

TRADITIONAL FOREST USE

TRADITIONAL FOREST USE OF THE CHIPPEWAS OF GEORGINA ISLAND

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The Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation (CGIFN) lies in the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Wendat, Mississauga and Haudenosaunee and is located in Lake Simcoe in the Region of York, in the Province of Ontario.

The CGIFN Nation consists of three Islands that are located approximately 2 km. from the southern shore of Lake Simcoe. Georgina is the largest of the three at 4.5 km. long and 3.2 km. wide, with an area of 1,290 hectares. Snake Island is 136 ha. and Fox Island 20.4 ha.

To gain access, one must take the Car Ferry, Water Taxi, or use a private vessel in the spring and summer months. During the shoulder seasons the members travel by skidoo, ATV, Scoot (air boat) followed by cars and trucks once the ice is thick enough. This is becoming a lot riskier as conditions are not as predictable and “safe” as in prior years, due to climate change and pollution. In 2019 the ferryboat ran continuously, which was a first in our history of having ferry transportation.

Forests occupy approximately 75% of Georgina Island, and 67% on both Fox and Snake Islands. Georgina Island contains 93 hectares of Ash dominated wetland forest comprising approximately 40,000 Ash trees, a number of which are Black Ash; a species of traditional, cultural significance.

Georgina Island Band membership totals approximately 800 with 200 living on the First Nation. Some members supplement their income through the sales of arts,

crafts, maple syrup, firewood, cultural tours and workshops – often facilitated in the forest and trails.

KENO GEGO NAABADOSIN – EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

As Indigenous people we feel that we ARE the land and that we share the same make up as the earth. Our Ancestors and language are exemplified in Aki (the Land). We adhere to the premise that we “belong” to the earth, which is adverse to the “ownership” ideology reflected in colonialism. We do not consider ourselves Stake Holders – we are Rights Holders. Often times our land ethics are not understood by many governmental resource managers, for example, Indigenous resistance to aerial spraying of forests with glyphosate.

Aki is our living library that holds the key to our wellbeing, power, ancestors, and future. The CGIFN community has a strong relationship with Aki and N’bi (water). Many still harvest foods that come from the forest and waters, for example wild leeks or ramps, fish, deer, wild turkey, waterfowl, berries, Dumpniig (wild horseradish) maple syrup and sugar. Historically, manoomin (wild rice) and cranberries were once staple food sources until the creation of the Trent Severn Waterway which caused them to be flooded out permanently.

Traditionally we held controlled burns on the Island in the early spring. This kept the ticks and mosquitoes at bay and allowed rejuvenation and regeneration of native flora and fauna and associated

habitat. We also had strategic grazing practices with cattle and horses.

Unfortunately, the invasive Norway Maple has been introduced into the tree population of the Island by cottagers and members for their “aesthetic” value, unaware of its potential negative impacts to our ecosystems and especially the Sugar Maple population, which will have impact on our cultural and traditional practices. This is one of the main reasons we do not promote the transport of firewood or non-native plant species to our territory.

However, with regard to invasive species, holistic approaches are being considered – what can we learn from them? How can we utilize their gifts? The phenomenon of invasive species has caused Anishnaabemowin language speakers to adapt and create new terms and labels for these “new” visitors, but that is what we do and have always done. We adapt, while maintaining our core values that identify us as a people and nation.

TRADITIONAL USE OF TREES

Black and White Ash have historical significance and continue to be used for basket making, tool handles, snowshoe framework, fuel wood, sleigh making, lacrosse sticks, hockey sticks, barrel hoops and canoe ribs. The bark and roots were steeped in boiling water for a rheumatism tea. The seeds of ash provide food for wild turkeys; white tailed deer, beaver and porcupine feed on their leaves and twigs. The ash from an ash wood fire was used to prepare dyed corn for soup and was also mixed with



deer brain for hide tanning, to help give it a softer texture when being stretched and worked.

Other tree species growing on the Island which have significant traditional, cultural values include: Wiigwaas (birch) for its waterproof bark and use in canoe and basketry; apple for consumption, sale and trade; hickory for lacrosse sticks; Giizhik (White Cedar) for ceremonial, medicinal, craft and canoe construction; White Spruce for basketry and canoe making; Shingob (White Pine) was used for medicinal and lumber purposes; Zasgobmish (willow) for pain medication, crafting and lodge construction; Maanzaat (Balsam Poplar) for salves; Wiigbimish (Basswood) for carving, to name a few.

In the past, caring for habitats and species was a necessity for our people. We relied on Aki for our survival and Aki took care of us. We are taught that we have the responsibility to be caretakers of our natural environment. This responsibility is instilled in our children through our traditional teachings, often times shared in the outdoor classroom of the forest.

