



The First Nation Forestry Program in Ontario

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“In partnership with First Nations” has been described as the motto of the First Nation Forestry Program (FNFP). Working in cooperation with the federal and provincial governments, forest industry companies, and other partners, the FNFP provides an opportunity for First Nations and First Nation businesses and organizations to promote forest-based economic development, with full consideration for the principles of sustainable forest management.

Jointly funded and administered by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the FNFP is a 5-year program that ends March 31, 2001. It is delivered by the Canadian Forest Service (CFS), a sector within NRCan. The intent of this national program is to help improve economic conditions in status First Nation communities by facilitating, leveraging, or being the catalyst for increased contributions from external sources, leading to self-reliance of business initiatives. The FNFP supports communities in developing better and more cooperative ventures from which viable and sustainable long-term jobs will be created.

The FNFP in Ontario is directed by a seven-member Ontario Management Committee (OMC), which consists of five members from First Nations, one member from INAC, and one member from CFS. To achieve the objectives of the FNFP, the OMC has placed priority on the following strategic issues:

- Encouraging broader understanding of traditional knowledge, culture, and values;
- Contributing towards self-sufficiency of business initiatives and community development; and
- Developing capacity and support for cooperative working and funding partnerships.

Projects must demonstrate a trend towards self-sufficiency, creation of economic benefits, and capacity development in a forest-based business.

To date, more than 60 individual First Nations or First Nation organizations have been assisted by the Ontario FNFP. In line with the intent of the program, the \$2.7 million (Canadian) contribution from the FNFP over the past 3 years has helped facilitate the development of projects with a combined value of over \$9.2 million. This means that for every \$1 invested by the FNFP, an additional \$2.40 has been contributed by First Nations and First Nation businesses and organizations, as well as by other government and private sector partners.

Businesses have been investigated, created, and enhanced that have helped facilitate economic and social development in communities across Ontario. Some of the worthwhile projects that have been supported include biomass heating studies for remote communities; partnership development and joint ventures in harvesting and value-added manufacturing; forestry business planning; education, training, and business development in forest firefighting; forest management services; non-timber forest products; and forest nursery and ecotourism operations, to name a few.

The OMC members are very pleased that the FNFP is an active partner in stimulating interest and investment in Aboriginal forestry business development. In a prepared statement, the OMC members have said, “there is still a significant amount of work to be done to ensure that the First Nations of Ontario establish a real presence in the forestry industry. The work being supported by the FNFP is playing an important role in the development of the First Nation forestry sector. This type of support needs to be continued in order to ensure the sustainability of First Nation forestry activities.”

For further information, please visit the First Nations Forestry Program Web site at <http://www.fnfp.gc.ca>.

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Making a Black Ash Basket: From Log to Finished Product



A group of men drag a black ash log out of the woods. Only 1 or 2 of every 10 trees are good enough for basket making. To qualify, a tree must be at least 5 to 6 inches in diameter at breast height, have a straight 4- to 6-foot-long trunk that has no visible knots or defects, and have annual rings that are no thinner than a nickel.



Tools of black ash basketry.



The log is pounded with the blunt end of an axe to separate the annual rings for splints, the pliable wood strips that will form a basket. Here, Mark Bisonette is working his way down the log from the small end to the large end. He takes care not to strike too lightly or too hard because a too light blow will separate only two or three rings and a too hard blow will crush the splints.



Two women—one is the top basket weaver on the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation—get the splints ready to be woven into a basket. The splints are smoothed with a knife if they are thin enough, or they can be split once again by cutting halfway through them with a knife and then peeling them apart as if peeling the backing off of contact paper. The splints are then cut into different widths. When wet, a black ash splint is strong and flexible and can be bent into a right angle.



Les Benedict begins work on a basket. He uses a form to get just the right shape, a critical step in basket making.



Baskets come in many styles and sizes for many uses. The decorative, highly prized baskets in this photo are called fancy baskets. They are made from sweet grass and the most desirable wood of the black ash—the almost white sapwood. Black ash baskets hold their shape for years and are passed down from generation to generation.



A Leech Lake Reservation elder, with years of experience in her fingers, deftly weaves black ash splints into a corn-washing basket.



Black ash seeds surrounded by splints and sweet grass with a gauge—one of the tools of basketry—to the side and tiny pack baskets at the top.