Ashi-niswi giizisoog (Thirteen Moons)

Makoonsag-gaa-nitaawaadigiizis

When the bear cubs are born is the name for the moon that begins its cycle on February 14. Other names are Migizi giizis (Eagle Moon) and Namebini giizis (sucker fish moon), named for the fish that lives throughout northeastern Minnesota's streams and lakes.

Nahgahchiwanong Ozhiga'ige

By Nikki Crowe

Iskigamizige giizis is coming and I would like to take time to share a few facts about **wiishkobaaboo** and to profile some **Nahgahchiwanong** tappers.

According to the 2007 Agricultural Census on Specialty Crops, the US had 8,121 Maple Syrup operations producing more than $1,000 worth of product. Only 23 were Native owned. One of these operators was a Fond du Lac band member. Through my inquiries into the local tappers, I came up with six, most selling less than $1000 worth of product. I feel this news tells me the tradition is not lost and that we have much to learn from our own community. With the threat of invasive species and climate change, ongoing threats to the Ojibwe language, it's a good time to thank the tapper in your life for keeping the art of the sugarbush alive. I spoke with Charlie (Tuna) Nahgahnub and Bruce and Tawny Savage about their experiences in the sugarbush.

Experience

Charlie has thirty years learning from Russ Northrup and ten years on his own. Russ and Charlie still help each other out from time to time. Bruce and Tawny have forty years of experience, Bruce started when he was nine.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

To know when to begin, Charlie looks for opening buds, appearance of sap suckers, and cawing **aandeg**. Bruce mostly agrees, but is not above digging in the undisturbed snow at work to see if the frost is gone. Tawny looks for the puddles in the road to know if the frost is coming out of the ground. Scientifically, Bruce says, it's all about the daily environment: temperature, barometric pressure, and frost condition.

To boil the sap, Charlie uses "Cadillac wood" – essentially, dead standing maple (**aninaatig**) with no bark - or dry tamarack (**mashkiigwaatig**). Both generate less ash.

When I asked Bruce and Tawny about a plant I saw in the woods last year, they recognized my drawing of **miskodjibik** (Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria Canadensis*); they tell me when you see this plant the sugar bush has come to an end. Forestry's Steve Olson also shared that bloodroot indicates a site with rich soil qualities.

Size

Charlie taps two acres, placing about 50-100 taps, depending on reliability of his help. Bruce's Spirit Lake sugarbush has around 60 acres.

Both operations are wood-fired, although Charlie uses treaty kettles and an old beer keg (left behind from a long-forgotten '49') for a 16-gal preheater.

Bruce uses a few modern amenities to produce the larger amounts. Bruce shared that to do this work efficiently; you must have a combination of traditional ecological knowledge and the modern technology.

Economy

Bruce and Charlie both use the syrup as a food source for their family, while Charlie uses his surplus for trade and gifting, the Savages use theirs for the children's activities.

Tawny says, "We value the ability to harvest food, we pass onto our children the knowledge and respect required to run a sugarbush.

Final thoughts

Help is always needed but Bruce recommends that those interested in learning "Don't come out expecting a peaceful moment: there is work to do! It takes a lot to make a little; it takes more than one day to get the full appreciation for what it takes to run this operation. If you come out to volunteer and expect some maple syrup in return, expect to work, and bring a pot of food with you...no one has time to cook when the sap is running."

In past winters, I agonized over cold temperatures and lack of sunlight, I realize the sugarbush for me is a place to shake off the long winter days and look forward to my spring work and garden planning! I know I will be bringing out a pot of food and spending some time with the Savages, and over at Charlie's too. Hope to see you there.

This image of a sugarbush camp was created by Karen Savage Blue's art students for last year's Thirteen Moons page, we thought it was worth another showing.

Logo contest

We are looking for an image that represents 13 Moons, Fond du Lac's Tribal College Extension Program. The program's mission is to connect Fond du Lac Band and community members to:

- Natural resources, by increasing awareness of and knowledge about traditional and other resources;
- Knowledge networks, by providing new opportunities for social interaction and education in the context of traditional and other natural resources;
- Ojibwe culture, by highlighting and honoring the importance of natural resources in the traditional and contemporary Ojibwe lives and livelihoods.

Consider incorporating one or more of the following into your design:

- Ojibwe seasonal activities such as ricing, sugarbush, fishing, hunting, gathering berries, birchbark, etc.
- A turtle design representing the 13 moons or changing seasons
- The Ojibwe floral design

This contest is open only to enrolled Fond du Lac'ers of any age. The creator of the winning design will receive $200.00 . Six runner up designers will receive gift baskets. Any submitted designs may be featured in this paper. Thirteen Moons holds all rights to the winning logo and submissions. Submit your design to Nikki Crowe by 4:00 pm on April 1st, 2011. Print or electronic submissions welcome.

Upcoming Events:

Dibaajimowini maawanji'idiwin, February 19, 1pm - 6pm (Doors open at 12:15), Sawyer Community Center

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