

# *Sagow Pimachiwin*

*Plants and Animals used by  
Mikisew Cree First Nation for  
Food, Medicine and Materials*

**PUBLIC VERSION**



*Mikisew Cree First Nation Government and Industry Relations*



*Prepared by: Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources*



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*Photos left to right: photo of blueberries, birch basket, drying meat and fish, and drying mint: A. Karst, photo of moose: T. Ruta Fuchs*

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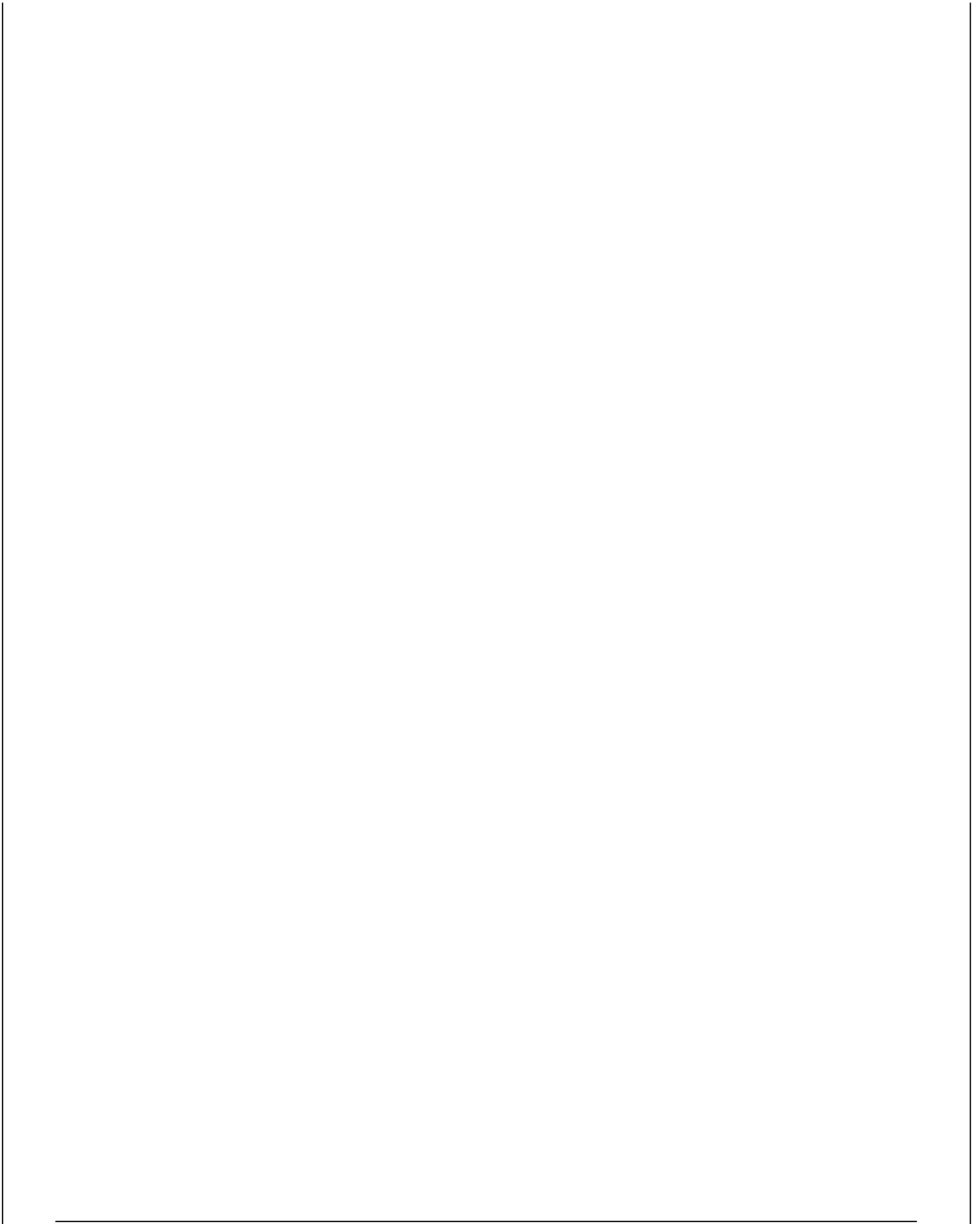
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# Acknowledgements

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The *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook was requested by Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) leadership and implemented by the MCFN Government and Industry Relations office. The guidebook was created through the dedicated work of a team of people, including Mikisew Cree First Nation Government and Industry Relations (MCFN GIR) and Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) staff. Thanks to Matthew Whitehead, TEK Coordinator at MCFN GIR, who provided Cree interpretation and translation for the interviews, and set up interviews with Mikisew members. Thanks also to Matthew for review of the guidebook. Thanks to Roy Campbell, Community Coordinator at MCFN GIR, who assisted with logistics during CIER visits, hosted the Elders' barbeque in his backyard, and gathered members during community visits.

Special thanks to the MCFN Traditional Environmental Knowledge-holders who were interviewed and went on fieldtrips for this guidebook. The knowledge-holders would like to acknowledge past generations that have shared wisdom with them, allowing them to pass this on to future generations. Both current and past knowledge-holder's expertise and willingness to share has made the *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook possible. Please see photos of knowledge-holders that contributed to this guidebook on the following pages.

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# Knowledge-holders

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The following Mikisew Cree First Nation members shared their knowledge and experiences for inclusion in the *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook.



*Harvey Antoine*



*Valerie Courtoreille*



*Maria Houle*



*Joe Kanaskamin*

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# Knowledge-holders

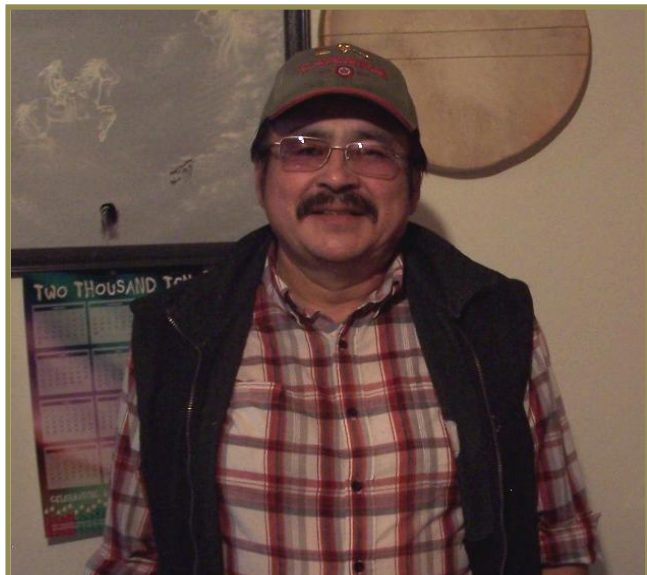
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*Mary Rose Mckay*



*George Marten*



*Helgi Marten*



*John Piche*

# Knowledge-holders

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*Larry Ratfat*



*Fred Vermillion*



*George Wanderingspirit*



*Billy Whiteknife*

# Disclaimer

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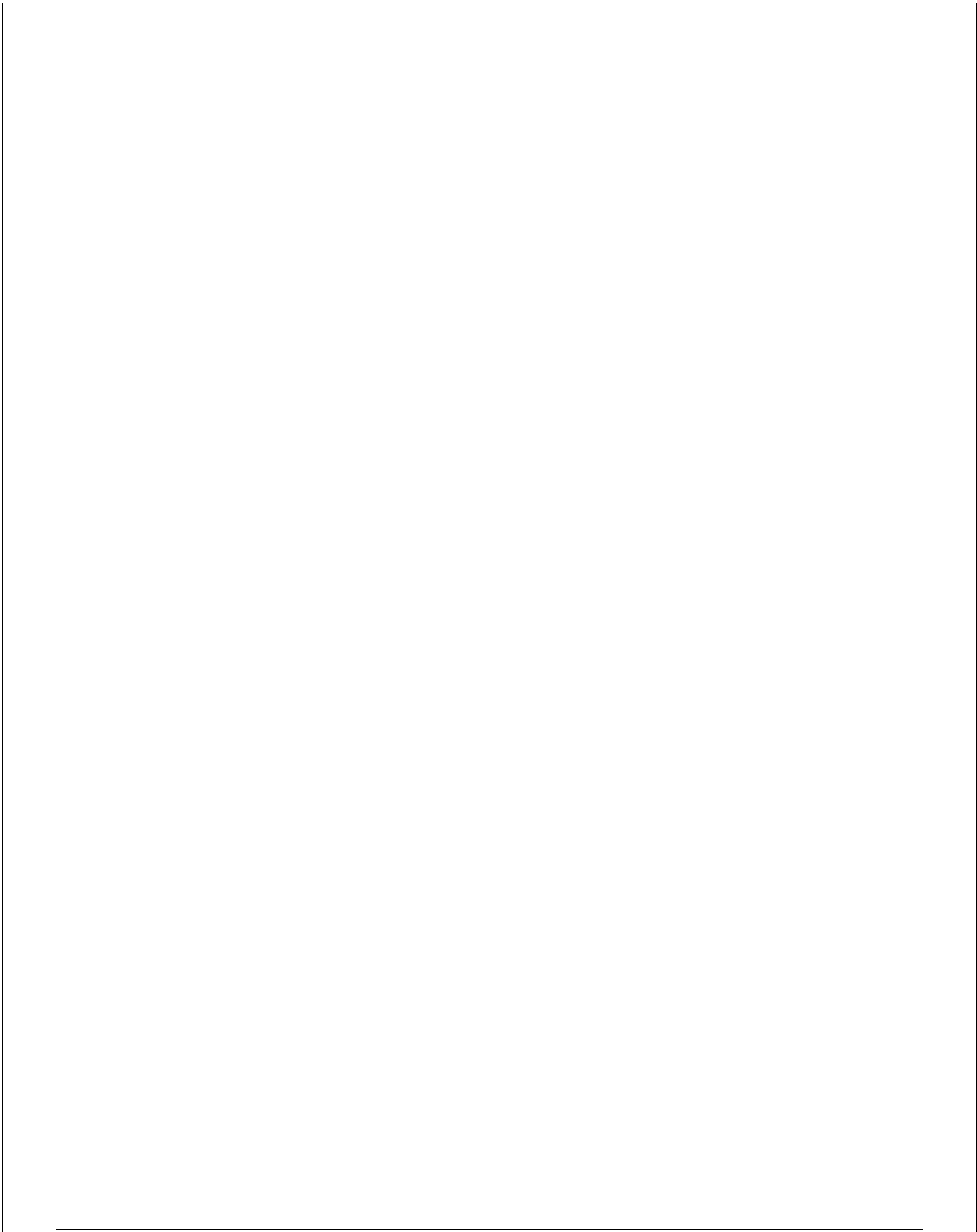
The *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook provides descriptions of plants and animals and cultural information. It is not meant to be a how-to-guide on consuming plants and animals. It must be cautioned that some plant/animal medicines, and even some food plants/animals, may be harmful if not prepared and used properly. Certain plants also have toxic properties. **Please consult an Elder or other person knowledgeable about plants or animals prior to using any plants or animals.**

The *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook includes information about plants and animals that Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) knowledge-holders determined was appropriate to share within this guidebook at this time (Note: sensitive information (e.g. medicinal/ceremonial details) have been removed from this public version). This guidebook does not include all of the plant and animal species of cultural significance to MCFN or all of the total knowledge about each species included. In addition, this guidebook is not intended to be an endpoint of the documentation of knowledge about plants and animals at MCFN. It will instead be an initial version of a '*living document*' that will allow for the inclusion of additional information by MCFN as resources and information become available. The guidebook information is presented in a user-friendly format that is easily replicable in order to facilitate periodic updates by MCFN.

