Mobilizing Diverse Interests to Address Invasive Species Threats: The Case of the Emerald Ash Borer in Maine

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Introduction

We seek to study and facilitate the ways that Wabanaki basket-makers, tribes, state and federal foresters, university researchers, landowners and others come together to monitor, detect, and respond to the threat of the emerald ash borer (EAB) – an exotic beetle that attacks and kills all three ash species (Fraxinus sp.) found in Maine. EAB is now found only a half day’s drive from the state.

EAB (Agrilus planipennis) is a small exotic beetle from Asia. Adult beetles feed on the leaves of all ash species, causing minor damage. They then lay eggs on the bark of the tree, and the larvae hatch and burrow inside. Once there, they feed on inner bark, eventually killing the tree. New infestations typically result from transporting infested firewood.

The Wabanaki culture and brown ash (F. nigra) have coexisted for centuries, and the creation story of the Wabanaki people is based on the brown ash.

Methods

Our Team includes university researchers in anthropology and forestry working in concert with Wabanaki basket-makers, tribal governments and organizations, and the Maine and US Forest Services. Our group is facilitating a process designed to link knowledge and action for sustainability while at the same time studying how different groups come together to address a common invasive species threat. Our approach pairs social science research methods such as focus groups and one-on-one interviews with explicit knowledge-to-action integration.

Workshops

Two workshops entitled Kolunkayowan Wikpiyik (Protecting the Ash for Future Generations) have been held at the University of Maine – one in October of 2009 and one in May of 2010. The 2009 workshop included presentations from Dave Struble of the Maine Forest Service; Mike Benedict, a Mohawk basket-maker and BIA forester; Theresa Secord of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance; Kelly Church of the Grand Traverse Band of Chippewa and Ottawa; John Banks and Tami Connolly of the Penobscot Nation; and Dr. Bill Livingston of UMaine.

Next Steps

This Fall, the Team will assist Maine and Wabanaki tribal governments in developing EAB response plans. Monitoring and seed collection efforts will continue, along with meetings and workshops to spur dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders. The Team also plans to collect data on brown ash ecology, and to survey expert knowledge of Wabanaki brown ash harvesters. These data will be integrated utilizing Bayesian Belief Networks to map areas favoring growth and regeneration of basket-quality trees that will receive highest-priority EAB protection.

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