

## These guidelines are intended to help promote respectful and sustainable balsam harvest for generations to come.

### **Aninaandag or Zhingob (Balsam Fir)**

Balsam fir is an evergreen tree that grows throughout most of northern Wisconsin. It is most common in lowland forests or forested wetlands with spruce, tamarack, white cedar and/or black ash. It is also a common under-story tree in upland hardwood and hardwood-hemlock stands, and can form dense thickets. Balsam provides thermal cover for roosting birds and many other animals during the cold winter months.

Known to the Great Lakes Ojibwe as “Nimissé” or “elder sister”, the balsam fir has the highest concern for her family, like a second mother. Her spirit is a maiden who represents illumination and enlightenment. Balsam fir’s beautiful fragrance is understood to represent the tree praying for the People. If one were walking by a balsam fir when she released her fragrance, they would know that someone somewhere needed prayers. Other traditional names associated with balsam fir are *aninaandag*, which refers to the tree, and *zhingob*, which refers to the bough.

There was a man who had several little children who were starving. He went out on a lake fishing. When he caught a big fish, the biggest he had ever seen, he was deeply grateful, but if he stopped to give thanks he might lose this important fish and his little children would go hungry yet another day. So as he worked to bring in the fish he called out “Nimissé” and the balsam fir made his thanksgiving for him.

From Mikawa Sara Warber and Keewaydinoquay. 1995. Balsam fir and burns. Miniss Kitigan Drum, publisher. 23 pp.

### **Balsam has many uses**

**Bedding:** The needles are often sewed into pillows. An enclosure is also made from wood and filled with the springy, fragrant boughs.

**Sugarbush:** Boughs are used during the boiling phase of maple syrup production. When the boil becomes too rapid, a “swat” with a balsam bough will help regain control.



**Spearing:** During the ice spearing season, boughs are laid on the ice inside a traditional darkhouse to block the light from above.

**Medicinal:** The needles and sap have many medicinal properties, such as inhalation for respiratory ailments and a salve and temporary bandage for external sores.

**Other:** In addition to traditional uses, a common use today is for income. The boughs are widely harvested for sale to commercial wreath makers in the fall.



**Tribal Harvest  
Guidelines:  
Balsam Boughs**

## Balsam bough harvest guidelines

Most balsam is harvested for sale to wreath makers from early October to early December. Boughs retain their needles better if harvested after the second hard frost. When gathering one of our plant relatives, we are taught to offer *asemaa* (tobacco) to the plant to ask permission and to give thanks for what is to be taken. In order to harvest balsam boughs on a sustained basis please follow these guidelines:

- ◆ Harvest only from trees more than 7 ft tall.
- ◆ Only remove boughs from bottom half of tree, leaving part of each pruned branch for regeneration.
- ◆ To reduce waste, harvest branch sizes used by bough buyers:
  - 18-30 inches in length
  - Branch ends no larger than a pencil.
- ◆ Attempt to harvest boughs evenly, not “clumps” of boughs from one area.
- ◆ Do not to harvest more than 1/3 of each branch, in order to promote regeneration.
- ◆ Do not to harvest more than 1/3 of the boughs on the tree.
- ◆ Let harvested trees recover for at least 5-6 years so branches can grow new bough tips.
- ◆ Do not chop or pull down entire trees.
- ◆ Choose trees at least 50 feet from public roads, to preserve aesthetic value.



## What's the Balsam Woolly Adelgid?

The balsam woolly adelgid (BWA for short) is a tiny insect from Europe that is attacking and killing true fir trees (*Abies* spp.) in eastern North America and the Pacific Northwest. The adults excrete whitish wax, making them look like tiny cotton balls.



The insects inject saliva, causing the twigs to become swollen and stunted (“gouting”), making them useless for boughs.



The BWA attacks the trunk as well as the leaf bases, feeding on the tree's starch reserves and killing the tree.



## The BWA is one invasive we don't want here!

Avoid moving balsam boughs from Lower Michigan across the Mackinac Bridge to Upper Michigan. The BWA is likely to reach the ceded territory in Lower Michigan first, as the beech scale and the hemlock woolly adelgid recently did.

If you are harvesting boughs, or harvest or buy a Christmas tree, check the trunk, branches and needle bases for white, cotton-like material, twig gouting or other signs of BWA. If you see these signs of BWA infestation, PLEASE LET US KNOW!

## For more information:

**Balsam Bough Harvesting: Doing It Right for the Future (Minnesota DNR)**

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/treecare/maintenance/balsamharvest.html>

**Balsam woolly adelgid (US Forest Service)**

<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/fidls/bwa.pdf>

**Or visit the GLIFWC forest invasives site at:**

[http://www.glifwc.org/Forest\\_Pests/index.html](http://www.glifwc.org/Forest_Pests/index.html).

**Front photo:** Balsam boughs are a source of seasonal income for Lac du Flambeau harvesters Clyde Mann and Ken Jack.

### Photo credits

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## Before heading out to exercise your treaty rights, please remember to:

- Obtain any required permits and carry your tribal ID card.
- Familiarize yourself with the regulations
- Know who manages the property where you want to gather, and whether it is open to tribal gathering.
- If you're unsure of land ownership or specific rules and regulations, contact your tribe or GLIFWC.

## Finally, report signs of BWA or other forest invasives to your tribal NRD, state DNR, or GLIFWC!

**Michigan:** (800) 292-3939 (Michigan DARD)

**Wisconsin:** (800) 462-2803 (Wisconsin DATCP)

**Minnesota:** (888) 545-6684 (Arrest-the-Pest Hotline)

**Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission**

**PO Box 9, 72682 Maple Street**

**Odanah, WI 54861**

**715-682-6619 x 2126**

[www.glifwc.org](http://www.glifwc.org)

