
As tribal basketmakers, we trace our creation story to the ash tree. It is said that Gluskabe, our cultural hero, shot an arrow into the tree and from the ash came the People of the Dawn, the Wabanaki.

Theresa Secord

Penobscot

Director, Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance

Emerald Ash Borer Beetle

The black or brown ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) is an important species for Wabanaki people and their traditions. The trees are used for a variety of purposes including splint baskets, canoe paddles, and snowshoes. Ash and sweetgrass baskets are one of the best-known Wabanaki art forms, and many people make or supplement their income through basket production. This resource is at risk, however, from the introduction of an invasive species called the emerald ash borer beetle.

Nationally:

The beetle was discovered in Michigan in 2002 and probably arrived in packing materials imported from Asia. The beetle has destroyed over ten million trees in Michigan, and can now be found in thirteen states and two Canadian provinces.

Maine:

Maine has been actively trying to prevent the spread of the emerald ash borer and stands to lose over four million ash trees if the beetle is established here. The ability of the tribes to protect this important cultural resource is constrained because most of the ash trees grow off reservation lands, where tribes do not have jurisdiction. Reservation resources are at risk as well because the beetle can move anywhere there are ash trees.

Wabanaki tribal governments and organizations such as the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA) are taking a lead on this issue. Each tribe has an office of environmental management, and tribal foresters and ash beetle specialists are charged with partnering with state and local agencies to create prevention and response plans. The hope is that by forming partnerships among the tribes, the Maine Forest Service, the Maine Department of Agriculture, and other organizations, the introduction of this insect and the destruction to follow can be prevented.

Emerald Ash Borer Beetle Newspaper Headlines:

Invasive insect threatens Maine trees

Anonymous

Bangor Daily News

July 1, 2009

The state's forests are currently under threat from two exotic, invasive insects: the Asian longhorned beetle and the emerald ash borer. The emerald ash borer - which can kill a tree in three to five years and has the potential to kill all ash trees in North America - has already destroyed millions of trees in the Midwest.

With more than seventeen million acres of forestland, Maine is the most heavily forested state in the nation. Both of these insects have the potential of destroying Maine's woodlands and affecting its wood products, tourism, and maple sugar industries.

Beetle's threat to ash trees also puts tribal art at risk

Deirdre Fleming

Maine Outdoor Journal

November 30, 2009

Maine Forest Service entomologist Charlene Donahue says it's only a matter of time before the emerald ash borer beetle arrives in Maine and decimates the ash trees here. Native American basket makers in Maine worry that will spell the end of their long tradition. The state's tribes make their traditional baskets from the wood of ash trees.

Emerald Ash Borer Wabanaki Quotes:

There could be another way to look at this - is it just something that will deplete our resources, or will it encourage people to look at traditions apart from ash baskets? Older, more diverse traditions, like items made from birch bark or cedar, may come back stronger.

Billy Nicholas

Passamaquoddy

Governor, Indian Township

At the turn of the 20th Century, it's estimated that 2/3rds of the households on Indian Island claimed basketmaking as their main source of income. Baskets are much more than art pieces, and we are doing everything we can to preserve that.

Kirk Francis

Penobscot

Chief, Penobscot Indian Nation

Almost immediately we created support for work on the ash borer beetle to prevent the introduction of this species into Maine. We created a position in the tribe dedicated to this work, collecting seeds, documenting ash populations, and educating people about the threat.

Kirk Francis

Penobscot

Chief, Penobscot Indian Nation

The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians doesn't have a program dedicated to just addressing the beetle, but we do have relationships with natural resource specialists from the state and other tribes. The tribe's land base is so small that we currently don't have a lot of ash to manage.

Sue Young

Natural Resources Director, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

We planted seven thousand ash trees on lands we purchased when Loring Air Force Base was decommissioned. The trees are about ten feet tall now, so we will soon have a stand for weavers to harvest from.

Richard Dyer

Micmac

Housing Director, Aroostook Band of Micmacs

The tribe is shooting for a policy outcome that will support research on the beetle and create a management plan with the tribes as major players, to protect access and resources. It has to be a collection of sovereigns working together that will come up with a management plan, communicating across different sovereigns.

Darren Ranco

Penobscot

Associate Professor of Anthropology and Coordinator of Native American Research,
University of Maine

Trustee, Abbe Museum

I grew up in a basketmaking family. I didn't want to make baskets when I was younger. My mother made cedar baskets when my older brothers weren't around to prepare the ash for her. In the mid-1980s, I saw it as a dying art and got interested. I've had a few apprentices, but they haven't continued making baskets. It's hard to get the young people to work at it. My mother made 120 baskets a week!

Richard Silliboy

Micmac

Quote to go with ash beetle ID material in case:

Emerald ash borer has not been detected in Maine, therefore most of our resources dedicated to this insect are focused on detection surveys, outreach, and education. We are also active participants in developing regional initiatives to limit the spread of this and other pests in firewood.

Allison Kanotie

Maine State Entomology Lab

The number one thing people can do to prevent the spread of this beetle is not to move firewood. Try to purchase all firewood locally, including wood to roast marshmallows and to heat your home or camp. If you've already moved wood into the state, burn it as soon as possible.

Allison Kanotie

Maine State Entomology Lab