

Students 'tap' into Forest Resources

YELLOWKNIFE (May 14, 2007) – Northwest Territories (NWT) students are learning a traditional skill that will yield a tasty treat for their efforts.

The Forest Management Division of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) has been working with former classroom teacher Mike Mitchell, who is now an outdoor educator to develop activity and lesson plans about birch sap harvesting and syrup production. Mr. Mitchell developed his expertise after working with local elders, and schools in the Hay River area.

“Birch sap harvesting and syrup production is a tradition that has been practiced by the people of the Northwest Territories for generations,” said Michael McLeod, Minister of ENR. “Passing on this traditional skill to our young people helps to give them a deeper appreciation of the importance of our boreal forests.”

South Slave and Dehcho students recently tapped birch trees and as the sap begins to flow in the Yellowknife, Sahtu and Inuvik areas, Mr. Mitchell will instruct teachers so they can incorporate this activity into their students outdoor education.

Bea Lepine, Extension Forester tasked with public education, is heading up this project for ENR.

“These activities and lesson plans combine math, social studies, science, and career technology studies in a way that makes learning fun and hands-on,” said Lepine “. Depending on the depth the teachers go into, students learn proper sap tapping technique, how to process the sap into syrup and how to protect the tree for future years.”

This is the first year of the project. Lepine anticipates making birch sap tapping available to all schools in the boreal forest in the future. The activities and lesson plans are suitable for all grade levels.

A video featuring elder Frederick Beaulieu, who has been practicing the traditional art of birch syrup making for many years, has also been released. Entitled “Thumper Creek Birch Syrup Company”, it complements the activity and lesson plan and will be available to educators.

Birch sap is delicious right from the tree, but when cooked down in a process similar to how maple syrup is made, it is excellent with bannock, fish, meat, in salad dressings, and of course, on pancakes and ice cream.

For more information contact:

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A limited number of the videos can be made available for media viewing on request.