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## **Leech Lake Ojibwe: Our Strategies**

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**Narrator:** The Leech Lake Band has established its own Division of Resource Management. The department employs scientists and environmentalists who, among other things, work to ensure that wild rice will be available for future generations.

**Bruce Johnson, Director, Leech Lake Division of Resources Management:** That's why we have such good scientists employed. To help us save what we have left—which isn't much left. Hopefully we can turn that trend around. I think we are. The last few years it's changed a lot.

**Becky Knowles, Plant Ecologist, Leech Lake Division of Resources Management:** The wild rice, in and of itself, is just naturally highly variable, so the band has recognized that understanding the variability of rice is very important, and as far back as nearly 20 years ago, they began collecting aerial photography of the wild- rice beds. They fly the rice beds just at this time of year when the rice has just ripened, and so it has coloration that distinguishes it from the surrounding vegetation. So, what we've done in the past is just compare photos to photos, and we can see from year to year that the overall coverage of rice is expanding or contracting, so that we can know exactly where we need to focus our protection efforts.

**Jeff Harper, Water Quality Specialist, Leech Lake Division of Resources Management:** In 1995, we did a study on wild rice, and we were also looking for mercury and PCBs and other widely known chemicals that are kind of out there a lot. We found that the plant does uptake those chemicals. We know that like in humans, they cause nerve damage. We don't know what that does to the wild rice. We do know that we need clean water for the wild rice.

**Levi Brown, Environmental Director, Leech Lake Division of Resources Management:** Well, within our water program, we do a lot of water sampling on a majority of the lakes within Leech Lake. But what we're looking for is a baseline data background, so we can measure the changes from year to year, and what's going on with the water.

**Jeff Harper:** As part of my job, when we go out on the lakes, we usually do a map study of the area—locate all the homes and houses, any kind of industry, septic systems, everything that goes on around the lake, the rivers that flow in and out of the lake—and that's just to get some baseline information. We use several different types of equipment, and we're looking at water quality. We take measurements for dissolved oxygen, conductivity, pH, and what we're doing is we're collecting baseline data. A lot of the lakes nobody's ever done any kind of study work on, so we're trying to see where they're at today.



**Jamie Mitchell, Chief Conservation Officer, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe:** We protect our natural resources. Fish, game, wild rice, and whatever else falls in between there.

**Narrator:** The Leech Lake Ojibwe monitor the lakes on their reservation and regulate the way that rice is harvested. They also enforce rules and regulations that protect other natural resources.