Cree words or terms related to plants and animals were included in this guidebook as much as possible. However, a linguist was not involved in the study to verify the Cree terms (both written and online references were used). Including the Cree words was important because they provide a deeper understanding of the connection of Mikisew Cree people to these plants and animals. Also, this work provides a starting point for future research, such as a language study.

Elders or others who are knowledgeable about plants and animals should be consulted for further information beyond the contents of the *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook.

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# Introduction to *Sagow Pimachiwin*

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## The *Sagow Pimachiwin* Guidebook

The *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook describes plants and animals of cultural significance to Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN). This guidebook is based on the knowledge of Mikisew



Moccasins made of moose hide with beaver fur trim at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

Cree First Nation (MCFN) traditional harvesters and community members and focuses on plants and animals within the traditional territory of MCFN. Mikisew Cree First Nation Government & Industry Relations (MCFN GIR) asked the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) to develop the guidebook.

## Guidebook Purpose

The purpose of the guidebook is to:

- Preserve Elder's knowledge about local names and cultural use of plants and animals;
- Inform youth and others at MCFN about the traditional uses of plants and animals; and,
- Contribute to a greater understanding of plant and animal species in the Peace and Athabasca Watershed and their value to MCFN.



George Wanderingspirit and grandson Rudy Whiteknife  
Photo credit: A. Karst

## Guidebook Format and Contents

The *Sagow Pimachiwin* guidebook is organised into plant and animal sections. The plant section is further organised into trees, shrubs, berry-producing plants, herbaceous plants, plants growing in water, and fungi.

Each page in the main body of the guidebook includes the following:



Fred Vermillion picking rosehips at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

- Photograph of the plant/ animal (taken on MCFN traditional lands when possible);
  - Aboriginal language name (s) (Woodland Cree)<sup>1</sup>, English common name(s), and scientific name in Latin to assist with identification of the different plant and animal species;
  - Description of the animal or plant and the types of places (habitat) where the plants grow or the animals live (if described by Mikisew knowledge-holders);
  - Ways and protocols of gathering plants or harvesting animals (if described by Mikisew knowledge-holders); and,
  - Traditional use information such as how plants/ animals are used for food, medicinal, and/or cultural purpose); and,
- Elder's and other MCFN members' thoughts on the importance of the plant or animal to the people of MCFN.

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<sup>1</sup> Spellings of Woodland Cree names for plants and animals are from:

Anderson, A. 2000. Pakwachê Ohpikinwa: Plants in Cree. Metis Nation of Alberta and Duval House Publishing. 72 pp.; and,

Nehiyaw Masinahikan: Online Cree Dictionary. [www.creedictionary.com](http://www.creedictionary.com) Accessed October 2010.

If not found in the two sources named above, Woodland Cree names are spelled phonetically from Mikisew Knowledge-holder interviews conducted by CIER in June, July, and August 2010. If Woodland Cree name not available from above sources or interviews '-----' in the title of the plant/ animal page indicates that the name is currently unavailable.

# Background on Plants and Animals

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## Cultural Significance

Many plants and animals are culturally significant to the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN). Using plants and animals in daily life is an important part of MCFN's history, livelihood, and

*"You'll never starve in the bush, no, you know you'll go out there with just a gun, your little teapot, teapail, little bit of bannock and lard; stay out there for weeks and have good meals."*

*- Billy Whiteknife*

traditions, and is important for the future well-being of the Mikisew people. The plants and animals in this guidebook are significant because they are part of peoples' daily lives as foods, medicines, materials, and/or part of their spiritual lives.

## Protocols

Respecting plants and animals is a part of Mikisew culture. Namanacheetan or keeskumwata are Cree words that mean to 'respect' or to 'take good care of'. Certain protocols (practices) are followed when gathering a plant or harvesting an animal as ways to show respect. Different people have different ways of showing their respect.

Plants and animals used for medicine have special protocols surrounding their use. An essential part of using Cree medicines is 'Intapowakeyiteen' or 'believing in it'; as one knowledge-holder



Making mint tea at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

*"...And after you are done all that (preparing medicine from a plant), you go and bury it and put tobacco. You have to give it back to Mother Earth (VC)."*

shared: “You have to believe in it for it to work (VC).” Some traditional harvesters also have protocols for appropriate ways that knowledge is shared. Mikisew knowledge-holders should be consulted to discuss protocols before gathering plants and harvesting animals.

## Environmental Concerns

Using plants and animals is an important practice to maintain at MCFN for people’s health and well-being. MCFN members have identified that the health of lands and waters is important for the health of the plants and animals and the people who use them.



Dry meat and fish at MCFN culture camp  
Photo credit: G. Poitras

Several Mikisew community members have shared concern that the quality of some of the plants and animals that they use has decreased over time. For example, some Mikisew members do not eat bear or beaver as often as they used to because they are “not healthy” (MM), and the meat does not taste the same as it used to. The quality of some plants, such as wild mint, has decreased: “Some mint has been found with rotten or black roots and if you try to make tea with this mint, the tea will turn black and you won’t be able to drink it (GW).” MCFN members have expressed concern about the potential impacts of resource extraction activities present in the area, such as decreased water quality and water levels. These concerns have impacted people’s ability to harvest these plants and animals as much as they would like.



# *Plants*

# Trees

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**Balsam Fir**

**Birch**

**Poplar**

**Spruce**

# Napagasihta

## Balsam Fir

### *Abies balsamea*

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#### Where Napagasihta Grows

Mikisew Cree members usually travel down rivers to the spots where they can gather napagasihta (bark, roots, or cones) (BW, GW); it is not usually found very close to Fort Chipewyan but can be found within MCFN traditional lands (HA, JK).

#### Uses of Napagasihta

Napagasihta is important to Mikisew Cree First Nation as a source of medicine. It is one of the key components of MCFN traditional medicines and is used to treat many illnesses.

Napagasihta boughs can also be used to make a shelter or as a floor covering inside a tent. Since the needles are flat, napagasihta is a preferred tree to use for these purposes (HM). Balsam fir needles can be used to get a fire going quickly (Tanner 2006).



Photo credit: PRFN/T. Ruta Fuchs

The Cree word napagasihta means 'flat needles' (HM).

## Gathering Napagasihta

Care needs to be taken when gathering napagasihta bark, as taking too much of the bark off the tree (girdling, or removing an entire circle of bark from around the tree) may damage or kill the tree (HM). Community members may be asked to gather napagasihta when they are out on the land to bring back for Elders' use (HA, JK).



Joe Kaskamin with dried balsam fir bark  
Photo credit: A. Karst

# Waskway

## Paper Birch

### *Betula papyrifera*

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Photo credit: A. Karst

The wood is very hard and strong, so it is a good wood to use for building. Waskway wood can be used to make dog sleds, the rims of snowshoes, paddles, toboggans and drums.

The papery bark is a very useful material. There are some Mikisew knowledge-holders who still remember the art of making a waskway bark canoe. No nails or glue were used to make these canoes, and the bark was fastened together with roots and spruce gum (BW). Birch bark can be used as a splint for a broken arm or leg.

#### Where Waskway Grows

Waskway can be found growing in a variety of places. It is found mainly in drier areas (not in low marshy areas).

#### Uses of Waskway

Waskway is used for a variety of things: medicine, food and material for woodworking and crafting.



Birch bark basket at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

Waskwayiwat (a birch bark basket or bag) can be made from waskway bark. They were used to carry berries or meat before there were metal pots and plastic buckets.

*"I remember watching my mother make a waskway bark basket: the bark is peeled off the tree, nice and brown, and then roots (any kind of roots like waskway roots or spruce roots) are used to tie it. Before the roots are used, they are soaked and split in half, and after the basket is tied up the roots get dry."*

- Billy Whiteknife

Tapping of waskwayapoy (birch sap) has been passed from generation to generation at Mikisew. It was traditionally women that went out to get the waskway sap. The sap harvest happened early in the spring (i.e. May), as soon as the snow was gone and after May it was all dried up (BW). The waskway sap can be made into syrup by boiling it until it is thick, or it can be drunk 'straight up'; this is called waskway water (before it is boiled) (LR).

### **Gathering Waskway**

A good time to peel birch bark is in the spring when the sap is running and helps to separate the bark from the wood (BW).

# Wâpimêtos

## Trembling Aspen or Poplar

### *Populus tremuloides*

---

#### Where Wâpimêtos Grows

Wâpimêtos is a tree that can be found growing in many different places (e.g. both dry and moist areas).

#### Uses of Wâpimêtos

Wâpimêtos is a tree that is important as a source of food, medicine, and wood. In early spring, the inner bark of wâpimêtos can be eaten. The outer bark can be scraped off to get the white sweet-tasting bark inside (LR). The wood is a good fuel for fire and is gathered for that purpose. Dry poplar wood is favoured for drying fish (GM).



Photo credit: A. Karst



Photo credit: A. Karst

#### Gathering Wâpimêtos

Wâpimêtos leaves can be picked anytime other than winter.

# Sihta

## Spruce

### *Picea species*

---

#### Where Sihta Grows

Sihta grows in a variety of places. Black spruce is a type of sihta that normally grows in muskeg areas.

#### Uses of Sihta

Sihta is valued as a medicinal tree and a tree that supplies useful woodworking materials. The wood, branches, cones, roots, and sap are all useful materials.

Sihta boughs can be used to cover a tent, laid on the floor of a tent for use as a carpet, or as a tablecloth that provides a place to put meat or other foods (BW). The roots of sihta trees

(the thin roots)

can be split into string and used for many purposes, for example, as the sewing material for birch bark baskets and canoes (BW). Sihta wood can be used to make paddles, frames to stretch hide, or furniture like picnic tables. Historically sihta wood was used to make boats. Large-sized trees with no knots were required for this purpose (GM). Sihta sap or 'gum' was used to keep the boats water-proof and patch any holes discovered later (BW).



