

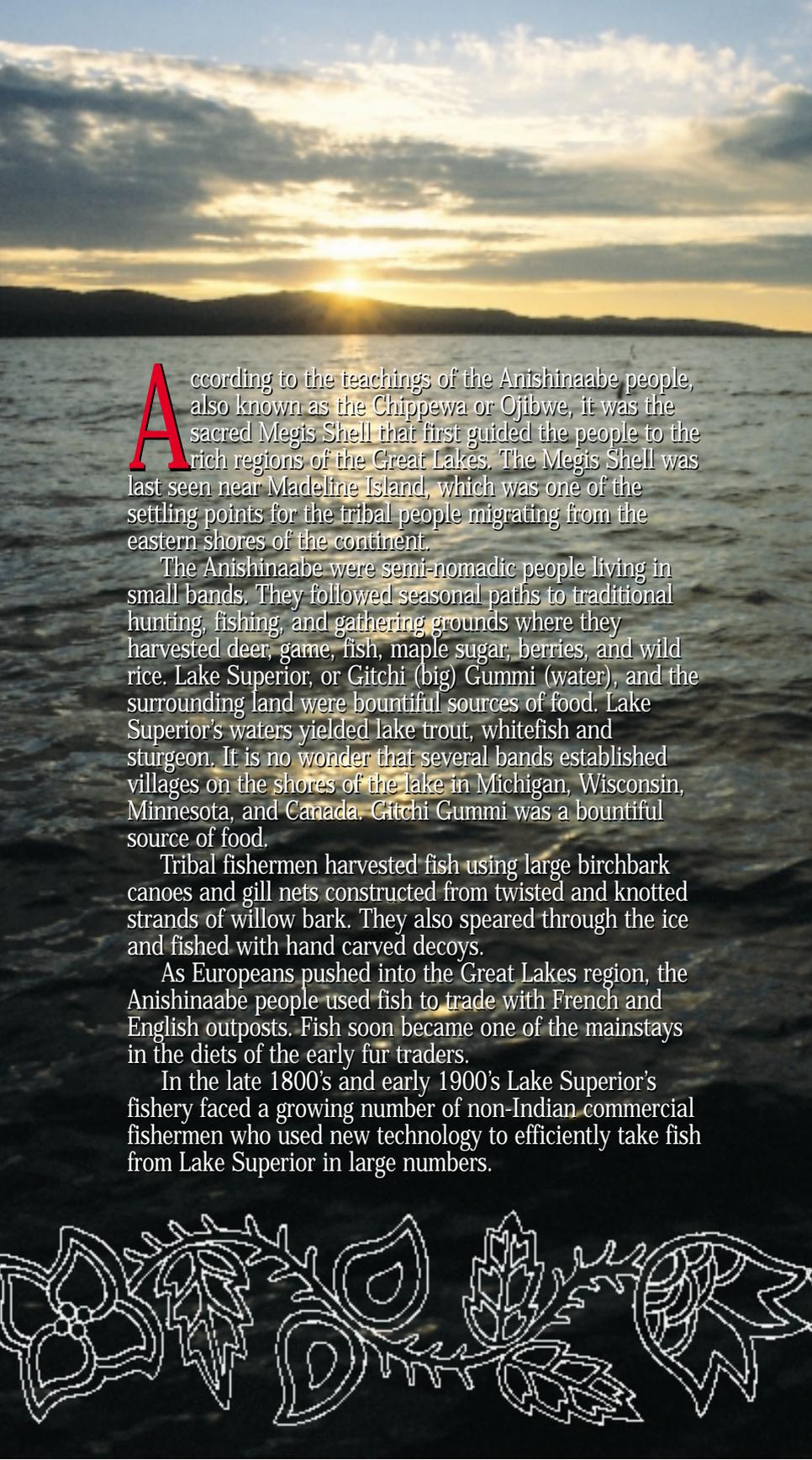
LAKE SUPERIOR

Indian Fishery



P.O. Box 9
Odanah, WI 54861
Phone 715-682-6619





According to the teachings of the Anishinaabe people, also known as the Chippewa or Ojibwe, it was the sacred Megis Shell that first guided the people to the rich regions of the Great Lakes. The Megis Shell was last seen near Madeline Island, which was one of the settling points for the tribal people migrating from the eastern shores of the continent.

The Anishinaabe were semi-nomadic people living in small bands. They followed seasonal paths to traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering grounds where they harvested deer, game, fish, maple sugar, berries, and wild rice. Lake Superior, or Gitchi (big) Gummi (water), and the surrounding land were bountiful sources of food. Lake Superior's waters yielded lake trout, whitefish and sturgeon. It is no wonder that several bands established villages on the shores of the lake in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Canada. Gitchi Gummi was a bountiful source of food.

