**Rusty Crayfish Trapping in Wood County**

Working with the Wood County Land Conservation Department for six years now I have had the opportunity to be involved in numerous interesting and educational programs and projects. In 2009 Paul Skawinski, Golden Sands RC & D, contacted me to see if I wanted to help estimate the Rusty Crayfish population in the Yellow River. I didn’t know much about Rusty Crayfish and going into the field with Paul is always a positive learning experience so I jumped at the opportunity. Our main goal was to figure out an effective way for lake groups to trap Rusty Crayfish as a form of control. We tested three spots along the Yellow River in Wood County to establish where would be most effective to conduct our trapping study. We borrowed twenty traps from University of Wisconsin Stevens Point to start with. We tried a variety of bait; from donated meat scraps wrapped in cheese cloth to cans of cat food slightly open. We set the traps in different depths of water, different river substrates and different water flow rates to research the most effective trapping methods. On our first day of setting the traps, the river bottom seemed to be crawling with crayfish that would quickly scurry away as a foot approached; other wildlife seemed to be nonexistent.

After letting the traps soak for 48 hours we came back with 5 gallon buckets, tongs, our interns and a lot of curiosity. We started pulling traps and collecting data on the crayfish and about the traps themselves so we could see if there were certain environmental aspects that we could manipulate to improve the numbers we were catching. The first day we ended up catching over 2,000 crayfish and as they were lying at our feet we kept asking ourselves now what? Previously working wildlife rehabilitation, I thought of finding a wildlife rehabber that could use an endless supply of free food for the summer. We started filling gallon freezer bags and filling my home freezer with crayfish, my husband was thrilled! A raccoon rehabber in the Rome, WI area said she had 6 raccoons and would love them. It didn’t take long before we figured out we had to many crayfish and needed to find another place. So we contacted Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary in Green Bay, WI and they said they would absolutely take them. The summary of the 2009 trapping season went like this: 1 month, 26 traps, 15,000 rusty crayfish removed from the Yellow River and 40 happy raccoons.

Wood County currently does not have lake associations and I didn’t want all of our hard work and knowledge gained to end with one summer but I also didn’t have time to devote to checking traps. I contacted Todd Steward, Advanced Biology teacher at Pittsville High School in Pittsville, WI to see if he would be interested in partnering with Wood County Land Conservation Department to pilot a research project. Being that the Yellow River is right behind the High School and they already had a unit that studied water quality, a trapping research project would fit right in. So I got started getting all the logistics worked out. Mr. Steward applied for and received a grant to buy more waiters for the students to use. I worked on securing money to build traps and getting some construction blueprints for them. We ended up getting measurements from an existing trap and coming up with our own set of blueprints. The previous blueprints were not very helpful at all. I pursued and was successful in getting a freezer donated from a local dealer to store our catch until we could meet Bay Beach Wildlife Rehab staff to exchange them. Wood Co LCD made 10 traps; we also borrowed some from UWSP to have enough to cover the three class periods of advanced biology that would take part in the research project. Then I started coming up with the actually research project, and presented it to the students at the end of April and trapping started the first part of May. We decided to start trapping in May as the female crayfish would still be in berry meaning they were holding eggs under their tails, rather than all the eggs being hatched out as we had the first time we trapped. The students were placed in groups of 2-3 per trap. They made data sheets to record: depth of water the trap was placed in, flow rate where trap was placed, characteristics of river where trap was placed, ex-sun/shade, ratio of male to female, what bait was used, what container bait was placed in, water temperature, air temperature, substrate where trap was placed, etc. They checked their traps every other day for 2 weeks and gathered data. They turned their data into graphs, reports and theories and had class discussions about what they found. The students seemed to enjoy the project even with the occasional wet clothes that might have happened. We have had two successful years of this project and are expanding the project to two schools this school year. It was satisfying for me to get the students out doing real world applications and having them gain appreciation for natural resources.