Black spruce growing in muskeg area  
Photo credit: A. Karst



Spruce boughs laid on the floor in a canvas tent  
Photo credit: A. Karst

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Yoskitâk: old spruce wood used to smoke moose hide  
Photo credit: A. Karst

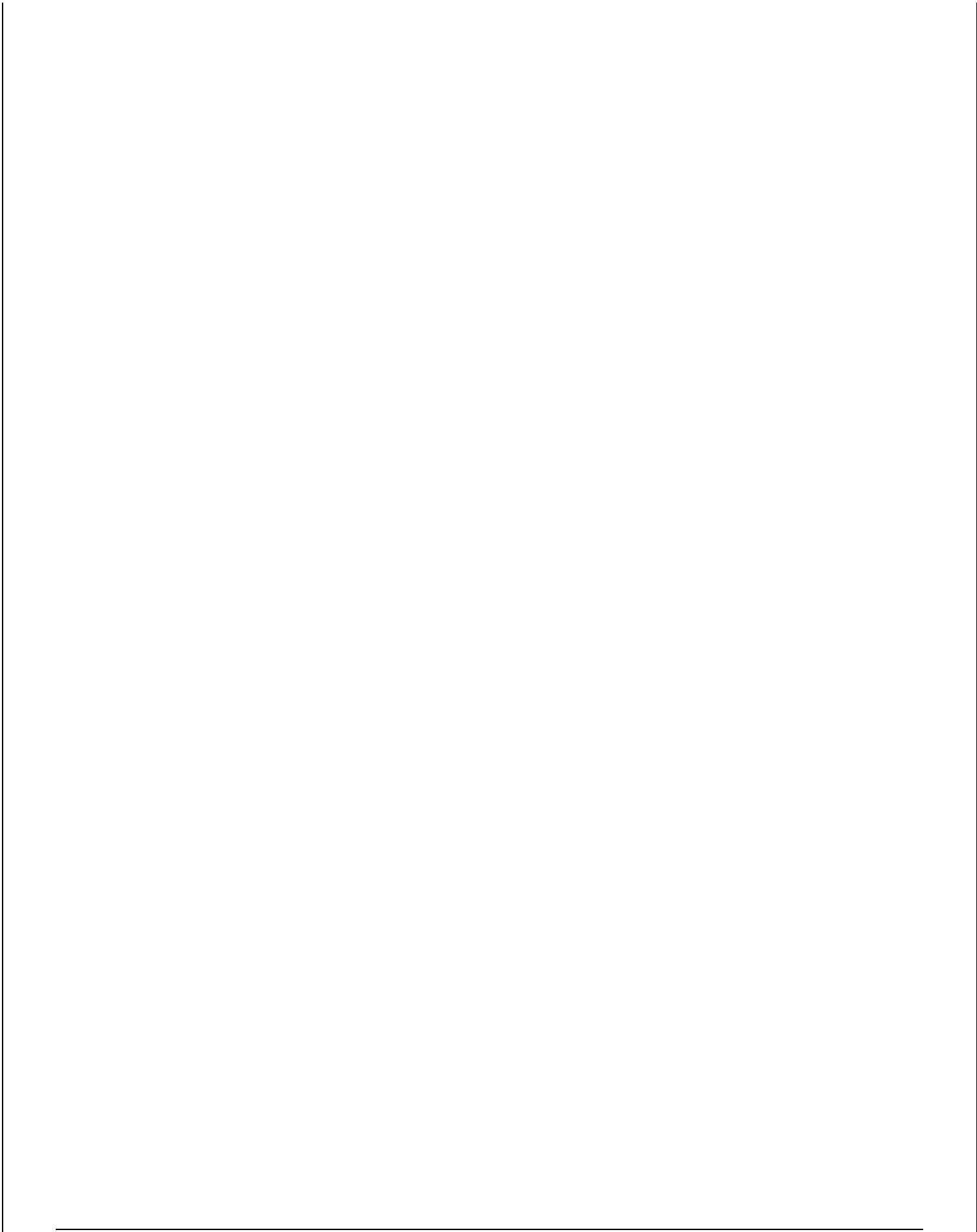
Sihta wood is valuable for different uses based on the age and condition of the wood. For example, the young green wood is suitable for making a boat required for short-term use. In the same way, only old decayed/rotten spruce wood that appears orange in colour, called yoskitâk in Cree, is selected to smoke moose hide (GM).

Sihta gum is important for its medicinal properties. Sihta gum is usually not eaten, but can be chewed like bubblegum (LR). Sihta cones are also used for medicinal purposes.



John Piche harvesting sihta gum  
Photo credit: A. Karst

Sihta gum collected at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst



# Shrubs

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**Bearberry, Red-Osier Dogwood or Red Willow**

**Common Juniper**

**Creeping Juniper**

**Green Alder**

**Labrador Tea**

**Wild Rose**

**Willow**

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# Mêhkwâpemak

## Bearberry, Red-Osier Dogwood or Red Willow

### *Cornus stolonifera*

#### Where Mêhkwâpemak Grows

Mêhkwâpemak grows by the river.

#### Uses of Mêhkwâpemak

Mêhkwâpemak is an important medicinal plant. Hunters might eat a few bearberries for luck before they go on a bear-hunt, but it is not good to eat too many (GW).

#### **Bearberries Grow on Red Willow**

At MCFN, the white berries that grow on mêhkwâpemak are called makwamina in Cree or 'bearberries' because bears eat them.

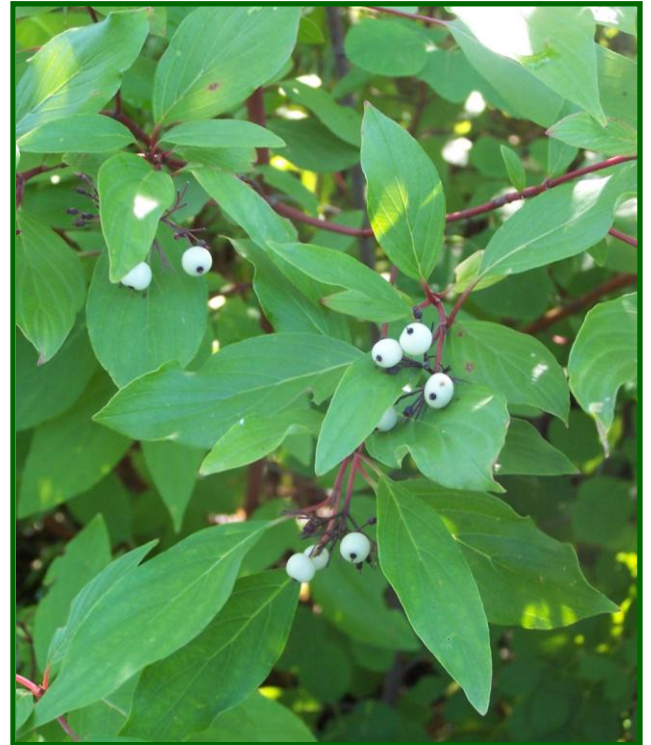


Photo credit: A. Karst



Mêhkwâpemak bark  
Photo credit: A. Karst

# Kâhkâkiwahtik

## Common Juniper

### *Juniperus communis*

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Photo credit: A. Karst

#### How Kâhkâkiwahtik Grows

Kâhkâkiwahtik looks like a tree, but it is not tall. Berry-like cones grow on it that look similar to blueberries.

#### Where Kâhkâkiwahtik Grows

Kâhkâkiwahtik grows in hilly areas, on rocky or sandy soil.

#### Uses of Kâhkâkiwahtik

Kâhkâkiwahtik is a medicinal plant. The berry-like cones can be used to make a brown dye (Tanner 2006).



Kâhkâkiwahtik growing at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

#### The Meaning of Kâhkâkiwahtik

The Cree word for juniper, kâhkâkiwahtik, means 'raven stem': from the Cree word kâhkâkiw meaning raven and the Cree word ahtik meaning stem.

# Peemnakwomsita

## Creeping Juniper

### *Juniperus horizontalis*

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#### Where Peemnakwomsita

#### Grows

Peemnakwomsita can be found growing in the same areas as Kâhkâkiwahtik.

#### Uses of Peemnakwomsita

Peemnakwomsita is a medicinal plant.

#### Gathering

#### Peemnakwomsita

Peemnakwomsita is not gathered from where people have stepped on it. This is part of respecting it as a medicinal plant (GW). Both kâhkâkiwahtik (common juniper) and peemnakwomsita (creeping juniper) are green year round, and can be gathered even in the winter (HM).



Photo credit: A. Karst

#### How Peemnakwomsita Grows

Peemnakwomsita grows along the ground.  
The stem resembles a rope.

**Âtospê**  
**Green Alder**  
*Alnus species*

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**Where Âtospê Grows**

Âtospê grows along rivers.

**Uses of Âtospê**

Âtospê is a medicinal plant.



Photo credit: A. Karst



Âtospê branches gathered in MCFN territory

Photo credit: A. Karst

**Le Tea Wuska**  
**Labrador Tea**  
*Ledum groenlandicum*

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Le Tea Wuska in bloom  
Photo credit: A. Karst

**Where Le Tea Wuska Grows**

Le tea wuska grows in muskeg areas.

**Uses of Le Tea Wuska**

Le tea wuska is a well known and important food and medicine plant to Mikisew Cree members. The Le tea wuska leaves (or other plant parts) are gathered, dried, sometimes crushed, and boiled to make a flavourful tea that smells good when it is boiling (MM).

**Gathering Le Tea Wuska**

The leaves of Le tea wuska can be picked anytime, even during the winter, because some leaves stay on the plant. However, early summer is the best time to pick the leaves because they are fresh (LR). The whole plant can be picked as well.



# Okiniwapakwaniya

## Wild Rose

### *Rosa acicularis*



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

taste good and can be eaten right off the plant. Okiniyak, or rose hips, are good to drink as a tea. Okiniyak are also good to eat, especially after frying them and putting sugar on them. A jam or jelly can also be made from okiniyak by boiling them and straining them through cheesecloth to remove the seeds (MM). Okiniyak are nutritious (JP, FV). The hips can also be frozen in bags for later use (Lepine, H. 2008).

### Gathering Okiniwapakwaniya

The petals are picked in June. Okiniyak, the rose hips, sometimes also referred to as the rose 'buds', are picked when they ripen in September (JP, FV).

### Where Okiniwapakwaniya Grows

Okiniwapakwaniya grows in the bush, usually in relatively high, dry areas.

### Uses of Okiniwapakwaniya

Okiniwapakwaniya is a food and medicinal plant. The petals from the okiniwapakwaniya flower



Picking okiniyak (rosehips) at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

It is important to remove the seeds from okiniyak before you eat them, because the seeds have prickles on them. You would not want to get kiyakitskewminack or 'itchy bum' (HA).

# Nêpisê

## Willow

### *Salix species*



Photo credit: A. Karst

#### **Where Nêpisê Grows**

Nêpisê grows mainly in wet or low areas, near water. It is found in areas where muskrat is harvested. However, diamond willow is a type of willow that is found mainly in relatively high, dry areas.

#### **Uses of Nêpisê**

There are different kinds of nêpisê. Some nêpisê are medicinal. Willow wood is used

to smoke meat and fish, and is the preferred wood for smoking dry fish (GM). Nêpisê stems can be used to hold muskrat traps in place (HM).

*"Diamond willows are good wood to use when you are smoking things. The wood needs to be half dry - can't be really dry - if they are they will burn too fast, then you will burn your dry meat. But if it is half-green it burns slowly. It smokes the meat at the same time."*

- Billy Whiteknife

# Berry-producing Plants

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**Black Currant or God's Berry**

**Blueberry**

**Bunchberry**

**Chokecherry or Chick-Chick Berry**

**Cranberry**

**Gooseberry**

**Low-bush Cranberry or Mooseberry**

**Raspberry**

**Saskatoon**

**Stoneberry, Bearberry or Kinnickinnick**

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**Manitômina**  
**Black Currant or God's Berry**  
*Ribes* species

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Manitômina (*Ribes lacustre*) berries  
Photo credit: Nancy Turner

**Where Manitômina Grows**

Manitômina grows in a variety of areas, in both dry and wet places.

**Uses of Manitômina**

Manitômina berries are a food source and are used for medicinal purposes. The taste of the berries can be described as sour (MM). They can be eaten fresh or used to make jam (HM).

**Gathering Manitômina**

It is rare to find manitômina around Fort Chipewyan (HM). They have a strong smell that can help locate them. The berries fall off of the plant easily, so they are easy to pick (HM). They are ripe and ready to be picked in July or August.

