



Spearfishing, Tourism & Golf

By Dean Musbach

Northern Wisconsin has a long tradition as a vacation paradise. Seeing the white birch and pines mirrored in a crystal clear lake is indeed reason enough to come to the northwoods. Good hunting and fishing are just icing on the cake.

In the wake of Chippewa spearing of spawning fish, both the environment and economy of northern Wisconsin are in jeopardy. Since I am not an avid fisherman, I think I have been able to view this issue with some objectivity.

The Chippewa Indians began spearing in lakes seven years ago after a federal court ruled that it was their right. Since then, daily bag limits have decreased and size limits have increased. Some lakes have even been closed to fishing completely, and this has severely injured the entire tourist economy, especially the resort business.

The ACLU, liberal media and the big city liberals have labeled the local communities as uninformed redneck bigots. I find this type of rhetoric completely appalling because I am neither uninformed nor a redneck bigot. These "rebels looking for a cause" have their own agendas that they will try to attain at anyone's expense.

This is America and all people are to have the same rights. The DNR banned all spearfishing on lakes many years ago to protect the resource. So in my opinion, allowing Chippewa spearfishing is un-American and environmentally unsound.

Many facets of Native American culture are interesting. I have long ad-

mired the Native American awareness and respect of the land, but what I have witnessed disgusts me. This spearfishing ritual has nothing to do with culture or heritage and I think if their ancestors were alive they would be ashamed and disgusted too.

Nonetheless, resorts and other businesses have been hurt because tourism here is tied to the environment. The fishing is not what it used to be, so people are looking for other forms of recreation. Golf seems to be the popular alternative.

Over the past five years, three golf courses have been built or expanded within a thirty mile radius of Minocqua alone, and two more are in construction now. The other existing golf courses in the area have made great strides in improving the quality of playing conditions.

Historically, fishing dominated the tourism in this area, but now it is obvious people are spending less time fishing and more time golfing, and this is good news for the local economies.

The town of St. Germaine is so sure of this trend that it recently began construction of its new golf course. Realizing the dilemma the town was facing, a development committee comprised of local business people researched the feasibility of a golf course and decided that the town needed to take a bold step to insure economic prosperity. There was controversy over the project, but ultimately the residents realized they needed to develop other tourist attractions.

Most golf courses in the Northwoods are daily fee, both privately and municipally owned. In 1991, these courses averaged 15,000 - 20,000 rounds with the majority of rounds being played in July and August. The golf courses would have a difficult time surviving without the tourist business. This is why it is difficult to find an exclusive private club north of Wausau.

My employer, Timber Ridge C.C., has a private owner and a private membership. The membership is made up of seasonal residents, weekend warriors and local residents. Although technically the club is private, it would not pay the bills without outside play. At Timber Ridge, if you know a member you can play the course. With the club actively selling group events, and allowing reciprocal guests, it is at a point now that if the members want to limit outside play, they will need to pay more than they realize to limit the lucrative tourist dollars.

To sum things up, spearfishing has left a sour taste in the mouths of many people in the north. Their egos, morals and values have taken a beating, and worse yet, so has the environment and the economy. One bright spot shines through this ugly experience. Golf has prospered and it has helped boost the tourist economy at a time when it was needed. Golf will never replace traditional tourist activities, but it is another good reason to come to the Northwoods.

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