

To Resa Kierstein, Colleen Pittard, Mark Stephens, Anne Danielski and Teresa Rodriguez:

I am writing to thank each of your organizations; the NRPA, Project FISH, and the Future Fisherman Foundation for your role in making the City of Portage "*Angling Adventures*" program possible and successful. This past year has brought many new smiling young faces to our community and has rewarded our staff in unique ways.

The NRPA and the Take Me Fishing organization provided the grant funding, marketing and training materials to get us started and motivated in designing a fishing program that would reach out to our community youth. As we developed our *Angling Adventures* program we found that our Park Ranger staff was the perfect fit for this challenge. As outdoor conservation enthusiast, the Rangers who enjoy fishing and boating in their personal lives have shined through with their passion to share this hobby. The City of Portage has 17 park locations, 7 of which border local water resources for fishing and boating. With budget cuts being very prominent this past year, it has certainly been a challenge to add any programming to our recreation schedule. Of the many programming options that exist, I don't think we could have found a better fit than fishing and expansion of our existing boating programs!

Mark Stephens was the inspiration of our efforts to pursue this recreational opportunity and grant funding. His short presentation at the MRPA conference in Traverse City was enough to get the wheels turning. With a year of adventures under our belt, the Project FISH training has kept these youth educated and engaged. The activities such as Pour a Pond, Backyard Bass, Knot Tying with hangers and rope, Fish printing, Tackle crafting, Live Bait traps and much more are some of the many reasons our little campers can't wait to come back for more. Additionally, the Project Fish organization has supported our program with many discounted supplies and resources that we can share.

Big thanks to Anne and Teresa at the Future Fisherman Foundation. They were so kind in allowing me to attend the Physh Ed training in Traverse City last year and we were not even part of their program! The National Training was a great experience and is the reason our *Angling Adventures* program has connected with local public schools. Our Park Rangers spent at least 4 days per semester at 2 local middle schools, guiding the students through hands on experiences after their teachers have taken them through the fishing curriculum. We have also hosted field trips for these students, many of whom put their line in the water for the first time!

Well this summer we really saw the impact of *Angling Adventures*. Each of the 4 day summer camps we offered were a huge hit and we filled registration to our limit! These youth are enthusiastic and hungry for the experiences we can now provide. And you know, we have been blessed that each and every camper has caught fish!! We have a great set up at Ramona Park with lots of open green space to practice casting, equipment handling and canoe boating safety, a long shoreline for catching live bait and fishing, a fishing pier that acts as a habitat, an enclosed building used for classroom material and storage for the canoes and equipment.....you would just be amazed to see how many little fish these kids catch from each of these areas, and just as amazed to watch them follow the safety rules such as carrying your rod, wearing glasses/hat, circle of safety, pfd fitting, points of contact when entering a canoe and following their lessons on conservation and handling a fish. I can't tell you how many parents have said their child can't wait to come back the next day. This coming year we hope to hold "family" clinics to get these parents involved so the parents aren't afraid to take the kids fishing just because they don't know the basics themselves. We also hope to extend our school visits to include more schools and under privileged students as well. Ramona Park is fully accessible with the shoreline, fishing pier, and playground all being inclusive to persons with all abilities.

Not a single one of these opportunities would have been possible with out the collaboration of support your organizations have provided. This THANK YOU!!! comes from myself, The City of Portage Parks Department, our Park Ranger staff, volunteers, our community youth and the parents. It's been rewarding for us all and we look forward to impressing many more lives.

Sincerely,

Tricia Keala

Assistant Parks Superintendent, City of Portage