# Ênimina

## Blueberry

### *Vaccinium species*

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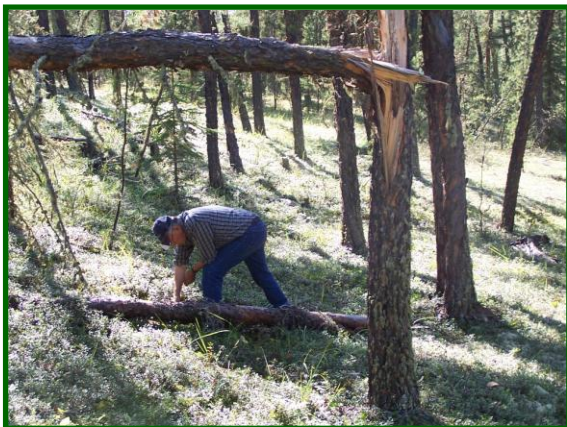
#### Where Ênimina Grows

Ênimina are found mostly in 'jackpine country'. Ênimina are plentiful in areas that have been burnt and have fresh growth (where plants are starting to grow back after a burn). Some Mikisew members travel by boat to islands in jackpine country and look for the 'good patches' of ênimina. Ênimina can also be picked alongside



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

of roads. In good ênimina areas, the ground looks like it is covered with a blue carpet from all of the ripe berries (MM). A family could pick 15 to 20 pounds of berries in one patch (Tanner 2006).



Picking berries in jackpine country  
Photo credit: A. Karst

#### Jackpine Country

'Jackpine country' is described as dry, sandy areas where there are jackpine trees with caribou moss underneath, and some rotten jackpine wood. These areas are wide open underneath the trees (MM).



Ênimina picked in MCFN traditional territory  
Photo credit: A. Karst

## Uses of Ênimina

Ênimina are an important food and medicinal plant to Mikisew. Ênimina are eaten fresh, made into jam or pie, or frozen for winter storage. Long ago, without a deep freeze, the berries were canned (i.e. boiled without sugar, and kept in a bottle). Before bottles were available, people made containers out of birch bark, put the berries in there, and sewed a lid onto the container

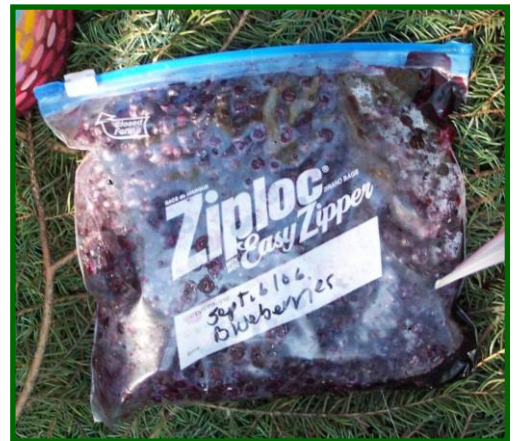
so that the berries would not spoil (GW). Fresh berries were also mixed with grease and dry meat to make pemmican.

## Gathering Ênimina

Ênimina are picked in August and September. The berries are ready for picking when they have changed from white to a blue colour. People don't start picking ênimina until it looks like there are enough ripe berries to fill a pail (e.g. a five-gallon pail) (MM). The amount of ênimina available changes from year to year. There are certain years without many ênimina and sometimes they are not of good quality, looking dried up and small, as if they have been burned (LR). Although anyone can pick berries, it is mainly women that have had the primary responsibility for berry-picking and teaching children how to pick berries.

*"You have to boil blueberries right away (after you pick them). If you freeze blueberries without boiling them right away, then they break apart. You can freeze blueberries in a container; they freeze well (last for a long time)."*

- Maria Houle



Ênimina frozen and ready for later use  
Photo credit: A. Karst

# Sassagominsa

## Bunchberry

*Cornus canadensis*

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### Where Sassagominsa

#### Grows

Sassagominsa can be found growing under the shade of trees, often where moss grows. It grows in high, dry areas, not in low, wet areas.

### Uses of Sassagominsa

Sassagominsa berries are a food source. They are thought to be good for eating because they are nutritious (HM). The berries can be boiled or fried with shortening. They can be eaten raw, but do not have a very strong taste and their texture can be mushy (HM).



Photo credit: A. Karst

#### How Sassagominsa Grows

Sassagominsa grows close to the ground. It has bright red-orange berries growing in a bunch that appear to be sprouting out of the centre of the plant.



Sassagominsa flowers  
Photo credit: A. Karst

### Gathering Sassagominsa

Sassagominsa are picked when they are ripe in July or August. They dry up before frost starts to set in. Several pounds of these berries can be picked in one season (HM).

# Takwahimina

## Chokecherry or Chick-Chick Berry

*Prunus virginiana*

---

### Where Takwahimina

#### Grows

Takwahimina bushes are found growing in patches in the bush and/or near water (MM).



Takwahimina flowers  
Photo credit: Marilena Kowalchuck



Photo credit: Nancy Turner

#### How Takwahimina Grows

Takwahimina grow hanging down from a bush; bushes can be small or large. They ripen in mid-July and can look like blueberries or saskatoons when they are ripe, but they taste very different. The seeds inside a takwahimina are hard and look like little bones (MM).

### Uses of Takwahimina

Takwahimina are important as food and medicine. Takwahimina are delicious to eat, but Elders warn “Don’t eat too much” because eating the hard seeds could cause constipation (MM). In the past, takwahimina were dried by putting them out on a tarp in the sun and turning them until they were dry. Once they were dry, the takwahimina could be kept without spoiling over the winter. Takwahimina were also smashed together with dry meat to make pemmican (HA, JK).



# Wêsakêmina

## Cranberry

*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*

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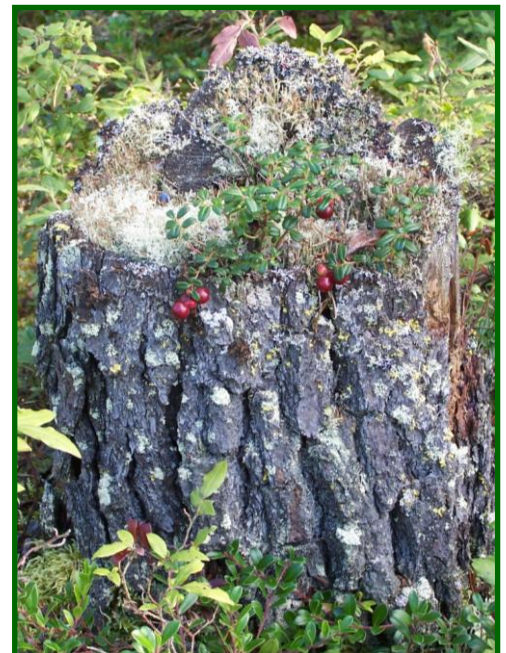
Photo credit: A. Karst

### Where Wêsakêmina Grows

Wêsakêmina grow on plants that grow low to the ground. They are found mostly in jackpine country, growing in sandy soil. Wêsakêmina are often found growing in the same area as blueberries. The Cree name for cranberries that grow in jackpine country is wêsakêmina (the plant shown on this page), while muskegomina refers to cranberries that grow in muskeg.

### Uses of Wêsakêmina

Wêsakêmina are important as food and medicine. Wêsakêmina are canned or made into jam or pie. They can also be added to bannock. These berries have a tangy 'bite' to them, so often a lot of sugar or sweetener is added when they are cooked (HM). Today, wêsakêmina are stored for the winter in a freezer. Long ago, without a deep freeze, the berries were boiled, without sugar, and kept in a bottle. Before bottles, containers were made out of birch bark to put the berries in, then, lids were sewed onto the containers so that the berries would not spoil.



Wêsakêmina growing on a stump

Photo credit: A. Karst

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Wêsakêmina and sugar were added to moose grease and dry moose meat to flavour pemmican. Wêsakêmina are a healthy food because they contain vitamins (HM).

### Gathering Wêsakêmina

Wêsakêmina are usually picked in August and September. However, cranberries can even be picked once the snow has fallen (HM). If they are picked when they are not fully ripe, you can put them in an open container and they will turn red (ripen) (GW). If it is a good year for berries, enough berries can be picked to last all winter.

### Buffalo and Berries

Buffalo can sometimes show up on berry picking trips – you could be picking berries then suddenly the buffalo will be standing there! One time when Mary Rose Mckay’s husband went to pick berries, a buffalo swam across the river towards them, so they jumped in the boat and took off.



Mary Rose Mckay aka ‘Super Granny’ with wêsakêmina ready to put away for winter  
Photo credit: A. Karst

# Sâpômina

## Gooseberry

### *Ribes species*

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Photo credit: Nancy Turner

#### Where Sâpômina Grows

Sâpômina are usually found growing in rocky, open areas.

#### Uses of Sâpômina

Sâpômina are used as a food plant. In the past, sâpômina used to be picked and kept in birch bark containers for the winter. They were also mixed with pemmican (HA, JK). Today, sâpômina are mainly picked for eating out-of-hand (usually not in

large amounts). Jam normally is not made from sâpômina. However, if enough sâpômina are picked, they can be canned for later use (HA, JK).

#### Gathering Sâpômina

Sâpômina are ready to pick in July. They are juicy and tasty when they turn blue like a blueberry (BW). Sâpômina

plants have sharp prickles on the branches, so it is hard on the hands to pick them. In the past, picking was done by putting a tarp around the bottom of the sâpômin bushes, then using a stick to hit the bush and knock the sâpômina off of the plants (HA, JK).

#### Picking Berries Like a Bear

The Cree word moasoweyahk means to pick berries in pails to have for later, and the word moominiyahk means 'picking like a bear' or picking berries just to eat them (MM).

# Môsomina

## Low Bush-Cranberry or Mooseberry

### *Viburnum edule*



Photo credit: A. Karst

### Gathering Môsomina

Môsomina are ripe at the end of August or early September. When they ripen, they turn from white hard berries into soft red berries.

Môsomina are ready to pick when the bears eat them (LR). They have a strong smell that can be detected from quite a distance away, which helps to locate them (JK).

### Where Môsomina Grows

Môsomina can be found growing in the bush and/or on riverbanks. They grow where roses and red willows grow (HM).

### Uses of Môsomina

Môsomina are a food and medicinal plant. These berries have a strong smell (some say they smell like toe-jam!), but they taste good (JK). Môsomina can be eaten fresh and make good jelly or jam. Some say they are too bitter to be eaten fresh and are best eaten after they have been boiled with sugar (JK).



Mosomina picked and ready for use at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

**Âyôskana**  
**Raspberry**  
*Rubus idaeus*

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Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

**Where Âyôskana Grows**

Âyôskana can be found growing on the banks of rivers where there is lots of grass. They are usually found near water.

**Uses of Âyôskana**

Âyôskana is a food and medicinal plant. The berries are picked for eating fresh. The fresh berries do not keep for a long time, but can be frozen. They were not normally dried, as with other berries, to preserve them (HA). A delicious jam can be made from the berries.

**Gathering Âyôskana**

Âyôskana can be picked in July or August. If there are lots of berries some can be picked for eating fresh and others preserved for later use (MM).

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**Sâskatômina**  
**Saskatoon**  
*Amelanchier alnifolia*

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**Where Sâskatômina Grows**

Sâskatômina grow in a variety of places, including near rivers, on rocky hills or along roadsides.

**Uses of Sâskatômina**

Sâskatômina is an important food and medicinal plant. They can be eaten fresh, made into pies, or frozen for the winter. Sâskatômina also make good jam (MM). In the past, the berries were dried by putting them out on a tarp in the sun and turning them until they were dry. Once they were dry, the berries could be kept without spoiling over the winter (HA, JK).

**Gathering Sâskatômina**

Sâskatômina are picked when they are ripe in July.



Photo credit: Nancy Turner

**A Tricky Spot to Pick Berries**

Mary Rose Mckay talked about one spot above a set of rapids on a river where there were lots of sâskatômina. As a kid she was tempted to pick them, but was warned by Elders not to pick berries there because of the tricky location.

