

# Restoring Great Lakes Wetlands

That is the question that New York Sea Grant's community issues specialist **Dave Greene** and others are asking. Wild rice is an indigenous North American plant that helps stabilize wetlands. It is also considered sacred by Native cultures.

NYSG's Greene is part of a developing network that includes Cornell University's American Indian Program, native peoples, environmentalists, heirloom seed preservationists, and farmers who are interested in the preservation of seeds and habitats of culturally significant plants such as native wild rice.

"The Plant Materials staff of the Natural Resource Conservation Service of United States Department of Agriculture is interested in developing wild rice as an alternative plant to replace the invasive purple loosestrife and *Phragmites* in wetlands areas," Greene explains. "Organic farmers and heirloom seed preservationists are interested in preserving wild rice for its heritage value. For native peoples, wild rice is a culturally sacred plant and one that is a source of food and economic benefits."

The network hopes to link to other groups outside the region such as the White Earth Land Recovery Project, based in Minnesota, which is concerned with wild rice. Greene says the St. Regis Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne on the St. Lawrence River has sown wild rice, and harvested it for family food use. He notes that wild

rice growing naturally is more honored by native peoples than a paddy-cultivated wild rice. Wild rice is harvested and sold in some areas.

A work team is currently looking at the feasibility for seeding wild rice both as a habitat restoration plant and as a food crop. The team is coordinating with Cornell's indigenous seed sharing and preservation group and would like to work with the White Earth Land Recovery Project to extend information to interested parties throughout the Great Lakes. A New York Sea Grant fact sheet on wild rice is expected in the coming months.

— **Kara Lynn Dunn with H. David Greene**

**This typical clump of wild rice plants in a freshwater tidal marsh in South Carolina helps to stabilize wetlands. Wild rice occurs in small colonies in the south, while further north, it is found in extensive, almost monoculture stands. Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter F. Lee**

|| *Wild Rice—Can this culturally, environmentally and economically significant plant help restore wetlands in northeastern North America?* ||

— *H. David Greene*

