

Wis. DNR Makes 'Fish Sticks' for Lake Nebagamon

Posted at: 02/13/2013 5:12 PM
Updated at: 02/13/2013 8:32 PM
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On snow-covered Lake Nebagamon, the Wisconsin DNR unloaded 160 trees from the Brule State Forest onto the ice.

"Those trees on the shore are eventually going to fall in anyway so we didn't want to steal from the bank, so to speak," said DNR fisheries biologist Scott Toshner. "We are basically speeding up the clock by adding wood off-site, off-water."

Building "fish sticks" is a multi-step process. It takes some chopping, a lot of hauling, and some

precise placement. The DNR will build 35 "fish stick" formations along the shoreline of Lake Nebagamon. Five trees make up one "A" formation. When the ice goes out, the trees will sink to create a wooded habitat for fish and wildlife.

The project started with one of Will Kiefer's favorite past times, he loves to fish walleye. As a member of the Lake Nebagamon Association, Kiefer said he always hears the same complaint from fishermen.

"They all say it's hard to catch a walleye and also it's turning into a bass lake," said Kiefer.

So last year the association teamed up with the DNR to chop, haul, and place trees to get those walleye back.

"We have done a lot of snorkeling with underwater cameras around these wood placements and it's amazing, it's like snorkeling in the Caribbean reef," said Toshner.

Tiny micro-organisms feed on the submerged trees, which starts the food chain from little bugs to big bugs, and little fish to big fish. The "fish sticks" attract other critters, too.

"Wildlife use these [branches] to bask on, like turtles. King fishers you'll see on these branches a lot, also drawn to the fish," Toshner said.

The DNR said some people worry "fish sticks" make the shoreline look messy, but the benefits of wood in water are catching on.

"I've had people tell me 'that looks like the boundary waters,' and then they also see how they can catch fish off of them and next thing we know we have more enrollment," said Toshner.

This year, the DNR had 12 private property owners enroll in the "fish sticks" program on Lake Nebagamon. Last year, nine private lakeshore properties were part of the program.