# Muskomina

## Stoneberry, Bearberry or Kinnikinnick

### *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*

#### Where Muskomina Grows

Muskomina is a hardy plant that doesn't require much soil to grow. It can grow in many places, including rocky and sandy areas.

#### Uses of Muskomina

Muskomina is a food plant, however, they are not picked as often as other berries such as blueberries or cranberries. The



Photo credit: A. Karst

berries are a good source of vitamins and can be eaten fresh, although they have little seeds that may be spit out. The seeds are hard and so the berries are often pounded or mashed before use. They can be mixed with dried meat, boiled or fried in grease or lard (HM, GW).

#### Gathering

##### Muskomina

Muskomina can be found year round, even under the snow.

##### Muskomina (Stoneberries) and Wesakemina (Cranberries)

Muskomina grows close to the ground and have bright red berries, similar to Wêsakêmina. These two berries may be confused for each other. One time, a Mikisew member and his wife went wesakemina picking with his family. The wife had just moved to the area and this was her first time picking wesakemina. The mother-in-law was surprised at how full her pail was, saying "Boy she is really picking fast!" - but when they looked closer they saw that it was a bunch of muskomina!

# Herbaceous Plants

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**Bluebell or Harebell**

**Fireweed**

**Pink Lady's Slipper**

**Rabbit Root or Wild Sarsaparilla**

**Richardson's Alumroot**

**Sage**

**Stinging Nettle**

**Wild Mint**

**Wild Onion**

**Yarrow**

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# Kaskwâsonâpiskos

## Bluebell or Harebell

### *Campanula rotundifolia*

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Photo credit: A. Karst

#### Where Kaskwâsonâpiskos Grows

Kaskwâsonâpiskos grows in dry, rocky or hilly areas, or areas with sandy soil.

#### Uses of Kaskwâsonâpiskos

Kaskwâsonâpiskos is a medicinal plant.



Kaskwâsonâpiskos root  
Photo credit: A. Karst

#### How Kaskwâsonâpiskos Grows

Kaskwâsonâpiskos are delicate-looking plants with blue or violet bell-shaped flowers.

#### Gathering Kaskwâsonâpiskos

The roots of these plants are dug up, cleaned off, and dried for use (HM).

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# Ihkapaskwa

## Fireweed

### *Epilobium angustifolium*

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#### **Where Ihkapaskwa Grows**

Ihkapaskwa grows in abundance following a forest fire. They grow where the soil is relatively dry; they are normally not found in boggy or marshy areas (HM).

#### **Uses of Ihkapaskwa**

Ihkapaskwa is a medicinal plant.

#### **Gathering Ihkapaskwa**

Ihkapaskwa leaves are normally picked in the summer. The roots can be harvested year round, although they are less accessible in the winter (HM).



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

**Musksinsa or Kiseetaw Marie Muskinsa**  
**Pink Lady's Slipper or St. Mary's Slipper**  
*Cypripedium acaule*

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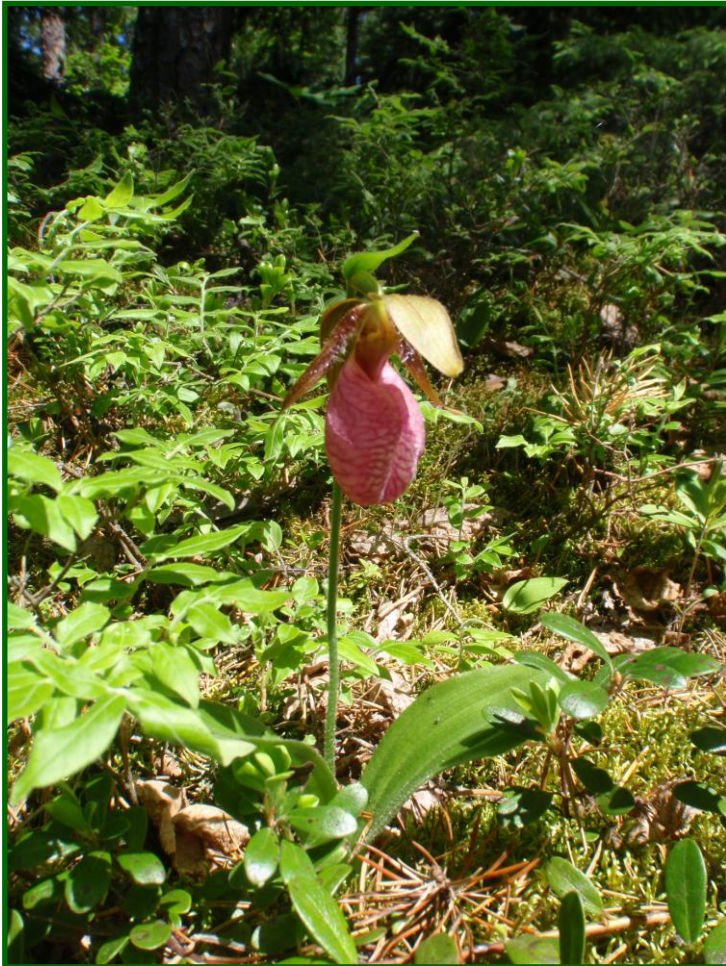


Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

**Where Muskinsa Grows**

Muskinsa grows in sandy areas, usually in jackpine country. It also grows in muskeg areas.

**Uses of Muskinsa**

Muskinsa is a medicinal plant.

**Gathering Muskinsa**

Muskinsa are recognised by their attractive pinkish-purple colour. They are found in the spring, and they only bloom for a short time (LR).

# Wāposōcēpik

## Rabbit Root or Wild Sarsaparilla

### *Aralia nudicaulis*

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#### Where Wāposōcēpik Grows

Wāposōcēpik grows in the bush, in shady areas.

#### Uses of Wāposōcēpik

Wāposōcēpik is a medicinal plant.



Photo credit: A. Karst



Leaves and purple berries of Wāposōcēpik  
Photo credit: A. Karst

#### How Wāposōcēpik Grows

Wāposōcēpik can be recognised by its large leaves.

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## Richardson's Alumroot

### *Heuchera richardsonii*

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#### Where Alumroot Grows

Alumroot grows on rocks, in hilly areas.

#### Uses of Alumroot

Alumroot is a medicinal plant.

#### Gathering Alumroot

Alumroot can be recognised by the round leaves. The plant is dug up because the roots are the part that is used (LR).



Photo credit: A. Karst



Leaves of Richardson's alumroot  
Photo credit: A. Karst

# Mostosowêhkask

## Sage

### *Salvia species*

---



Photo credit: A. Karst

### Uses of Mostosowêhkask

Mostosowêhkask is used for smudging at ceremonies (HM, LR). It has a good smell (MM). It can also be used to make a smudge to keep mosquitoes away (MH).



Dried sage ready for use at MCFN

Photo credit: A. Karst

# Masân

## Stinging nettle

### *Urtica dioica*

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#### Where Masân Grows

Masân grows where there is a relatively high amount of soil. It is not usually found growing in sandy or rocky areas.

#### Uses of Masân

Masân is a medicinal plant.

#### Gathering Masân

Masân can be gathered in the summer or anytime before frost (HM). You need to take care when gathering stinging nettle, because touching the plant causes itching (MH).



Photo credit: A. Karst

# Âmiskowêhkask

## Wild Mint

### *Mentha arvensis*

---

#### Where Âmiskowêhkask

#### Grows

Âmiskowêhkask can be found along shorelines of rivers or lakes.

#### Uses of Âmiskowêhkask

Âmiskowêhkask is an important medicinal and food plant. All parts of the plant (flowers, leaves, and stem) can be used, although usually the root is not used.



Photo credit: B. Maclean

Âmiskowêhkask can be drunk as a beverage by pouring hot water over the whole plant. It is usually dried and used right away or stored in a paper bag for later use (MM).



Drying wild mint  
Photo credit: A. Karst

#### Gathering Âmiskowêhkask

Âmiskowêhkask can be picked anytime during the summer. You can find âmiskowêhkask easily because you will smell it before you see it. This plant has a strong smell, but it smells good (MM).



# Wêchekaskosê

## Wild Chive or Wild Onion

### *Allium* species



Photo credit: A. Karst

#### Where Wêchekaskosê Grows

Wêchekaskosê grows in rocky areas.

#### Uses of Wêchekaskosê

Wêchekaskosê is a food plant. All parts of wêchekaskosê are eaten (onion bulb and stem). The bulbs or stems can be crushed and used in soup (GW).

#### Gathering Wêchekaskosê

Wêchekaskosê means 'stink grass' in Cree; it can refer to the whole plant, or just the onion bulb. When picking wêchekaskosê: "you can smell the wêchekaskosê a long way off (GW)." Wêchekaskosê are picked at the end

of August, at the same time as berries are picked. The bulbs keep well; if you pick them in the summer, they will keep until fall (LR).



Wêchekaskosê bulbs  
Photo credit: A. Karst

*"An old man grew up on onions, all his life he ate wild onions. When he died he was over 90 years old and never lost his sight, he could see from Dog-Head to Potato Island, could see a person walking over there, could see like an eagle. That's from eating onions all his life."*

*- George Wanderingspirit*

# Wâpanewask

## Yarrow

### *Achillea millefolium*



Photo credit: A. Karst

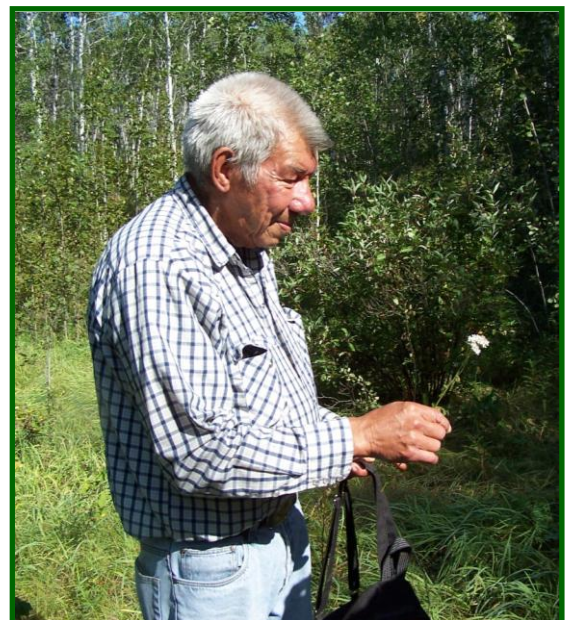
#### Uses of Wâpanewask

Wâpanewask is used for several medicinal and practical purposes. The flowers are dried and crushed into powder for use on trap bait (e.g. bait used to trap lynx or marten); the bait doesn't freeze when wâpanewask is added (GW). This plant is called 'mosquito medicine' because it can be used to make a smudge to keep mosquitos away (LR).

