. They continued to rice and some years got 100 pounds in a half-day, he said.

Then, because of rains, floods and climate change, many lakes didn't yield much wild rice.

"It's been several years since I riced on Billy Boy Flowage; it just hasn't been good. It doesn't take much to pull the rice out of the ground when the jet skis are out," he said.



Billy Boy Flowage. Photo by Jim Coors.

He and Lori continue to rice every other year, gathering about 20 pounds, which is enough for two years.

Russ said if the rice is thick you have to use poles; if it's thin you can use canoe paddles. Your canoe cannot be over 17 feet long and 38 inches wide. You must be a Wisconsin resident to rice and you must get a license (\$ 8.25) but the license also allows immediate family members to harvest rice. No mechanical devices can be used to harvest rice and the gathering hours are from 10 a.m. until sunset.

Chris Smith, of Hayward, is another person who knows her wild rice. She and Paul Vallem own the Rice Shack where they finish the unprocessed rice that harvesters bring in.

Chris said her father, Bud Smith, and Paul's father, Ray Vallem, started the business in 1975. When Chris's dad started having heart attacks she stepped in to help, and when Paul's dad got cancer, he stepped in. By the early 90s Chris and Paul were operating the business full time.

Chris said, "If you bring in 30 pounds of green wild rice that has been floor dried, you can expect to get about 15 pounds of finished rice."

Floor drying is when the gathered rice is spread out on a tarp, usually placed on a large flat surface, like a garage or basement floor. This lets any remaining moisture on the wild rice evaporate.

Smith and Vallem parch the rice in a big drum with controlled heat so the grain shrinks and the hulls dry. Then the rice goes into a thresher that has padded paddles inside that rub the hulls off and blow them out of the machine. The rice is then at the bottom of the thresher.

Finally, they blow any remaining powder or hulls off the rice. At that point it becomes what Chris calls it—"green gold."

"How is the harvest this year?" I asked her. "Better than poor, less than average. It's mediocre because of the bad weather," replied Chris.

Finally, this from a Minnesota outdoorsman who recently riced for the first time: "Legend has it that when the Chippewa moved west centuries ago, they were inspired by a vision in which they were told they would find abundant food waiting for them on top of the water. Many believe wild rice is the fulfillment of that prophecy."

KEVIN FINNEY - WILD RICE IN OLD WAYS, NEW BATTLES

Paul Demain hosted [this interview](#) with Kevin Finney about the history and cultivation of wild rice. From IndianCountryTV.

Share Tweet Forward

[View this email in your browser](#)

"Maybe the best thing about harvesting wild rice, other than a taste that seems to reflect the soul of our natural world, is the setting where this delicate grain is gathered."

--- Dave Zeug from "Harvesting Wild Rice"



CONGRATULATIONS TO 4TH OF JULY BOAT PARADE WINNERS

First place - top photo. Second place - bottom photo. It has been a wonderful summer on the lake! See you again next year.



COLA'S NEW WEBSITE

COLA's [website](#) has been completely redesigned. Please let us know what you think of the new look.

ALL OF LAC COURTE OREILLES EXPECTED TO BE LISTED AS AN IMPAIRED WATER BODY

The WDNR draft 2018 impaired water list will be published for public comment in the coming weeks. In addition to Musky Bay, all of Lac Courte Oreilles is expected to be included based on depleted dissolved oxygen levels.

COLA requested this action, which was spurred, in part, by last fall's extensive fish kill along with the well-documented low oxygen levels and high water temperatures ([more](#)).

LCO CREEL SURVEY REPORT MAY 7, 2016 TO MARCH 5, 2017

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources regularly conducts fishery surveys of area lakes and reservoirs to gather information on species composition, population size, reproductive success, size/age distribution, and growth rates. [Here are the recent results for LCO.](#)

WISCONSIN'S NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD HAS APPROVED WDNR'S SCOPE STATEMENT DEALING WITH LCO'S PHOSPHORUS STANDARD

Wisconsin's Natural Resources Board has now joined Governor Scott Walker in the approval of a scope statement submitted by the WDNR on that initiates the rulemaking process to establish a more protective water quality standard for LCO. The current phosphorus standard for the lake is set at 15 ppb by the state. COLA and the LCO tribe have asked that the limit be lowered to 10 ppm. Now its up to the WDNR to follow through with the rule making.

"LEGACY PHOSPHORUS" AND OUR WATERS"

A [new study](#) quantifies the need to reduce phosphorus in our soils—for the health of our lakes and rivers.

By Jenny Seifert, Grow - Wisconsin's Magazine for the Life Sciences, UW College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR COLA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2017!

COLA membership is a pretty good deal. For only 25\$/year, you help COLA protect LCO, and you get a picnic in return!

[Renew your membership](#) today in one of Wisconsin's most active and respected lake associations.

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

LAKESHORE PROPERTY OWNER GUIDES

These guides provide guidance on selection of native plants as well as simple and inexpensive best practices for lakeshore property owners.

[Healthy Lakes 350 ft2 Native Planting Companion Guide](#)

[2014-2017 Wisconsin's Healthy Lakes Implementation Plan](#)

THE LAC COURTE OREILLES FOUNDATION LEGACY FUND

Many families have enjoyed LCO's pristine beauty for generations. Your generous donations over the past eight years have helped preserve the lake and remain the essential funing for current activities. But now we have another opportunity to protect the lake far into the future by putting the Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation into your estate plans.

The LCO Foundation teamed up with the Eau Claire Community Foundation to create the [Lac Courte Oreilles Legacy Fund](#). Endowment gifts include: planned gifts such as a bequest in a will, charitable remainder trust, or outright gifts, such as of cash, or stock.

PHASE 2 OF 3-PART LCO MUSKY RECOVERY PLAN

Phase 2 of 3 part LCO Musky recovery plan is underway - 3,900 extended growth Musky to be released Oct 11 -12 with pit tags. See [Issue #19 Short Ears, Long Tales](#) for more information about the recovery plan. More coming.

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears, Long Tales, [let us know](#).

Help COLA by sharing this newsletter with friends.

[ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES](#)

Kathy Hanson is a free-lance writer for various local and regional newspapers and Duluth magazines. She is the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine and copy editor for the Bayfield County Journal. She was previously a staff reporter, business writer, columnist and copy editor for the Sawyer County Record.

COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

The eNewsletter Editor can be reached at:

COLA
P.O. Box 702
Hayward, WI 54843
courte.oreilles.lakes.association@gmail.com