

## Itasca County School Offers Fishing In The Classroom

If Luke Adam, a 19-year teaching veteran had his way, every kid who attends school in Minnesota would have the opportunity to learn about sportfishing.

“I think there’s a big disconnect in generational learning right now,” said Adam, who teaches math in the Nashwauk-Keewatin Public Schools system in Itasca County. “Passing on knowledge from parents, grandparents or any older relative to the younger generation, especially things like fishing and hunting skills, is becoming more rare it seems.



With strong support from school administrators, and after having secured a \$20,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources through a program that seeks to recruit, retain and reactivate participants in outdoor activities—such as fishing and hunting—Adam established Spartan Angling.

Spartan Angling is not a fishing club. Nor is it a competitive team, like those becoming so popular in schools statewide. Spartan Angling is a for-credit elective class in which students meet every school day to learn the Art and Science of Fishing.



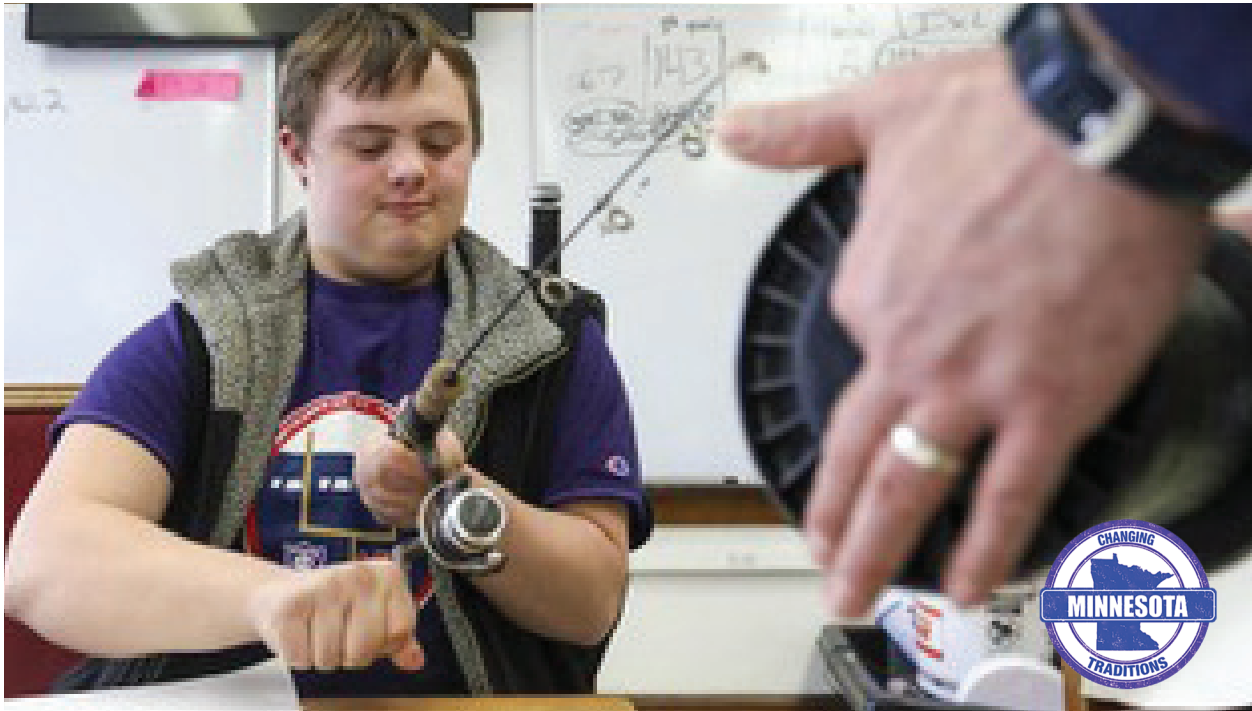
*Spartan Angling students landed a 5-foot lake sturgeon during a field trip to the Rainey River.*

“I’m a lifelong angler, and have been a teacher for my entire career,” Adam explained, “and I’ve always wondered whether it would be possible to teach a fishing class. When I stumbled upon the DNR grant, everything kind of worked out from there.”

While the teaching of practical fishing skills—casting, knot tying, lure selection etc.—is a big part of the curriculum, there’s much more to it than that, the instructor explained.

“We basically start with an introduction to fishing,” he said, “and talk about the different fish species in Minnesota. We discuss the different gamefish and the types of lures you’d use to catch them—that sort of thing. Then, we get a little scientific and talk about fish behavior and movement; the different types of lakes and how to determine a lake’s fish population using data from DNR creel and gillnet surveys.”

Spartan Angling also emphasizes the need to preserve this natural resource with sections on aquatic invasive species, shoreline management, water quality and more. Each student also takes a deep dive with a



*Proper tackle preparation is critical to fishing success. Here Alex Milstead spools line on a spinning reel while instructor Luke Adam lends a hand.*

class project on a fish species of his or her choice. They do research and report on the species' biology, forage preferences and habitat preferences through the seasons, as well as identify local waters where their particular fish can be found.

Of the 15 or so students in the class each semester, typically some are experienced in the outdoors; a few have never been fishing before, and many fall somewhere in between. So, field trips, understandably, are the most exciting and anticipated part of the class. Often the excursions are to local lakes, but the class has also fished Lake of the Woods, Lake Winnibigoshish and other larger waters.

Adam maintains a tackle lending library, as well, so students can check out gear whenever they want for their own personal excursions.

“The grant has helped with the cost of our field trips and equipment, but we also rely on donations from local business sponsors and individuals to cover the costs,” said Adam. “Likewise, volunteers from the community help out during the trips so we can make sure the kids have a good experience.



*It's not all about taking fish from the water. Spartan Angling students removed all this trash from Pickerel Creek, a popular trout stream near Pengilly.*

Exploring career paths in the outdoors is in the classroom mix as well. Clayton Godwin, who graduated from Nashwauk-Keewatin High School this year, is now in a college program that will lead him to becoming a conservation officer. The Spartan Angling program, he says, inspired him to seek a job last summer as an invasive species inspector for the county, checking boats and trailers as they arrive at and leave public access ramps. This summer he's helping take samples and monitor invasive species in various lakes in the county.

“I’ve been passionate about fishing since I was in the 6th grade,” he said, “but the program really helped me get a better understanding of different fish species and how to catch them, as well as helping improve other skills—like reading lake maps. It also inspired a stronger appreciation for the resource and how important it is that we take care of it.”

“The whole point of the class,” Adam concluded, “is to expose student to fishing, and everything that surrounds it. To give them the skills to go on and be successful anglers for the rest of their lives, if they choose to.”



*All aspects of fishing are explored, including cleaning and cooking the catch.*

If you'd like to donate cash or equipment to help young people learn more about the outdoors, contact Luke Adam at [ladam@isd319.org](mailto:ladam@isd319.org), or call 218-969-5517.

*This information is produced and distributed by the Mississippi Headwaters Board in an effort to motivate everyone to protect our natural resources. A recreation based lifestyle is part of our MN Traditions and is only preserved when we protect our aquatic resources from invaders such as zebra mussels and Eurasian milfoil. To support Minnesota Traditions join us on social media here:*

*Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MNTraditions>*

*FaceBook: <https://www.facebook.com/MinnesotaTraditions/>*

*Website: [www.minnesotatraditions.com](http://www.minnesotatraditions.com) for more information*