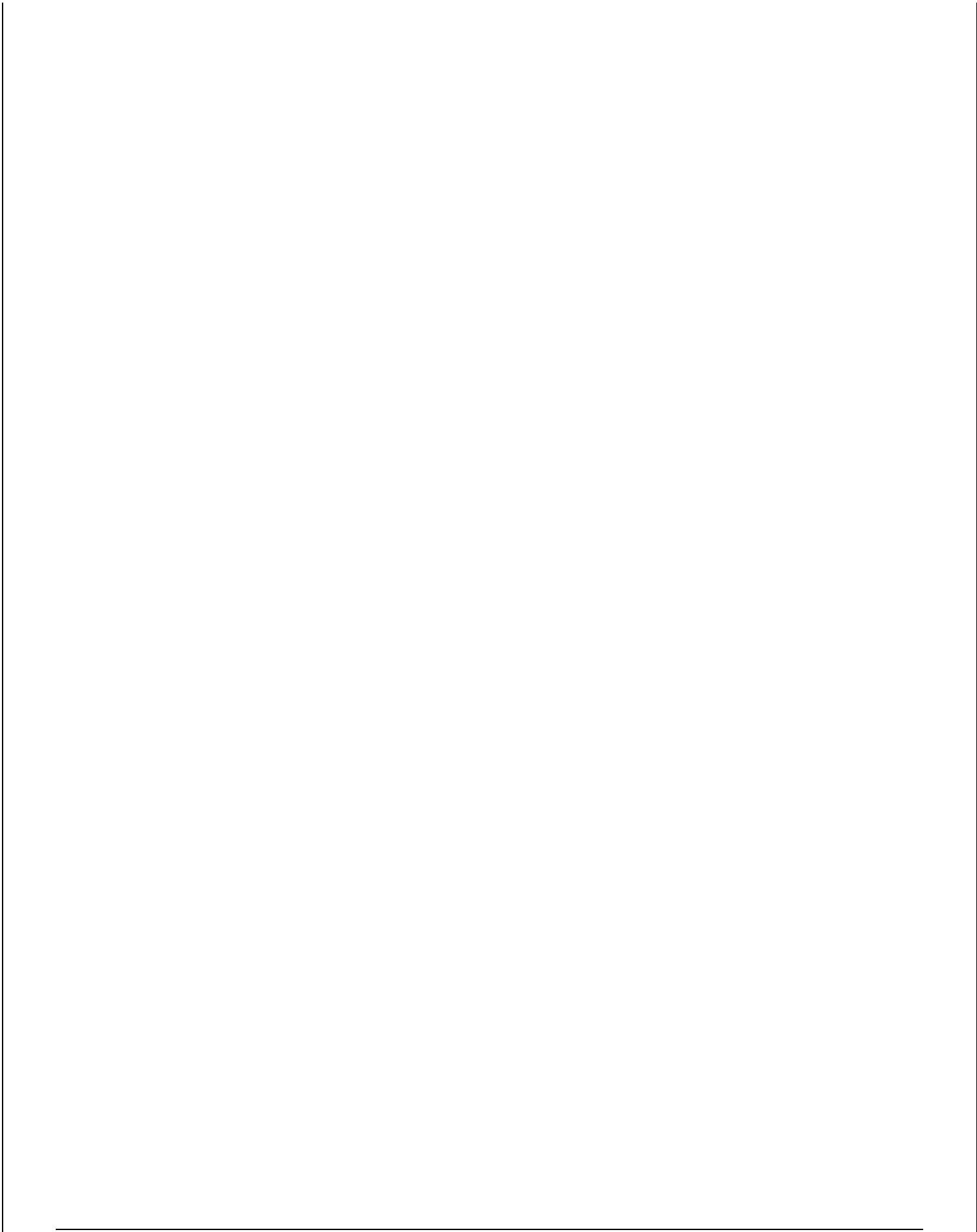
Wâpanewask is placed on top of the fire to make the smudge and smells good. Wâpanewask is also a medicinal plant.

#### Lynx Perfume

Lynx are attracted to wâpanewask, and like to rub themselves on it. That is why another Cree name for this plant is pisew wîhkimâkohon meaning 'lynx bait' or 'lynx perfume' (GW).



George Wanderingspirit picking yarrow  
Photo credit: A. Karst



# **Plants Growing in Water**

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**Cattail**

**Pineapple Plant or Yellow Pond Lily**

**Ratroot or Sweet Flag**

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# Otâwask Cattail *Typha latifolia*



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

Photo credit: A. Karst

## Where Otâwask Grows

Otâwask grows at the water's edge, such as in sloughs or along rivers. Water levels affect where cattails grow as well as access to areas where cattails grow.

Certain lakes where cattails grow are more difficult to access by boat when water levels are low (JK).



## Uses of Otâwask

The soft, fluffy seeds of Otawask can be used inside socks or mitts to keep feet and hands warm in the winter. One way to make sure that trapper's hands do not get stuck on the metal animal traps in the winter, is to put one's hands into cold water, then put them into gloves lined with cattail fluff. This way, when a person's hands are removed from the gloves, the fluff sticks their hands, and their hands don't stick to the traps (GW).



Seed head and fluffy seeds of Otâwask  
Photo credit: A. Karst

Otâwask is a traditional food plant. In the past, the shoots or underground stems were eaten. Before being eaten, the parts were peeled 'like a banana'. Elders taught youth that these were safe to eat, and kids would gather them and break them up and eat them (MM). Otâwask can also be eaten as an emergency food if one is stranded in the bush. They can be eaten raw or boiled (HM).



Edible root or rhizome of Otâwask  
Photo credit: A. Karst



Edible shoot or stem of Otâwask  
Photo credit: A. Karst

## Gathering Otâwask

The parts of otâwask that are gathered are the thick underground stem and/or the shoots. These are gathered by digging underneath the plant. The top portion that contains the fluffy seeds, called paseecanak in Cree can be gathered in the fall.

*"When the ducks are moulting, that is when the cattail seeds come out. They are just like feathers. Kids used to hit each other with them [when they played]!"*

- Mary Rose Mckay

# Waskatamiw

## Pineapple Plant or Yellow Pond Lily

### *Nuphar lutea*

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#### Where Waskatamiw

#### Grows

Waskatamiw can be found growing in creeks, rivers, or sloughs. It grows where there are beavers because beavers eat this plant (BW).

#### Uses of Waskatamiw

Waskatamiw is used as a medicinal plant. This plant is only used for medicine and not for food (BW).



Photo credit: A. Karst



Wuskutamo (the root or underground stem of the pineapple plant) cut and hung to dry at MCFN  
Photo credit: G. Poitras

#### Gathering Waskatamiw

The part of the pond lily that is gathered is called the 'root' (it is a part of the underwater stem). The root is found under the floating leaves of the lily, at the bottom of the long underwater stem. The root is often referred to as a 'pineapple' because it is large and yellow with dark spots or lumps (resembling a pineapple) (BW, HM). The easiest way to gather the 'pineapples' is when they are floating on the surface of the water. This often happens in the spring.

Beavers dig them up to eat them and then they float

to the surface. People often see the pineapples floating around beaver dams. If the pineapples are not floating on the surface of the water, you have to use something like a pole with a hook at the end to reach them and dig them out (BW).



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

### **Cree Names for Parts of Waskatamiw**

Weeskeechepuk refers to the leaves that float on the surface of the water.

Wuskutamo refers to the underwater root or the 'pineapple'.



# Wachaskomêchiwin

## Ratroot or Sweet Flag

*Acorus americanus*

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Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

Photo credit: A. Karst

Wachaskomêchiwin is picked during the summer or in the fall (August/September) (HM).

### Where Wachaskomêchiwin Grows

Wachaskomêchiwin grows in wet places. Only certain places are good for wachaskomêchiwin to grow (GW).

### Uses of Wachaskomêchiwin

Wachaskomêchiwin is an important and widely used medicinal plant by Mikisew Cree people. It is used in a variety of medicines to treat many illnesses.

### Gathering Wachaskomêchiwin

The 'root' or underground stem of the plant is the part that is dug up for use.



Gathering wachaskomêchiwin at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

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# Fungus

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**Diamond Willow Fungus**

**Puffball Fungus**

# Wikamosagun

## Diamond Willow Fungus

### *Trametes species*

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#### Where Wikamosagun Grows

Wikamosagun is a fungus that grows on the dead or dying branches of nêpisêyak (willow).

#### Uses of Wikamosagun

Wikamosagun is used for ceremonial and medicinal purposes. It is usually dried before use (HM). The fungus is burned like incense and gives off a pleasant smell (HA, JK, HM).



Harvey Antoine and wikamosagun  
Photo credit: A. Karst

#### Gathering Wikamosagun

Wikamosagun can be detected from far away because it has a nice smell. Wikamosagun is usually picked in the fall. It can also be picked in winter by tapping on the fungus; pieces will fall off easily because it is frozen (HM).

# Wesakejakpooketoowin

## Puffball Fungus

### *Lycoperdon* species

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#### Where Wesakejakpooketoowin Grows

This fungus can be found growing in the bush, in dry places (Tanner 2006).

#### Uses of Wesakejakpooketoowin

This fungus is used for medicinal purposes.



Photo credit: A. Karst



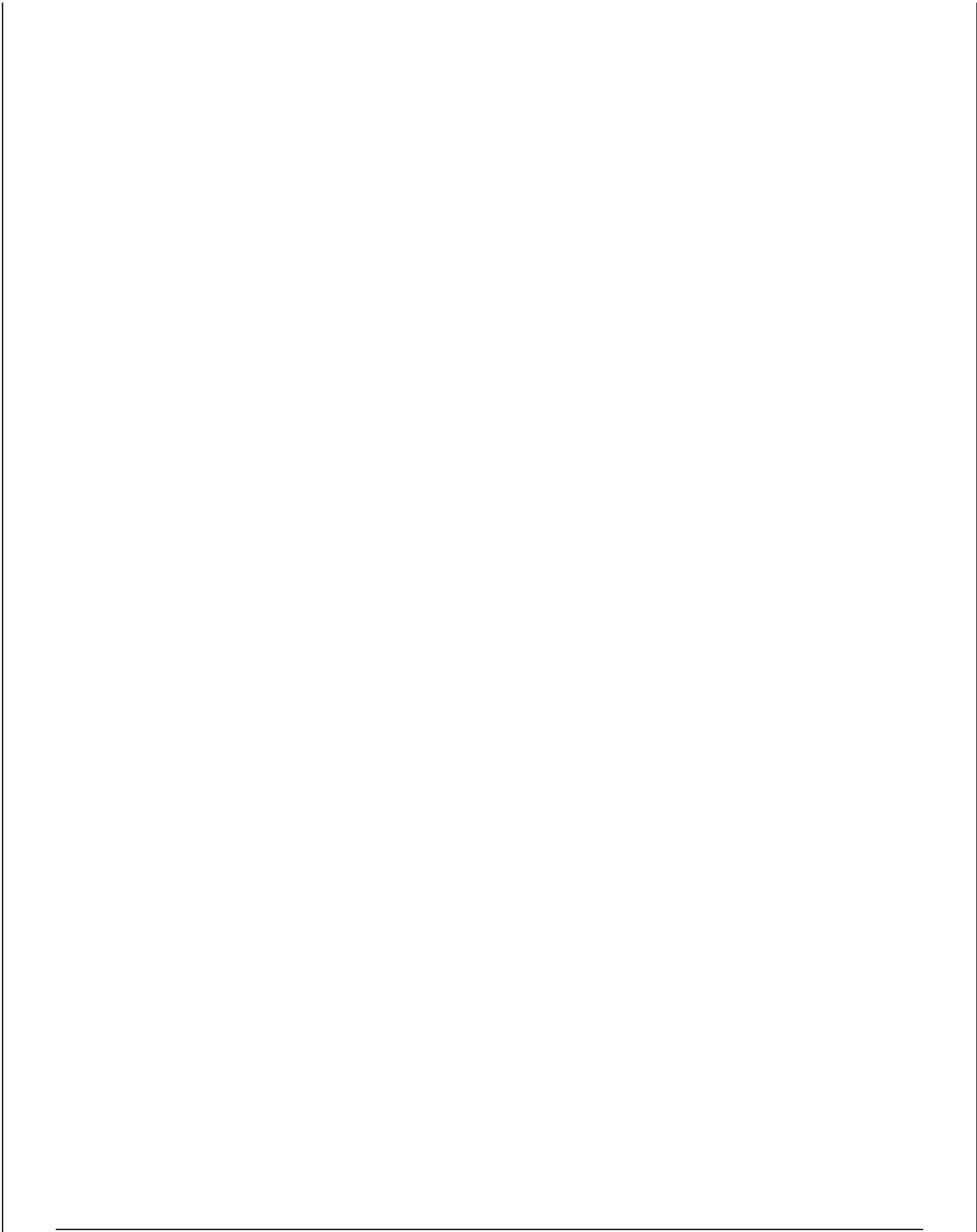
Mature Wesakejakpooketoowin ready to release its spores

Photo credit: A. Karst

#### The Meaning of Wesakejakpooketoowin

Wesakejakpooketoowin translates into "Wesawkejak's fart" (MH).

