

'Fish Sticks' could lead to more fish fries on Kangaroo

Door County's Kangaroo Lake will be among the first waters in Northeastern Wisconsin to benefit from a tree recycling project that benefits fish — and fishermen.

Known as "Fish Sticks," the habitat restoration project is set to begin Valentine's Day and is geared toward finned swimmers while also benefiting insects, birds, frogs and turtles.

Chris Anderson, marketing director of The Nature Conservancy's Minneapolis office, said the Kangaroo Lake Association is partnering with TNC to reuse trees that the Conservancy needed to remove from one of its adjacent preserves.

Trees from the tree-thinning project will be cut by Harbor Lumber of Baileys Harbor and dragged to the lake. Volunteers will then move trees by hand and with ATVs across the ice, placing and securing them in eight locations.



Each Fish Stick complex will include two trees placed perpendicular to the shoreline, crossed and secured to each other and to the shoreline with cable to prevent movement after ice-out, when they will sink into the water.

Tom Schneider, Kangaroo Lakes Association president, said the project attempts to balance homeowners' desire to enjoy their lake property with habitat and shoreline where aquatic plants, large and small fish, birds, reptiles, animals and all of nature in general can thrive.

Mike Grimm, conservation ecologist with The Nature Conservancy in Sturgeon Bay, said the partially submerged trees will provide habitat for many fish and

invertebrates in the lake, protect the shoreline from wave erosion and provide calmer waters where submerged plants can get established, providing even more habitat for fish and other creatures.

"They will also provide resting and feeding sites for frogs, turtles, dragonflies and many lakeshore birds, particularly flycatchers and kingfishers," Grimm said.

A study conducted by the University of Wisconsin's Center for Limnology in northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan showed that there are significantly more trees and other woody debris in undeveloped lakes than in developed lakes.

Ninety-two percent of the life in a lake has its origin at the shoreline. When logs and trees are absent in the water at the shoreline, the number and size of fish decline. Songbirds disappear from the shore-

line, frogs and turtles are all but eliminated and healthy aquatic plants are reduced significantly.

This approach to protect shoreline and improve fish habitat has been used successfully in other places, including Douglas and Bayfield counties where it helped reduce the impact of developments on lake shorelines.

A three-year Shoreline Preservation and Restoration Planning grant, which the Kangaroo Lake Association received from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 2014, supports the Fish Sticks Project and the Bulrush Restoration Project already under way on Kangaroo Lake.

Schneider hopes that with the success of these first-year efforts, more shoreline landowners will participate in our effort to balance the

development that has occurred over the years with shoreline restoration according to Mother Nature.

Faster service

The DNR has streamlined the permit process for lakefront property owners who want to more quickly create habitat improvements — tree drops, fish cribs or fish spawning reefs, for example — near their shoreline.

A link to the permit applications and a step-by-step guide for "Fish Stick" projects are available at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/outreach/fishsticks.html>.

DNR fisheries biologists say more people wanted to improve fish habitat along their shoreline property, so agency staff created a general permit and an online guide to make the process easier.

The new general permit process costs less and is reviewed faster, allowing property owners on lakes to have a streamlined permitting process to submerge groups of trees near their shoreline.

It also allows for fish sticks sites constructed in later years and by different property owners on the same lake to "add on" to an existing approved permit without a new application fee — something the DNR has never done before.

The general permit identifies the location, design, and other standards and conditions these beneficial project must meet to qualify for the general permit and to ensure minimal impacts to public rights in the waterway.

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