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2C1Forest - A Network of People Creating a Network of Conserved Lands

The disappearing black ash and the stewardship of the First Nations



In the Northern Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion First Nations (Native Americans) are investing time, energy and resources into the restoration of the Black Ash (*fraxinus nigra*). The **Haudenosaunee** (an alliance of six Nations (Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, and Tuscorora)) and the **Wabanaki Confederacy** (Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet and Mi'kmaq)) have been stewards of the land and waters of the Northern Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion for millennia. Over time much of their native knowledge and land have been lost. However, today's First Nations are reclaiming their place in conserving the health of the ecoregion and its species. They are going beyond preserving their knowledge of traditional basket making with black ash to being active stewards of the species.

The black ash, also known as the hoop ash, water ash, swamp ash and brown ash, is not only a source of medicine for First Nations, but also an excellent tree for making baskets. Baskets serve the utilitarian function of transporting goods, preserving items and sifting materials, and have a cultural and economic place in the lives of North America's First Nations. First Nations have been trading baskets for as long as they've known how to make them. In recent centuries, the revenue from selling baskets has been a life line for many in First Nation communities.

The practice of selecting the right ash tree and making baskets provides each new generation with the historical and cultural link necessary for the responsible stewardship of the black ash and its habitats. Unfortunately, the black ash has become a vanishing species in the Northern Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion. Habitat destruction, overharvesting, blight infections in the 1970's and the arrival of the Chinese emerald ash borer in the 21st century have contributed to its decline. The black ash is a victim of cumulative environmental impacts, but it is believed that changes in water quantity and quality are directly affecting the black ash populations¹.

The decline of the black ash has caused the First Nations of the ecoregion to travel further and further to find ash trees that are healthy and plentiful enough that they can be sustainably harvested. Across the ecoregion, First Nations, individuals, organizations and governments have been working to conserve and restore what is left of the species. Two Countries, *One Forest* is pleased to highlight some of the great conservation work done by First Nation basket makers and their friends.

Basket makers have an important and honoured role in The Haudenosaunee Nations. Today many basket makers are economically and culturally affected by the loss of good basket quality black ash. In order for their traditional knowledge and means of subsistence to continue in a changing climate, they recognize the importance of coordinating their efforts and working together. Among the Haudenosaunee, the Mohawks Council of Akwesasne(MCA), the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT) and Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment (ATFE) collaborated with NGOs and academics of the region to develop an educational book, website and training program on how to collect, germinate and plant ash seeds and care for the seedlings². Successful conservation of the ash depends on collecting and transplanting black ash seedlings at the right time. Training sessions that are conducted throughout the growing range of the black ash provide seed collectors with the knowledge to find, choose, collect, handle, store and transport

the seeds from one location to another. Annual black ash identification, methods of seed collection and storage are covered in workshops conducted through the ATFE, MCA, & SRMT and hosted by a First Nation community.

Their website (<http://sites.google.com/site/blackashcenter/Home>) includes pictures of training sessions, information about initiatives to bring black ash restoration knowledge to First Nation communities and other individuals, and links to websites related to black ash or the invasive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

Other First Nations across the ecoregion have basket making traditions but have different challenges to overcome in order to implement conservation actions for black ash. Unlike the Haudenosaunee who have access to black ash along the shores of the St. Lawrence River, the Ottawa River, the South Nation River, as well as areas in the province of Quebec; the Wabanaki Confederacy has limited access to black ash habitat beyond the ecoregion because the majority of their traditional territory is in the Northern Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion³. The Wabanaki Confederacy Nations are returning to traditional basket making in greater numbers just as their supply of black ash for basket making has become limited. To compensate, they have increased trading with others in the area to attain good basket quality logs, which has increased the potential influx of the EAB. This has brought about an increase in work for conservation of the species in the east as well as in the west.



In New Brunswick some Mi'kmaq basket makers travel to communities in Gaspé to buy black ash splints, or travel to the Maine-New Brunswick border where some black ash can still be found in Acadian forest sites. In Elsipogtog, the largest Mi'kmaq community in New Brunswick, basket makers have been turning to their forest management division for assistance in locating black ash closer to their community. Sometimes black ash is found but is in poor health and the quality of its wood unsuitable for basket making. Other conservation initiatives dating back a decade or so were the results of efforts by the Mi'kmaq Eel Ground community and the North Shore Mi'kmaq District Council. They mapped the location of the black ash stands found closest to the coast of the Northumberland Strait. Other individuals in the province are using their relations to bring attention to the situation and find cooperation for restoration and conservation initiatives.