# *Animals*



# **Animals**

---

**Black Bear**

**Beaver**

**Moose**

**Muskrat**

**Rabbit**

**Grey Wavy or Greater White-fronted Goose**

**White Wavy or Snow Goose**

**Fish**

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# Maskwa

## Black Bear

### *Ursus americanus*

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#### Uses of Maskwa

Maskwa is a culturally important animal for food, medicine, and materials.

Maskwa meat is an important food. The meat can be prepared for eating by simply boiling it (MH). Maskwa meat can also be smoked (HA and JK).

Maskwa grease is an important food and medicine. The grease is made from the thick fat of Maskwa. The fat can be three inches thick and you can get five gallons of fat from one bear (BW). To prepare bear grease, pieces of fat are cut into slabs, then cut into smaller pieces, fried and/or boiled; then the grease is skimmed off the top. The material left over after the fat is rendered out of it becomes crispy and can be eaten; it is called the “popcorn” (BW). The grease is very useful and can be eaten with dry meat, used to make

pemmican, used to fry bannock, or to make candles (made by dipping the tip of a rolled cloth in the grease; the candle can burn all night) (BW).

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Photo credit: Christian Artuso

*‘That is an animal you can’t play around with, that is why people have respect for it. It is like a human partner and that is why people have respect for the bear and the bear has respect for people.’*

- Harvey Antoine

*‘It [the bear] is our grandfather. He is very powerful’*

- Maria Houle



The hide of maskwa can be dried and scraped until it is soft so that it can be used like a rug. A bear rug is good to use when camping as a floor covering in the tent because it is very warm (BW). Maskwa hide can be tanned, similar to moosehide. A hide that is tanned and ready to make things with is called keesinamik/keeskingatik. The edges of maskwa hide can be decorated for a rug or a hanging to put up on a wall (HA and JK).



Photo credit: Christian Artuso

### **Harvesting Maskwa**

Bears can be found along lakes and rivers. A good time to hunt for maskwa is when they are fat on berries, around August (Courtoreille, 2008).

# Amisk

## Beaver

### *Castor canadensis*

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#### Uses of Amisk

Amisk is valued as food and medicine, as well as materials uses.

Many parts of amisk are used for food. Amisk meat can be made into 'dry meat' (GW). Amisk meat can be smoked,



Photo credit: A. Karst

once the bones are removed. The smoked meat can then be frozen for later uses, such as boiling the meat or roasting it in the oven (BW). The amisk tail, called amiskwiyo in Cree,

can be eaten. Amiskwiyo tastes nice: "you just have to throw it in the fire and peel off the scale (BW)." Beaver feet can also be eaten (only the back feet, as the front feet are too small). The feet are prepared by singeing them and boiling them (BW). Beaver grease can be used to make pemmican (HA).



Beaver lodge  
Photo credit: A. Karst

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Prepared beaver hide  
Photo credit: A. Karst

Beaver hide is prepared by skinning the beaver, fleshing it, and drying it; this is a long process that can take all day for one hide (JK). Some Mikisew Cree people tan amisk hides, which can be used for the fur trim on moccasins (GW).

*"[We] have a smokehouse out where we live in the summer. [It is] made out of tarp, some people use plywood, but I use tarp. The reason you cover it is so the heat and smoke stays in, you don't need much fire to dry up anything. You place what you are drying up high, and the heat stays up there and it slowly dries up. Some people use it (the smoking method) right in the open, but then you have to make more fire all the time. Sometimes you burn them (the pieces of meat); if you dry them too fast, it's no good."*

- Billy Whiteknife

# Mōswa

## Moose

### *Alces alces*

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#### Uses of Mōswa

Mōswa is an important part of both past and present food culture at Mikisew. Parts of the mōswa, such as the hide and bones are also used as materials or tools.

Almost every part of the mōswa is eaten and nothing is wasted (BW). The meat is made into dry meat or stored raw in the deep

freeze. Dry moose meat is important because it keeps for a long time (LR). The meat can be roasted or boiled. The bone marrow is good to eat; the bone can be cooked with meat on it, then the meat is eaten and the bone can be cut with a saw or axe to get the marrow out. The marrow is tasty and can be spread on bread (JK). Moose fat is cut into small cubes which are

then fried to make lard. The bones can also be boiled to make lard. To make lard from mōswa bones, they are cut or broken apart and boiled in a pot (BW).

When the grease comes out of the bone, the bones are removed and the grease is allowed to settle. The grease can then be used for frying. It can also be mixed with mōswa meat, dried cranberries, and sugar to make pemmican. The grease helps to bind pemmican into a hard ball that is good to eat (BW).



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs



Moose meat drying at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst

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Moose chin and tongue, ready to be cooked  
Photo credit: A. Karst

The nose of the mōswa is a favourite part to eat (BW). It is singed first, like a duck, to burn all the hair off. The eyes are taken off and the inside of the ear. Then it can be smoked, and the whole head is boiled (BW). The nose can also be put in the oven and roasted or cooked over an open fire (JK). From the inside of the mōswa, the large and small intestines, heart and kidneys can

be eaten (BW). However, the insides are not eaten when they are “too fresh”, as this may cause illness, it is best to wait until the next day to eat them (JK). The brain and lungs are not usually eaten (BW).



Moose meat and bannock  
Photo credit: A. Karst

In the process of preparing pahkekin (moose hide),

mōswa bones can be used as tools. The hide can be ‘fleshed’ (removing the flesh from the skin) by swinging a sharp bone at the hide (GW). Traditionally, a bone from the front leg of



Akowan – structure used for smoking meat  
Photo credit: A. Karst

the mōswa was used to make this tool by sharpening the edge and attaching a strap through a hole at one end (to make it easier to hold on to). This bone tool is sharp but doesn’t go through the hide (GW). The mōswa brain is used to treating hide (BW). The type of wood used to smoke moose hide is important. Rotten spruce wood that is soft and appears orange in colour, called yoskitâk (see page 19 for photo), is used for smoking hide (GM). Finished hide, called keesinamik/ keeskingatik, is used for moccasins and jackets and other clothing. Moose hide was also used to cover tipis, as toboggan ‘wrappers’, and in construction of canoes (VC).

## Making Pahkekin (Moose Hide) (VC)

Making pahkekin is a process that takes care and dedicated time. Traditionally, women are responsible for preparing the hide (GW). The process, as described below, can take up to two weeks.

### 1. Stretching the hide

Holes are cut around the hide, approximately six inches apart. Then a rope is threaded through the holes. The rope is used to attach the hide to a frame made of wood. The size of the frame depends on the size of the moose (e.g. a big bull moose requires a large frame). A pole may be propped in the middle of the frame so that a person can climb up and reach the top of the hide.

### 2. Removing the flesh and hair

A knife can be used to cut some of the flesh off first, starting at the top. Then, a bone scraper, made from the leg bone of a moose, can be used to scrape the remainder of the flesh off. During the scraping process, it is important to keep the hide moist because if it gets too dry there is a risk of cutting right through the hide. The neck and rump are the most challenging parts to scrape. Once the flesh is removed, the hide is flipped over to remove the hair. The hair is scraped off until small veins are visible.

### 3. Treating the hide

The scraped hide is treated with either grease/lard, dish soap, moose brain, or a combination of these. Once the treatment is spread all over the hide, the hide is folded and put away for several days to allow it to soak in and to soften the hide.

### 4. Smoking the hide

The hide is smoked for several days until it turns the desired colour.

*“The way you know your moose hide is going to turn out really good, is when you wring it only once (VC).”*

### 5. Soaking and wringing out the hide

The hide is then folded and soaked in water. At this point, the can be scraped again so that the water soaks in even more and the hide becomes soft. The hide is then wrapped around a pole and wrung out until as much of the water is removed as possible.

### 6. Drying the hide

The wrung-out hide is then placed on a wooden structure over a fire and turned back and forth until it is dry. It is then ready to sew clothing or use for other purposes.



Moccasins made from pahkekin  
Photo Credit: A. Karst



Photo of George Wanderingspirit and his family tanning moosehide  
Original photo credit: G. Wanderingspirit family, Picture of photo taken by: A. Karst

Pahkekin that is not tanned yet can be used to make snowshoes (BW).



Snowshoes  
Photo credit: A. Karst

*"I remember watching my uncle and other men make snowshoes: The moose hide (not tanned yet) was cut into strips, soaked in water, and used just like string; going back and forth between the rims of the snowshoes. Then, the moose hide would dry hard as a rock."*

*- Billy Whiteknife*

## Harvesting Mōswa

Fall hunting for mōswa is common. The meat is thought to be best in the fall, just before rutting, because the bull moose are fat (Tanner 2006). The Cree word for the time when moose are mating is nocihtowpisim, which means mating moon; the month of September (Denault 2009). A good place to hunt for moose is along rivers (Lepine, D. 2008).

*"Moose can be hunted anytime, year round. It's not that we are not allowed to, but we don't kill a cow and a calf, when the calf is small. We don't shoot any kind of animal that is a female with its young, unless you are starving."*

- Billy Whiteknife



Moose meat, a preferred food in Fort Chipewyan, is expertly prepared by Louise Campbell.

Photo credit: Chipewyan Bicentennial Museum



Mōswa hide jacket

Photo credit: A. Karst



## Many Ways to Call Mōswa

One way to attract a moose is to pour a stream of water onto the surface of a lake or river. This attracts moose because it sounds like a moose urinating (LR).



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs



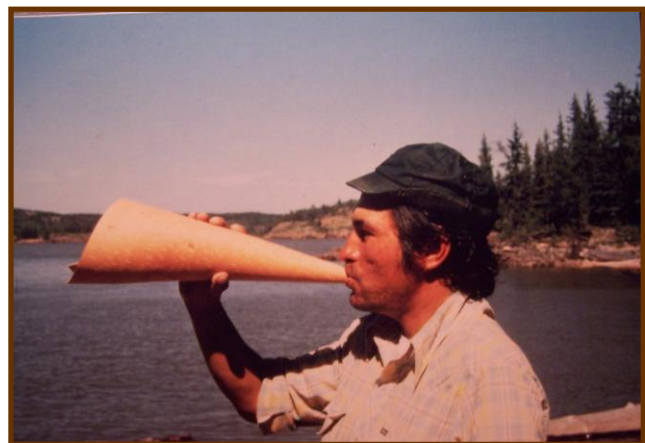
Moose-caller made from the shoulder blade of a moose. The shoulder blade is scraped along the bark of a tree to make a noise that attracts the moose.

Photo credit: A. Karst



Moose-caller made from a can or container with a hole cut in the top so that a string of wet hide can be pulled through to make a sound like a moose.

