

RIGHTS VS RESPONSIBILITY and the Emerald Ash Borer

**By Richard David
Mohawk Council of Akwesasne**

I hope that you take the time to read this article. Its content will affect Akwesasne in a negative way. I know that we have many rights when it comes to border crossing. We have the right to move many things both north and south of the border. A couple of years ago the Federal Governments of Canada and the United States informed us that there could be some restrictions that we will face in regards to the movement of firewood. Some of you know that I, along with Les Benedict, have been working to regenerate Black Ash. Black Ash is culturally significant to the Mohawks and many other First Nation people on both sides of the border, both to the east of us and to the west.

There are many invasive species out there that will have a devastating effect on our wood-lots. Many of these insects and their eggs/larvae will hitch rides on firewood. These pests will also ride on logs, pallets, bark. And almost all forms of wood products that are not dried. I feel that it will be up to us to keep abreast of these pests as they make their way into our territory. We as keepers of the Eastern Door and our women, the Keepers of the land, have to put into place our own restrictions concerning the movement of wood and wood products. As I stated, I know you have the rights to do these things but we also have responsibilities to Mother Earth, to keep her healthy and vibrant.

I ask you now to do a search on the internet and look up the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). This bug was first discovered in the Michigan area just a few years ago. Its natural movement would make it possible to arrive in Akwesasne in about 35 years. Due to the stupidity of people, the EAB could be here in Akwesasne in just a couple of years. Some people in the Michigan area have moved firewood with the full knowledge that restrictions are in place, some have moved seedlings to the Baltimore area and from Baltimore, these seedlings have been moved up the east coast. Both governments in Canada & the USA have cut what they call fire-lines where they have cut large swaths of land of all ash trees. They cut every ash tree from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie about a 20 km wide to try to stop the EAB's movement. These efforts have failed and the EAB was soon spotted later in London Ontario. It is now in Ottawa and in the Montreal area. It may very well be in many other areas, it just has not been found yet. It was estimated to be in the Ottawa area five years before it was identified. The same scenario has been seen in other areas where the EAB has been identified.

How do we protect Akwesasne? What do we do for the 7 generations to come? What are our responsibilities to them? I suggest that we put into place our own restrictions for the movement of firewood. I suggest that we gather and discuss this and set into motion a plan that will ensure that our children's children will have enough ash to sustain our people. I suggest that we begin to pick seeds from all ash species and put them into long term storage so that when the EAB comes to Akwesasne and wipes out much of our ash trees; that we will be able to wait a safe period of time to ensure that the EAB has eaten

all of its source of food and has died and is gone from our land, that we will be able to replant all ash species for our children's future.

I suggest that we find ways to put into storage ash logs in order that we can maintain our cultural activities like basket-making, snow shoe making, snow snake making, etc.

I know that a couple of years ago when the federal government attempted to restrict the movement of firewood that I was one of those people that reacted with anger and with the belief that we had the right to move whatever firewood we needed. Now a little wiser, I realize that we need to face up to our responsibility to our children and find ways that will restrict the movement of potentially contaminated wood in a manner that will not cause hardship to our people and to our community. We need to do our best to protect our land for the next seven generations still to walk this land.