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Fish Sticks: building lake habitat one tree at a time

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Pictured above is a Fish Sticks cluster that was placed on the Chetek Chain in 2018. Twenty-eight Fish Sticks projects will be completed on the six-lake chain in January and February 2019. Any lakeshore property owners that wish to create and improve habitat in 2020 should contact the Chetek Lakes Protection Association.

The mission of the Chetek Lakes Protection Association is to preserve and protect the Chetek Chain of Lakes, and their surroundings, and to enhance the water quality, fishery, boating, safety and aesthetic value, as a public recreational facility for today and for future generations.

Over the past 30 years, the CLPA has installed hundreds of fish cribs in the Chetek Chain, consisting of pallets strapped together and anchored to the bottom of the lakes. These cribs act as fish attractants and provide shelter to fish fry. The location and install dates of these fish cribs can be found on the free Chetek Lakes Fishing Map that is distributed throughout the Chetek community at several local businesses.

Continuing with CLPA's mission, a new project called "Fish Sticks" has been implemented. This project will continue to improve the Chetek Chain of Lakes by adding lake habitat with fallen trees. Fish and wildlife, such as ducks, birds and turtles, need habitat to rest, whether it is to get away from predators or spawn. Habitat in shallower waters will provide bait fish with hiding places as well as areas for plankton, insects and other food sources to grow.

A Fish Sticks cluster consists of four or five trees cabled together and then cabled to shore to prevent any movement by wave and wind action. The installation is done in late winter when the ice is determined to be safe. All permits and installation is managed by a CLPA Fish Sticks project manager. Permission from the riparian owner and DNR permit approval is required prior to start of project.

To date, the CLPA has installed 13 clusters of Fish Sticks, including some on the east side of Pokegama Lake, the north side of Burnham Island on Prairie Lake and the east side of Ojaski Lake.

In 2019, the CLPA will be installing 28 clusters of Fish Sticks throughout the Chetek Chain. If anyone who owns lakeshore property wishes to improve local lake habitat with Fish Sticks projects in 2020, they should contact the Chetek Lakes Protection Association at P.O. Box 916, Chetek, WI 54728, email info@cheteklakespa.org or call 715-790-9974.

For more information on Fish Sticks, visit the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/outreach/fishsticks.html>.