

# Ashi-niswi giizisoog (Thirteen Moons)

## Iskigamizigeigiizis

*Iskigamizigeigiizis starts April 3rd: This is the moon of the sugar bush. An-other name for this moon is Pokwaagamigiizis meaning Broken Snowshoe Moon.*

## Shushumeg (Snow Snakes)

By Nikki Crowe and Brant Miller

A game that has been played by tribes in the U.S. and Canada for the last 500 years has become popular through tournaments pitting tribal schools, 4-H clubs, and community groups against one another. Maybe it's our social networks like Facebook and YouTube and Tribal newspapers that have given rise to all the talk about shushumeg and brought about newly formed tournaments and revitalized competitions.

Shushumeg can be carved out of any hardwood, most often Aninaatig (maple) or Baapaagimaak (ash). Some shushumeg can travel up to 100 mph!

Tribes once used snow snakes for com-

munication, marking them with charcoal and sending them onto the next village. Men were responsible for keeping the track clean and unobstructed.

Brant Miller from the University of Minnesota has taken it one step further and incorporated science, technology, engineering, and math into a grade school curriculum using snow snakes. Another result of his work was the 3rd Annual Shushumeg Tournament held at Bemidji State University on March 4. There were three tribal schools represented by 45 students: White Earth Indian Reservation's Circle of Life, Pine Point and the Naytahwaush Community Charter Schools.

You don't have to join a tournament to enjoy the game of Shushumeg, and remem-



*photo courtesy of Joe Courneya, Extension Educator, American Indian Youth Program.*

ber it is a game for all ages. For those interested in learning more about snow snakes and the associated curriculum please visit: <http://bit.ly/b8NQa7>.

### For the Kids:

### Match the correct names to trees

Maple	Wiigob (iig)
Black Ash	Giizhik (ag)
Basswood	Gaawaandag (oog)
White cedar	Mashkiigwaatig (oog)
Birch	Wiigwaas (oog)
Spruce	Aninaatig (oog)
Tamarack	Aagimaak (wag)

*Answers: Maple, Aninaatig; Black Ash, Aagimaak; Basswood, Wiigob; White Cedar, Giizhik; Birch, Wiigwaas; Black Spruce, Gaawaandag; Tamarack, Mashkiigwaatig.*

## EAB: A Different Perspective

Story and photo by Dave Wilsey

*The story was originally published at [www.MyMinnesota-woods.umn.edu](http://www.MyMinnesota-woods.umn.edu).*

Last spring, I spent a weekend at the North House Folk School in Grand Marais learning the art of black ash (*fraxinus nigra*) basketry from Michael Benedict. Mr. Benedict is a member of the Oneida Nation in New York and lives and works near St. Paul.

You've likely heard about ash trees in recent months because of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), which is swiftly radiating from its 1990s port of entry, near Detroit, Michigan. EAB is an invasive insect species native to Asia. The beetle infests ash trees by laying its eggs in crev-

ices in the bark. Larvae bore into the tree and feed beneath the bark. Infested trees typically die within two to three years.

In May 2009, EAB was detected in St. Paul. Although the EAB can fly only short distances on its own, much of its spread results from human transport of firewood and landscape trees that contain burrowed larvae. The potential loss of Ash trees is tragic and associated challenges are numerous.

EAB discussions often focus on urban and suburban land-

scapes. Ash species were used to replace elm trees after Dutch elm disease wiped out what was once the predominant urban landscaping tree. Another issue is the loss of several species that are an important component of Minnesota's forests. Ash species are also culturally important, most notably to Indian communities, which brings me back to the

North House and Mike Benedict's ash basket class. The wood of black ash trees

is used to create baskets, a practice that dates back to the communities that encountered the first visitors from the old world.

Only black ash trees with straight and smooth trunks are selected for basketry. According to Benedict, availability of quality basket trees has diminished in recent years. The cut trunk is pounded to remove growth layers. Pounding separates growth rings into strips about the thickness of a nickel.

Pounded strips are then soaked, cleaned, and separated again into thinner strips. Depending on the thickness of the original strip, this process can occur several times, each yielding thinner and finer "ribbons" of wood.

Black ash baskets have a rich

tradition that goes far beyond what can be explained here, but is worth exploring. Ash "pack" baskets were likely used to transport goods by the voyageurs. Ash baskets fetch high prices in the marketplace, with small baskets priced around \$50 and larger baskets costing in the thousands. Basketry is not a quaint relic of the past; even today people use this early technology to create and sustain forest-based lives and livelihood strategies. It remains to be seen what the broader implications of the looming loss of this culturally significant species will be.



*A basket made of black ash wood.*

*Upcoming Events: 13 Moons and Gitigaan will be hosting a gardening class "Extending the Growing Season and Community Gardening" at 5:30 p.m. April 19, at the Cloquet Community Center*

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