Tribal fishermen harvested fish using large birchbark canoes and gill nets constructed from twisted and knotted strands of willow bark. They also speared through the ice and fished with hand carved decoys.

As Europeans pushed into the Great Lakes region, the Anishinaabe people used fish to trade with French and English outposts. Fish soon became one of the mainstays in the diets of the early fur traders.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's Lake Superior's fishery faced a growing number of non-Indian commercial fishermen who used new technology to efficiently take fish from Lake Superior in large numbers.

MEGIS SHELL



As a result of the increased fishing pressure and the introduction of many exotic fish, native fish populations were drastically reduced and populations of many species remain low today.

Particularly devastating to the Lake Superior fishery was

the introduction of the parasitic sea lamprey in the early 1950's. The impact of the sea lamprey, which entered the lake via the Welland Canal, coupled with an intensive commercial fishery reduced Lake Superior's commercial lake trout harvest from 3.1 million pounds in 1951 to only 380,000 pounds in 1960. Whitefish harvest dropped 17 percent a year from 1955 to 1960. Tribal fishermen who fished both commercially and for subsistence suffered both from the decreased populations of fish and the regulations



European settlement brought increased pressure on Lake Superior's fishery. The 1930's fishing boom heavily exploited many popular species.

imposed by the state departments of natural resources which sought to regulate tribal harvest despite treaty agreements.

The abundance to which the Megis led the Anishinaabe people has vanished, but the people have not, and their love for Gitchi Gummi has not. The people have endured, and as one with the land and the water, will endure long into the future.



A small boat fisherman brings in his catch.



Some tribal fishermen use small boats.



Netting through the ice on Lake Superior.

A tribal fishing tug heads out to check nets.

The Treaty Commercial Fishery

In more recent years, tribes have gone to court to re-affirm tribal rights to fish in Lake Superior. These rights were retained in the Treaties of 1836, 1842 and 1854 when tribes ceded lands to the United States government. The Jondreau and Fox decisions in Michigan and the Gurnoe decision in Wisconsin upheld the reserved right of the tribes to harvest both for commercial and subsistence purposes.

Treaty harvest in Lake Superior is regulated by the tribes, and tribal fishermen adhere to restricted quotas in order to provide opportunity for non-Indian fishing as well. The Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), an inter-tribal natural resource management organization representing eleven Ojibwe bands, assists its members in the regulation of the treaty commercial fishery in Lake Superior.

GLIFWC member bands who fish commercially in Lake Superior include the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians in Wisconsin and the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and the Bay Mills Indian Community in Michigan. Large and small boats which operate during the open water season are licensed through the respective tribes and must adhere to tribally adopted codes regulating the fishery.

During winter months, when sheltered bays turn solid with ice, snowmobiles instead of boats transport fishermen out to the stakes which mark their nets, and the catch is pulled through holes chopped in the ice.

Fishing is conducted primarily with gill nets from both the large tugs and small boats. Some fishermen also harvest fish with trap nets. While the majority of the fishery is comprised of small boats, the majority of the harvest is taken by large boats. Whitefish, lake trout, siscowet

(or fat trout), herring, and salmon make up over 95% of the tribal commercial harvest. Whitefish is the predominant species sought by tribal fishermen.

The life of the commercial fisherman remains rugged and challenging. For many it is a life passed down from generation to generation. It is a way of life, lived close to nature and requiring intimate knowledge of the big water, Gitchi Gummi, and its fishery.

GLIFWC performs annual lake trout assessments in Lake Superior.



Tribally tagged lake trout at Red Cliff's Buffalo Bay Fish Market.



Management of the Treaty Fishery

Like all fishing activity today, the treaty commercial fishery is strictly regulated and limited in scope. Tribes work with state, federal, and Canadian governments in co-managing the lake, recognizing that cooperation between all who value and rely on it as a resource will protect it most fully. Regulation is critical for effective resource management. Establishing seasons, closed areas and harvest limits and enforcing tribal laws are part of tribal self-regulation of the Great Lakes fishery. Conservation enforcement is provided through the

Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission's Enforcement Division and tribal enforcement officers. Fully-certified conservation officers routinely monitor treaty commercial fishing activity both on and off the water.

Violators are tried in tribal courts which strictly enforce the regulations and ordinances established by the respective tribal councils. Tribal judges are granted the authority to adjudicate violations of natural resource codes by tribal members, including those codes which regulated off-reservation hunting and fishing activities.