Photo credit: A. Karst



Moose-caller made from birch bark

Photo credit: Chipewyan Bicentennial Museum  
/J. Kristensen

# Wachask

## Muskrat

### *Ondatra zibethicus*

#### Uses of Wachask

Wachask are an important food animal. Muskrat meat was eaten often in the past, and is still eaten today at Mikisew. To prepare muskrat to eat, the bones are removed so that you are left with a whole piece of meat (BW). The meat can either be cooked right away or smoked to make dry meat. The dry meat will keep for later use.



Roasting wachask  
Photo credit: G. Poitras

*“Wachaskwiyo (muskrat tail) is good to eat. You just throw it in the fire, take the skin off, and oh, it tastes good!”*

*– Billy Whiteknife*



Photo credit: R. Town/USFWS

#### Where Wachask Lives

Wachask can be found where the water plant ratroot (wachaskomêchiwin) grows because that is what they eat. Muskrat houses are smaller than beaver houses and are made with plants. Muskrats make their houses in the fall (GM).

#### Harvesting Wachask

March is a good time to go out to trap wachask because they are fully grown (HA, JK). They are not usually hunted or trapped in the fall because they are not ‘primed’ or fully grown. In the spring they are mating and can be trapped or shot in the water (JK).

# Wāpos

## Rabbit/Hare

### *Lepus species*

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#### Uses of Wāpos

Wāpos is a regular food at Mikisew and can be eaten anytime of the year. Elders appreciate when people bring them wāpos to eat (MM). There are several ways to prepare wāpos including rabbit stew, or baking wāpos in the oven with bacon, rice, and vegetables like potatoes and onions (MM, BW). Wāpos meat can also be smoked. Wāpos that are not healthy are not eaten. Signs that wāpos is not healthy can include puss on the skin or different-coloured meat (MM).



Photo credit: T. Ruta Fuchs

#### Harvesting Wāpos

Wāpos can be caught by snaring them along the trails that they use. Snaring mainly happens in the winter (Lepine, H. 2008). A wire snare or a jump snare can be used. A jump snare is made using willow wood that is bent and attached to a snare wire (JK).

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# Chagapasees

## Grey Wavy or Greater White-Fronted Goose

*Anser albifrons*

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### Uses of Chagapasees

Both geese and ducks are important sources of food at Mikisew Cree First Nation. Chagapasees are favoured over other waterfowl by some Mikisew members. Chagapasees can be compared to ducks: “They are better than ducks, more juicy, more meat, and they are fatter (BW).” Chagapasees that are not used right away can be frozen for later use. When they go into the freezer they are not plucked or gutted, and are frozen whole. When they are ready to cook, they are taken out of the freezer and prepared at that time. Every part of the bird is used and nothing is wasted. Grease can be made from the fatty insides of the grey wavy. The grease can then be eaten with dried meat or fish. It hardens like butter, unlike the ‘lighter’ consistency of other fats, such as bear fat (BW).



Billy Whiteknife with Chagapasees that had been stored in the freezer  
Photo credit: A. Karst

### Names for Chagapasees

The term ‘grey wavy’ is the common English name used by Mikisew members to describe this bird. The grey wavy or chagapasees is a type of goose, but it can also be called ‘grey wavy duck’ at Mikisew. It is said to be larger than a ‘regular duck’ (BW).

## Harvesting Chagapasees

Spring is the best time to harvest chagapasees because that is when they stop in the area of Mikisew during their migration. In the fall, these geese don't stop in the area (BW).

*"To prepare it (chagapasees), you pluck it, then singe it, and cut it up and throw it in an oven pan, put a little bit of water in, and let it roast for about 3 hours, and you can just eat it with a fork."*

- Billy Whiteknife

### Cree Calendar Moons

There are Cree terms for months when birds carry out the different stages of their life cycle (Denault 2009):

Niskapism - Goose moon/month (March)

Piniyawipisim - Egg laying moon/ month (May)

Paskowpisim - Molting moon/month (July)

Ohpahowpisim - Flying moon/month (August)

# Wêhwêwak

## White Wavey or Snow Goose

### *Chen caerulescens*

#### Uses of Wêhwêwak

Geese, including wêhwêwak, are an important source of food. These geese can be prepared for eating by boiling, roasting in an oven, or cooking them over an open fire (JK).



Wêhwêwak (two juveniles)  
Photo credit: Christian Artuso

#### Harvesting

#### Wêhwêwak

Hunting wêhwêwak happens in the spring or fall when the geese are migrating. Geese or duck eggs can also be harvested for food in the spring (Marten 2008).

Niska is the general term for goose in Cree.



Flock of snowgeese  
Photo credit: Christian Artuso

*“Wehwewak named themselves because this is the sound they make when they go.”*

*- George Wanderingspirit*

# Kinosêwak

## Fish

Including: Sucker (*Catostomus* spp.), Whitefish (*Coregonus* spp.) Jackfish and Pickerel (*Esox* spp.), Goldeye (*Hiodon* spp.) and Burbot (*Lota* spp.)

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### Uses of Kinosêw

Kinosêwak is an important and commonly eaten food at Mikisew.

Kinosêwak are preserved by freezing them and by smoking them to make dry fish

(namestekwak). Making namestekwak takes patience and skill; the fish is cut into little strips while it is still attached to the skin (without breaking the skin). It is important to cut the

fish for the drying process; if one tries to dry a whole fish, it could rot during the process (GM).



Kinosêwak roasting over an open fire at MCFN  
Photo credit: A. Karst



Kinosêwak drying  
Photo credit: A. Karst

### Cree Names for Different Fish

Burbot - miliy

Goldeye - wipeecheesis

Jackfish - iyinikinosêw

Pickerel - okâw

Sucker - namepiy

Whitefish - atihkamêk



Smokehouse in MCFN territory for smoking kinosêwak and other meat  
Photo credit: A. Karst

Dry poplar or willow wood is preferred for smoking fish. Spruce wood is not used because it has lots of gum that gives off a strong smell when it burns, and could affect the flavour of the fish (GM).

### **Harvesting Kinosêwak**

Kinosêwak are harvested all year round. Nets are set for fish in the summer. In winter, nets are set under the ice.

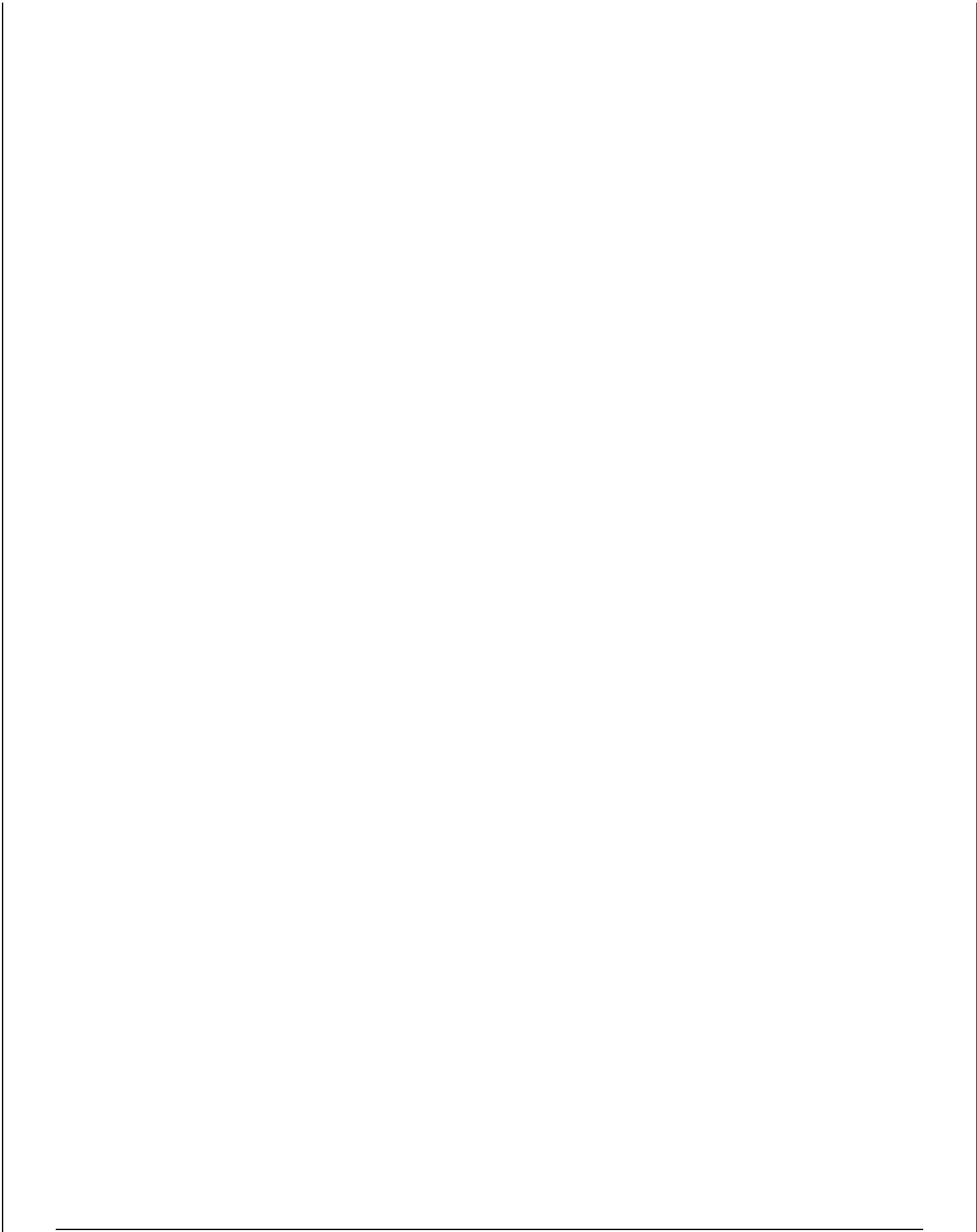


Namestekwak (dried fish), ready to eat  
Photo credit: A. Karst



Kinosêwak waiting to be cooked  
Photo credit: G. Poitras





# Woodland Cree Plant and Animal Terms

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## Plant Terms

<b>Atihk</b>	Stem, or entire plant or tree, or something that is held straight up
<b>Atihtekwaw</b>	To ripen (e.g. berries)
<b>Minisak</b>	Berries
<b>Mistik</b>	A stick or wood
<b>Nêpiy</b>	Leaf
<b>Ocêpihk / Watapiy</b>	Root
<b>Pâsiminân</b>	Dry berry (any type of berry)
<b>Pikiw</b>	Gum (e.g. spruce gum)
<b>Wâpikwaniy</b>	Flower
<b>Wasaskwetiw/Waskwêtoy</b>	Cone from an evergreen tree (e.g. spruce, pine, tamarack)
<b>Waskwayâpoy</b>	Birch sap
<b>Wayakêsk</b>	Tree bark
<b>Yoskihtâk</b>	A powdery, soft rotten wood (used for smoking hide)

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## Animal Terms

<b>Amisk wiyan</b>	Beaver hide
<b>Amiskowesinâw</b>	Beaver castor, a secretion from the scent glands of a beaver
<b>Namestek</b>	Dried fish
<b>Pahkekin</b>	Moose hide
<b>Pastewiyas</b>	Dried meat
<b>Kaskapasikew</b>	It is smoked
<b>Kîsinikiw / Kîsinikowin</b>	S/he is tanning hide / The act of tanning hide
<b>Kisinamik</b>	The hide of an animal that is tanned and ready to use
<b>Kîsinam</b>	S/he tans; s/he finishes tanning
<b>Misoy / Osoy / Wishsway</b>	The tail of an animal
<b>Wiyin</b>	Animal fat

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