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Fishing contributes \$221.5 million to local economy

By Jennifer K. Woldt
of *The Northwestern* October 14, 2006

Instead of just reeling in fish and dropping their catch in the bucket, anglers who descend on Lake Winnebago provide a good boost to the local economy.

It's estimated that fishing within the Lake Winnebago system contributes \$221.5 million to the local economy throughout the year. The economic impact of fishing was the topic of discussion during the final event of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's Earth Charter Community Summit Friday.



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Tom Gwinn and Susan Gustafson of Milwaukee came to Oshkosh to fish and stay a couple of days this summer. Gwinn removes the hook from the sheephead that he caught at Rainbow Park.
Northwestern photo by Joe Sienkiewicz

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Catherine Neiswender, of the Winnebago County UW-Extension, presented the findings of a study her office completed in conjunction with UW-Green Bay professor John Stoll during Friday's discussion.

In addition to showing how valuable fishing on Lake Winnebago is to the local economy, the study also serves as a tool to predict how changes in the lake could negatively affect the local economy.

"We really started out with a look towards the lake system and what it's worth," Stoll said. "But given what we've got, how does what we've got change as we make it better or if it deteriorates?"

Rob McLennan, a water supervisor with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, said one way the economic impact of the Lake Winnebago system could be drastically affected is if invasive species impacted the quality of fishing available on the lake.

Neiswender said the study predicted that if fishing decreased, there would be a loss of \$74.8 million to the local economy because fewer people would come to fish. The study estimates there would be a 50 percent loss in out-of-state anglers and 20 percent of in-state anglers would probably stop coming to fish on the lake.

"Invasive species are one of those things that could have an impact on the Lake Winnebago system," McLennan said. "But what scares me is the potential for fish diseases, the things you can't see."

But it's not only invasive species that affect the lake's economic impact. Other factors, such as

poor construction practices that result in poor water quality or high gas prices, can also take a toll on fishing.

"A good portion of my summer business comes from the Milwaukee and Chicago areas," said Dick Sickinger, who owns Fox River Bait and Tackle. "And this summer, because of high gas prices, they didn't want to come unless they were guaranteed to catch a bunch of fish."

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