

Sacred fire renews Wabanaki tradition: More than 40 tribes attend conference

By Aimee Dolloff - Bangor Daily News - June 23, 2008 Runners escorting embers from a 'Sacred Fire' that has been burning for fourteen years arrived Saturday on Indian Island for the annual Wabanaki Confederacy Conference. 'The conference is a traditional meeting of the Wabanaki tribes that goes way back,' Penobscot Nation Chief Kirk Francis said.

Identity



Photo by J. S. Rogers, collections of the Bureau of American Ethnology Collection, National Archives, Washington D.C.

The ability of a nation to determine who its citizens are is one of its sovereign rights. The United States requires American Indian governments to create a system of tribal membership based on criteria established individually by each tribe. But Native identity goes beyond blood quantum and tribal enrollment. In Maine, Wabanaki people and tribal governments have created economic and social opportunity by adapting traditions to meet the market demand of tourists, simultaneously maintaining traditions while adapting enough to stay viable.

"Identity is learned. It's a seeing thing, it's a knowing thing. Everything that is passed down is identity because that's all we've got!" -Roldena Sanipass, Micmac

"In the past, Native people were made to feel bad about being Indian, but now we're teaching kids to be proud of who they are" -Donald Soctomah, Passamaquoddy, Historic Preservation Officer, Tribal Representative

To learn more about Identity:

- Penobscot Culture web page: www.penobscotculture.org
- Aroostook Band of Micmac Membership web page: www.micmac-nsn.gov/html/membership
- Invisible, video, 60 minutes
- Wabanaki: A New Dawn, video, 28 minutes
- Our Lives in Our Hands: Micmac Indian Basketmakers, by Bunny McBride, 1989 (book and film)
- Uncommon Threads: Wabanaki Textiles, Clothing, and Costume by Bruce J. Bourque and Lauren A. LaBar, 2009 to the State Legislature