Since 1998, the CGIFN has been working with Chris Gynan R.P.F. to develop and

implement several forest management programs to conserve the forests, promote stewardship, and facilitate traditional uses. This involved establishing and maintaining a forest inventory, mapping of important areas to preserve ecological systems by identifying habitat such as SAR habitat, wetlands or woodlands and culturally significant species and spaces, construction of the Nanabush Interpretative Trails System, identifying and preserving Black Ash specimens through tree injections, carrying out annual hazard tree monitoring and treatment programs, planting trees for climate change adaptation, and implementing a monitoring and management program for the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

Tree harvesting is carried-out on a limited scale by Band members for personal use and professional tree services are utilized when necessary. Chainsaw Safety Certification courses have been provided for staff and members in an effort to encourage best practices and increase stewardship of the forests.

One of the main goals has been to bring the forest and trees back into the lives of the people in order to promote and

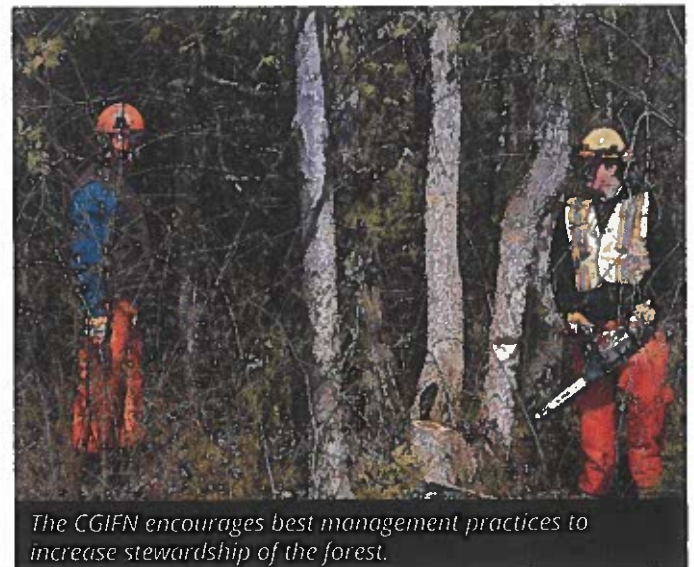
provide teaching opportunities, create community improvements by keeping the air clean and capturing of road dust and run off that can contaminate streams and lakes. Trees also create noise barriers, privacy, protection, maintain biodiversity, habitat creation or enhancement, decrease the heat island effect created by buildings and cleared/paved land, improve holistic health, provide shelter from weather, provide climate change buffer and ecosystem resilience and energy conservation.

Future plans include:

- Establishment of a Black Ash Recovery Program that will involve seed saving, tree transplanting and grafting to create a small tree orchard which will also serve as a future research area to determine tree resistance to the EAB and for the collection of Black Ash seed.
- Maintain and enhance native flora and fauna populations, maintain, and enhance functioning habitats, protect community determined significant species.
- Collaboration – continue to braid western science with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in order to facilitate



Making Black Ash baskets.



The CGIFN encourages best management practices to increase stewardship of the forest.





Article author Heather Charles in the forest on Georgina Island. Photo Credit: Chris Gynan R.P.F.

consistent environmental and conservation planning within our community, which will help to inform a community conservation plan; a vision for the future ecological health of CGIFN that can be used to protect the lands and waters for the future generations.

To help reconcile the impacts of colonialism, colonial activities, genocidal national policies and laws, the impacts of the residential school system, the CGIFN incorporates the Seven Grandfather Teachings into our work as a way to deal with these gaps in our medicine wheel by implementing projects and activities

that ignite a connection with the Land, especially for the youth.

Our work is guided by multi-year strategic plans that are rooted in conserving and restoring our community's rich, natural, traditional, and cultural heritage. With the aid of funding, and the assistance of colleagues throughout York Region and beyond, we are working towards developing models for effective partnerships in the conservation and recovery of endangered and threatened ecosystems.

We are also looking to strengthen collective and collaborative approaches with other Indigenous communities

and groups. We look to the future as our Elders and Ancestors had, while taking adaptive approaches where we build on successive benchmarks and accomplishments, learning from best practices, continually evolving as our efforts unfold and bear fruit.

"Gaawii Gitziimnaanig gii-miingosinaanig maanda Ki Gda daawnaanaanig gda Binoonjiimnaanig"

"We didn't inherit the Earth from our parents. We're borrowing it from our children"

- Chief Seattle, 1788-1899