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Northern Michigan tribes unite in effort to restore native plants and protect pollinators

BY BRENDA AUSTIN

Drumming, demonstrations, talking circles and presentations greeted participants during April's 5th Native Plants Restoration and Pollinator Protection Workshop, aptly named Kinomaage – or "Teachings from the earth." Sault Tribe hosted the workshop at their cultural center.

Hands-on sessions for the group of about 40 participants involved demonstrations on seed cleaning, seed storage, invasive species and native seed harvesting.

The Kinomaage series is part of the Wings and Seeds Project (Zaagkii) first launched in 2008 by the Cedar Tree Institute, the U.S. Forest Service, Northern Michigan University's Center for Native American Studies and Michigan's Marquette County Juvenile Court.

The intent of the workshops is to assist indigenous leaders in reclaiming key roles as traditional

caretakers of Great Lakes botanical ecosystems. The project is also a reminder to people that pollination is an essential ecological function. According to the Kinomaage website, "Over 80 percent of the world's vegetables and fruits require a pollinator to produce. These pollinators include bats, butterflies, moths, flies, birds, beetles, ants and bees."

Representatives attended from five area tribes, including the Sault Tribe, Lac Vieux Desert, Keweenaw Bay, Hannahville, Bay Mills Indian Community and Northern Michigan University's (MSU) Center for Native American Studies. Representatives from the tribes and MSU met with key presenters, which included Director of the Cedar Tree Institute Jon Magnuson, Ethno-botanist Scott Herron, Ph.D., Sault Tribe Environmental Program Manager Kathleen Brosemer and Jan

Schultz, a botanist with the U.S. Forest Service, to share skills and experiences for use in collaborative efforts to restore and preserve native plants and protect area pollinators.

Magnuson said pollinators bring integrity to the ecosystems by holding together the web of plant life by helping plants propagate each other.

Schultz said, "There is a need for more collective partnering work in botany and restoration and environment issues related to climate change. We appreciated the tribe hosting this event. I hope we can continue our collaboration and really get to the heart of what the needs are for ethnobotany and botany and the restoration piece and that we can keep it going," she said.

The first four workshops were held at the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Hannahville Indian

Community and in Marquette, Michigan. Magnuson said talks have been initiated about the possibility of forming a partnership with Bay Mills Community College and the Sault Tribe for a certificate program to train tribal members about seed harvesting, identification and medicinal plants. "As indigenous communities, Native peoples have historically been the custodians and caretakers for our natural resources," Magnuson said. "They have a voice and a role that no one can really duplicate. Tribal communities need partners, no one can do anything alone these days. In terms of restoring and protecting the integrity of the ecosystems that we all share, this project is here to assist tribes to reclaim and carry out that promise."

Magnuson said the projects planning team hopes people attending the workshops would walk away with some technical knowledge about seed harvesting,

stem regeneration and identification of medicinal plants that are endangered. He said he hopes participants also came away with a vision and encouragement for continuing restoration work on their own reservations of bringing back native plants and protecting them for future generations.

The Cedar Tree Institute is a non-profit organization that initiates projects and provides services in the areas of mental health, religion and the environment. Magnuson has worked with tribes across the Pacific Northwest and over the last ten years has been working with tribal communities in northern Michigan. He has also taught at Northern Michigan University's Center for Native American Studies.

For more information on the Kinomaage workshops or the Cedar Tree Institute, visit them online at: <http://wingsandseeds.org>.



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Above: Group talking circle. Below: Jan Schultz, a workshop presenter and botanist with the U.S. Forest Service.



Above: Sault Tribe Environmental Program Manager Kathleen Brosemer (left) talking with a workshop participant. Below: Bud Biron (left) and Nathan Freitas, Sault Tribe Environmental Program GIS Technician.