In Nova Scotia, the forestry department of the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources (UINR), and the environmental department of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq (CMM) have been working on the restoration of black ash in thirteen Mi'kmaq communities. Like other initiatives, a small group of individuals travel throughout Nova Scotia to collect seeds that are then germinated by a partner such as the Scott and Stewart nurseries and more recently the Canadian Forestry Services. Seedlings are then distributed to each of the communities for planting.

The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI) is restoring the population of black ash through a seedling and nursery approach. With the help of a grant from the First Nations Forestry Program, MCPEI has been able to create and implement a two phase project to restore black ash populations on the island.

The first phase is preserving areas that are identified as natural black ash forest and use the area to foster an understanding of forest ecology, the use of non-traditional forest products and develop surplus seed production. MCPEI's Integrated Resource Management Division (IRM) has an agreement with the island's Provincial Forestry department to protect an area of



approximately 80 hectares on the Western end of the Province. This conservation agreement will help protect 70 rare and endangered species that were revealed to exist in the site through the black ash study. Individual black ash trees are carefully surveyed; their locations mapped with GPS, and inspected regularly for seed production. The second phase of the project will grow these seeds in nurseries to propagate black ash in other areas of the Province.

The Maliseet Nation Conservation Council in New Brunswick supports black ash restoration and protection in its communities through the efforts of its Science Director, Cecelia Brooks. She is training individuals to learn how, where and when to successfully plant black ash seedlings. The seedlings are provided by the Canadian Forestry Services and the Hugh John Flemming Forestry Center. Because communities are far apart, providing training for individuals and reaching adequate planting sites is proving the biggest challenge to establishing a formal black ash restoration initiative. The Maliseet Nations are also seeking to develop a cooperative aspect to non-forest timber products harvesting for Crown Lands. They are focusing their efforts on increasing cooperation from private land owners and the province for harvesting black ash and other species from areas slated for clear-cut.

The black ash is considered sacred by most of the First Nations of North America. Conservation of the species across the Northern Appalachian/Acadian ecoregion is critical if the traditions and craft of the basket makers are going to continue and flourish. A key element to sustaining and conserving plant species is connecting the people who are stewards of the species. Working collaboratively across borders, sharing knowledge, information and ideas can provide the necessary human connection for the black ash species to survive and thrive across the ecoregion. Two Countries, *One Forest* works with partners to connect the people who share a vision of a healthy and connected Northern Appalachian/Acadian Ecoregion.

[For more information, please visit:](#)

Haudenosaunee Black Ash Website

<http://sites.google.com/site/blackashcenter/Home>)

Unama'ki Institute for Natural Resources (UINR)

<http://www.uinr.ca/stories/black-ash/>

<http://www.uinr.ca/section/forestry/>

(to view an excerpt from the speech by Elder Albert Marshall at the November 2007 2C1Forest conference in Montreal, follow this link: <http://www.uinr.ca/stories/two-countries-one-forest/>)

Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI

www.mcpei.ca

Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq

<http://www.cmmns.com/>

Maliseet Nation Conservation Council

<http://www.mncc.ca/pages.asp?pid=1>

Ash Borer website

<http://www.emeraldashborer.info/videos/basketmaking.cfm>

<http://www.emeraldashborer.info/index.cfm>

Nova Scotia Initiatives

<http://www.novaforestalliance.com/media/documents/blackash.pdf>

This is the eight edition in a series of profiles describing the network of people and organisations working together to establish a network of conserved lands in the Northern Appalachian/Acadian Ecoregion.

Please visit the 2C1Forest website (www.2c1forest.org) to learn more about us and conservation work across the ecoregion.

To Unsubscribe to this listserv: Contact alice.chamberlin@2c1forest.org

¹ Benedict, L., David, R., 2004, *Handbook for Black Ash Preservation, Reforestation/Regeneration*, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Department of the Environment, Akwesasne, Canada - St.Regis, USA.

² This collaborative work received the Forest Stewardship Certificate of Appreciation from Governor General of Canada 2002 and the US EPA Award for Black Ash restoration efforts.

³ A portion of the Mi'kmaq territory does extend to the island of Newfoundland. Only a small south-east section of the island is part of the range for native black ash (Wright J.W., Rauscher, H.M., *Fraxinus nigra Marsh. Black Ash*, Accessed online September 1, 2009,

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/fraxinus/nigra.htm).