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## Emerald ash borer: a voracious pest nears Maine



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When the emerald ash borer arrives in Maine everyone will lose, but the state's native American tribes have more to lose than most.

The ash is a valuable hardwood: straight, tall, with a beautiful open grain; producer of prime firewood. The three ash species that grow in Maine are key components of their ecosystems. But for the Penobscot, Maliseet, Micmac, and Passamaquoddy, the black ash, also known as the brown ash, is not just a tree -- it's part of who they are as a people.

In 1993 the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance was formed to reverse that trend, and has nurtured young basketmakers, like Jeremy Frey of Princeton, a Passamaquoddy basketmaker who has won top honors at national shows, including the Santa Fe Indian Market, for his breathtakingly beautiful, intricate split ash baskets that sell for hundreds and thousands of dollars.

Now, a tiny beetle from Asia threatens to undo that entire effort. Indeed, it threatens the very existence of the continent's ash trees. Not just one species -- every species of *Fraxinus*, the genus of ash.

"We're alarmed," said Theresa Secord, a Penobscot, a basketmaker and the executive director of the MIBA. "The sacred ash is woven into our identity as a tribal people in Maine, as well as our baskets. After 20 years of work to save ash basketry by increasing basket prices, teaching an entire new generation of weavers and intensive marketing efforts, the EAB will be the one thing we can't do anything about."

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