**Ken Weyaus Sr Fall Ricing**

Ricing is a very important seasonal activity for the Ojibwe, because wild rice was traditionally the main source of food for our people.

Wild ricing begins in August and runs through October – about three months.  In the fall, the rice is not on the big lakes – it’s on the shallow lakes with the muddy bottoms.  So people would move from the large lakes, where they had been in the summer, to the smaller lakes.

First they would send certain people out to the lakes to see which ones were best that year for ricing.  Wild rice depends on Mother Nature.  It does not grow on the same lake each year – there may be too much or too little water.  So the Ojibwe wouldn’t go to the same place each year.

They would find a good lake where they could stay all season, and they would set up camp there.  They wouldn’t let the people go out and start ricing until the rice was ripe and ready.

Back in those days, each person had a section on the lake.  The would tie their section off and kind of make boundaries, and they wouldn’t go in another section.

They would go out in canoes.  One person would move the canoe forward by pushing off the lake bottom with a long pole, and the other would use two shorter sticks to knock the rice into the canoe.

When they got enough rice to fill up their canoe, they came back in and started processing the wild rice right away.  First they would dry out the rice.  After it was dry, they would start parching it over heat.  They would parch it in big metal kettles to get all the moisture out.

Wild rice has got a kernel and a husk around it.  You also parch the rice so the husk will come off.

After the parching, they dig a pit in the ground.  This is the men’s job.  They dig the pit about one and a half feet deep and fill it with wild rice kernels.

Then they stand in the pit and move their feet up and down to get the husks off of the kernels.  However, this can easily break the kernels.  So you have two poles to lean on.  You have to know how much weight to put on the kernels without breaking them.  It takes about 30 to 45 minutes to do one pit.

Then, after that is finished, the men give the rice to the women to winnow it.  The women put the rice in a winnowing tray and gently toss it in the air.  The wind catches the husks and blows them away, and the kernels fall back into the tray.

This whole process for one canoe load of rice takes maybe three to four days.  Once one load of rice is finished, you go back out again.  By that time, the plants that had been knocked down the last time are standing up again.

Once ricing season was over, the people would go back out to untie their boundary markers.  They would shake those markers into their canoes and get more rice that way.

The Ojibwe gathered enough wild rice to last year-round, because it was their main food source.  They would figure out what they needed for the winter, and the rest they would take out to the spring sugarbush camp and store in the ground.  That supply would be enough to last them from the spring through the next fall.

Ricing is something Mille Lacs Band members still do today.  It is one of our most important traditions.