

Ashi-niswi giizisoog (Thirteen Moons)

Binaakwe-giizis

Binaakwe-giizis is the Falling Leaves Moon. The new moon begins October 26.

Natural resource livelihoods and culture

By Dave Wilsey,
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Natural resources represent an important connection point between northern Minnesota livelihoods and culture. In 2000, I spent several weeks traveling across several northern Minnesota counties having conversations with bough pickers about balsam boughs and other gathered forest products. Minnesota is a national leader in the seasonal greens industry, shipping wreaths to every state in the

nation and across the globe. This seasonal industry employs thousands of people in Minnesota and allows many home-based businesses to earn a substantial amount of income. Income from balsam bough harvest is important in a number of ways. Bough picking adds more money to the family pot – not always a substantial amount, but something is better than nothing. More importantly, balsam income comes at a time of year when other income sources are lacking. People I spoke with used balsam money to buy gifts for

the holidays or to purchase equipment such as guns, snowmobiles, and other items that otherwise might be unaffordable. For these folks, the timing of the income was more important than the amount. So it was with other products and activities as well, such as hunting (for meat) and trapping (for additional money). From my time working with the Fond du Lac community I know that, for many, ricing falls into this category as well. One of the interesting findings from my research was that certain natural resources contrib-

ute to what some have called a “cultural economy.” The notion of a cultural economy looks at how resources and gathering activities contribute the formation of culture, a system that is bigger than the products or activities themselves, but also the specific individuals involved. One of the goals of this newspaper page and the Thirteen Moons program overall is to increase individuals connections to Ojibwe culture. In the years I have spent working with Fond du Lac Band Members, I have learned a great deal about the importance of

harvesting natural resources as a means of practicing culture. Making sugar, gathering birch bark, ricing, and hunting are a few examples. These activities represent expressions of the Ojibwe culture. In the coming year, we will be spending more time exploring the links between Fond du Lac livelihoods and Ojibwe culture through the Thirteen Moons program and other new programs.

Bough Picking – 101

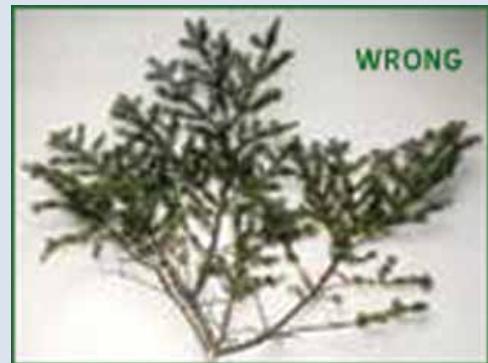
By 13 Moons staff

So, you think you might like to pick balsam boughs to earn some extra money this year. Pickers range from 10 to over 1000 pounds of boughs per day, with payment about 20 cents per pound. There are some important things to know before you head out. First, you will need a permit. According to Christian Nelson, FDL Forester, free permits to harvest balsam from FDL-owned land are available to any Band Member. In most years, Forestry

only receives about a dozen permit requests. Note, however, that FDL permits are not valid on non-FDL lands, including Ceded Territory. Permits are also required for harvest on Minnesota’s public land. The US Forest Service, Minnesota DNR, and County offices each have gathering permits for federal and state, and county lands, respectively. Make sure you get written consent if you have an agreement to harvest from private land other than your own. State law requires a permit or written consent whenever cutting, removing,

or transporting boughs! The second thing is to know how to harvest sustainably. Boughs should be harvested to protect and ensure future harvest opportunities. Harvest after the second hard frost. Choose trees over seven feet tall. Cut lower boughs only and take only the end portion of the branch. Harvested boughs should be no thicker than a pencil at the cutting point. Pick in areas that have not been harvested by someone else. Boughs must be kept cool and out of sunlight to minimize degradation. Taking a Bough is a great

publication for bough pickers and is available at Minnesota DNR offices. The third thing to do is to find a buyer. You don’t want to end up with piles of boughs and no one to sell them to. While buyer information is not easily available, word of mouth seems to keep the industry afloat. Also, check the “Shopper” and other local publications for advertisements. A good relationship with a buyer is invaluable in this business!



Upcoming Events:

13 Moons October Workshop: Income Opportunities from Balsam Boughs. Contact thirteenmoons@fdlrez.com for more information or call (218) 878-7148.

This page addresses culture, ecology, and natural resource management. Thirteen Moons is the Fond du Lac Tribal College Extension Program and is a collaboration of Fond du Lac Tribal College, Fond du Lac Resource Management, and University of Minnesota Extension.