In Wisconsin the Bad River and Red Cliff Bands enter into a ten-year agreement with the State of Wisconsin. The agreement defines the treaty commercial fishery, including quotas, seasons, and fishing areas. Fishermen from the Bay Mills Indian Community also fish under an agreement with the state of Michigan. The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community exercises its fishing rights within the guidelines of its own fishery management plan.

Tribes use information gathered through biological assessments and monitoring of the treaty commercial fishery to determine quotas and other regulations pertaining to the Lake Superior treaty fishery. Biologists from the tribes and from GLIFWC have been actively involved in annual assessments and monitoring the treaty commercial fishery, as well as conservation activities for years.

Population information is gathered through spring and fall assessments. Approximately four to six thousand fish are measured each year for assessment purposes. Biological and statistical

GLIFWC wardens routinely monitor the treaty fishery in Lake Superior.

Tagging and data collection are part of GLIFWC's annual spring and fall assessments on the lake trout and whitefish populations.

information is collected from assessment netting, monitoring commercial fishermen, and catch reports filed by tribal fishermen. Whitefish, lake trout and other species are sampled at selected sites to record size, growth, mortality, and abundance. This data is essential in determining the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), a figure which provides the basis for tribal and non-Indian lake trout harvest quotas in waters of the 1842 ceded area. Biologists compile monitoring, harvest, and effort information into an annual commercial catch statistics report which is produced jointly by GLIFWC and tribal biological staff.

Hatchery staff use fyke nets to trap walleye for hatchery use.



Brook trout produced by a tribal hatchery for brood stock.

GLIFWC fisheries staff pull lamprey nets as part of annual lamprey assessments.

Tribal Fishery Enhancement and Preservation Programs



Ojibwe tribes have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to protect and preserve the Lake Superior fishery through tribally operated fisheries programs and through member tribes' support of GLIFWC's Great Lakes activities.

Tribal biologists not only participate in fish assessments and monitoring of the fishery, but also have developed successful on-reservation hatchery programs. The Red Cliff, Bad River, and Keweenaw bands maintain successful and expanding fish hatcheries. Keweenaw Bay moved into new hatchery facilities in 1994, and the Red Cliff Hatchery occupied its new quarters in 1995. Bad River has renovated and expanded existing facilities. These facilities allow the hatcheries to rear fish to fingerling (3"-4") or yearling (6"-8") size prior to stocking. Tribal hatcheries rear and stock lake trout, "coaster" brook trout and walleye into Lake Superior.

Tribal and GLIFWC fisheries managers make every effort to work in cooperation with local, state, and federal organizations towards the enhancement of the Lake Superior fishery. GLIFWC participates annually in sea lamprey population assessments in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sea Lamprey Control Program. Data collected on lamprey in tributary rivers to Lake Superior help determine the status of the lamprey population and effectiveness of population control measures. GLIFWC fisheries biologists have also coordinated activities for studies on exotic river ruffe, which are decimating the prey fish communities in rivers.

The Ojibwe tribes recognize that the Lake Superior fishery is a shared resource and one which requires participation and cooperation to effectively manage. A priority for Ojibwe tribes is the preservation of the resource for generations to come.

The parasitic lamprey attaches to lake trout, leaving huge scars and killing many.

Spring and fall assessments provide information for GLIFWC's data base on lake trout and whitefish populations.



Lake Superior's water quality is affected by pollution from many sources.



appointed to the Binational Program, a branch of the IJC, and GLIFWC has gone on record in support of the IJC's call for "zero discharge" into Lake Superior. GLIFWC also passed a resolution supporting the declaration of Lake Superior as an Outstanding Resource Water (ORW). An ORW status would provide additional protection to the lake's water quality.

The tribes keep a watchful eye on development proposals, such as paper mills and mines, which may adversely impact Lake Superior. The tribes seek to guarantee that industry adhere to regulations that reduce the risk of further environmental contamination. Tribes also have representation to committees of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC), an international organization, devoted to the management of the Great Lakes fishery.



Rehabilitation of the lake trout population has been one of the GLFC's long-term goals. In 1996 lake trout were considered rehabilitated, in other words self-sustaining populations of lake trout are reproducing sufficiently to guarantee a continuing lake trout fishery. Lake trout rehabilitation is a hard-won battle which has required the cooperation of numerous state, federal, and tribal governments over many years. Tribes have cooperated, and continue to cooperate, in both population assessments as well as lake trout stocking programs.



Marketing

Fresh and smoked fish caught by tribal fishermen can often be found at roadside stands near reservations. Several retail and wholesale outlets are also operated by tribes or tribal fishermen.

(See attached insert for addresses of tribal outlets for fish.)

Fish are transported on ice to market.
Smoked fish - a delicacy.

Lake trout fillets at Buffalo Bay Fish Market, Red Cliff.

