Kids spend special day playing by lake

Water events, fishing offered for children with special needs

By Jeni Lewis
Central Wisconsin Sunday

Nearly 30 children with disabilities and terminal illnesses from across the state had a chance to go fishing, water-skiing, tubing and swimming Saturday at a charity event in eastern Jackson County.

The event, a Water Sport Celebration, was sponsored by the United Special Sportsmen Alliance. The national nonprofit group has been organizing outdoor activities for children with special needs for four years.

Water activities and fishing are favorites for many children, said Brigid O'Donoghue, president of the United Special Sportsmen Alliance.

“That's all the fun stuff that kids like to do,” she said.

The event was held on O'Donoghue's cranberry farm, which is about 15 miles east of Black River Falls. It's home to a lake used for farming, on which the children and adults water-skied and swam, and a pond that's stocked with fish.

“We're trying our best to catch some fish,” said Den ny Halgren of Dixon, Ill., who was one of the Professional Catfishing Association members invited to the event to help the children fish.

Large catfish patrolled the bottom of the pond. Many of the children and their families tried their luck at snaring them, but most had little success.

“Oh, we're going to get some fish,” Halgren said.

“We won't leave here until we do,” O'Donoghue said. “I think if one of them catches one of these big ones — and there's a lot of them on the bottom — it will be a big thing.” By midday, the group do,” said her father, Scott Schneeberg, who doesn't go fishing. “She always wants to fish. The second Brigid said fishing, she was here.”

Area YMCA. They are guardians of their great-nephews, Byron and Alex Gun, who both have behavioral and cognitive disorders.

Alex said he really wanted to catch a catfish and to swim in the lake. Nearly everything for Saturday's activities, from