



# Wiigwaasi-Jiimaan

Birch Bark Canoe Building and  
Anishinaabemowin Immersion on  
Nagaajiwanaang Reservation 2010

# The Wiigwaasi-Jiimaan Project

Sponsored by the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum funded by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the Administration to Native Americans (ANA), the birch bark canoe project teaches this traditional craft while promoting language preservation in a learn while doing immersion setting



# Petrasavodsk Jiimaan



In 2007 a team of community members built a jiimaan in Petrasavodsk, Russia sponsored by Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa for a sister city cultural boat building symposium

# Washington D.C. Jiimaan



A collaboration between the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian in 2008 built a Jiimaan on-site in Washington D.C.

# 2010 Jiimaan Team

## Staff, Artists, Resource Experts

- n Jeff Savage
- n Marvin Defoe
- n Dave “Niib” Aubid
- n Kyra Paitrick
- n Lisa Shabaiash
- n Marilyn Carpenter
- n Phil Savage
- n Rick Defoe
- n Bill Howes
- n Charlie Nahgahnab

## Participants

- n Darryl Porter
- n Joe Rodaks
- n Vern Zacher Jr.
- n Tim Diver
- n Jamie Petite
- n Chris Ojibway
- n Jerald Jenkins
- n Brett Dufault
- n Joe Fairbanks
- n Supporting family members and volunteers



# Anishinaabemowin

Primary project goals were

- § Implement a language preservation project that will contribute to the fluency, knowledge, and comfort using the Ojibwe language
- § Create community members skilled in our cultural arts who then can be the future teachers and mentors



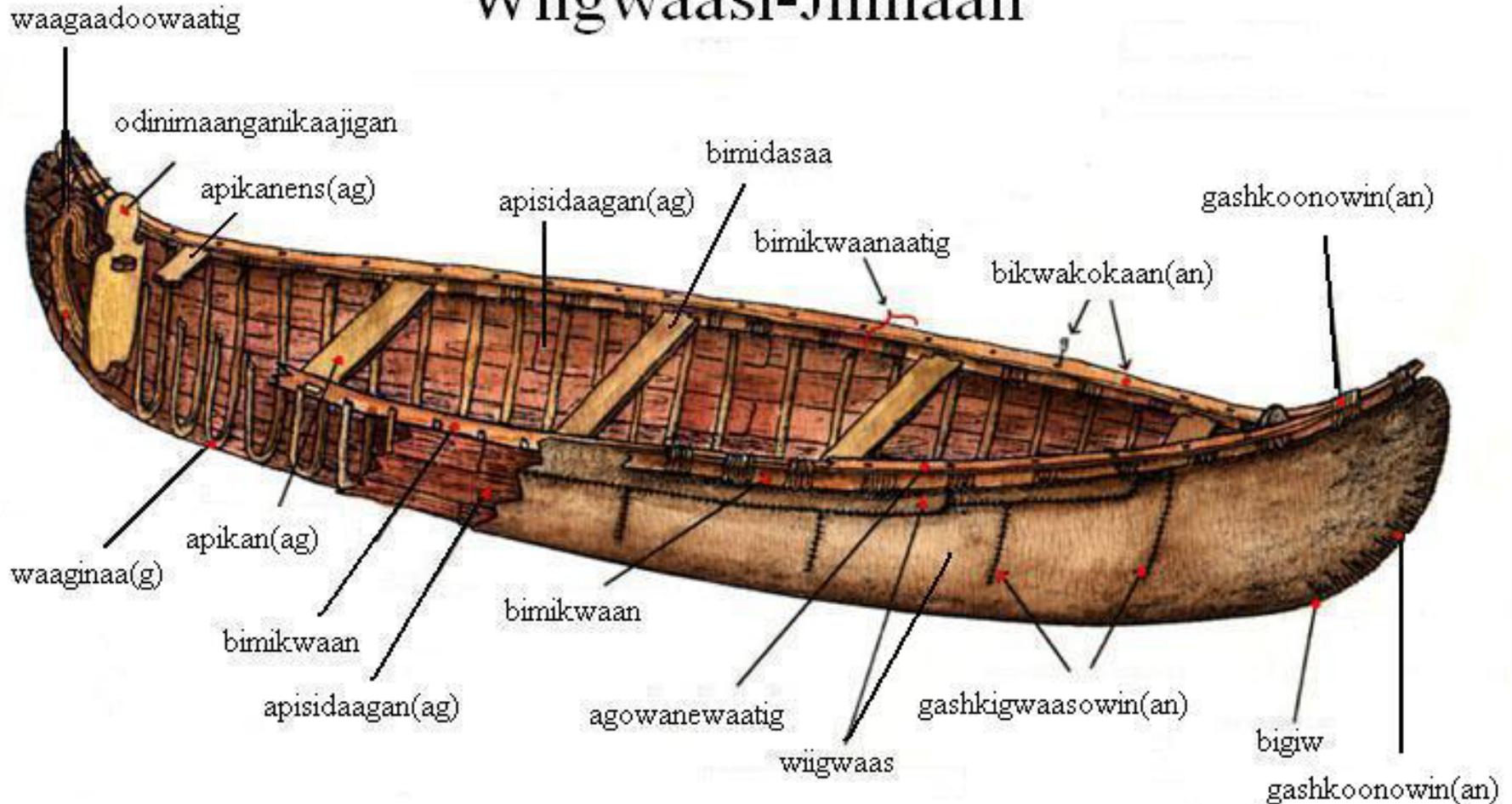
# Gidinawemaaganinaanig (all our relatives)

Intergenerational teaching and participation provides the foundation for our culture and was a cornerstone of our project



# Jiimaan basics

## Wiigwaasi-Jiimaan



# Biindakoojigewin

At appropriate times during the Wiigwaasi-Jiimaan project, asemaa (tobacco) was offered following the Anishinaabe tradition



# Obishagaakobidoon Wiigob (he peels the inner bark of the basswood)

- n Wiigobiin (inner basswood bark) is peeled to make Anishinaabe universal twine



# Odoozhitoonaawaa Jiimaanike- Wigamig (they build the canoe making house)

- n Maananoons (ironwood/hop hornbeam) poles are gathered and used for the jiimaanike-wigwaming (canoe making house)



# Odoozhitoonaawaa Jiimaanike-Wigamig (they build the canoe making house)

- Traditionally, wiigobiin (inner basswood bark) is used to tie the maananoons (ironwood/hop horn beam) poles together



# Onaadinaawaa wadabiin (they go get spruce root)

- n Gawaandag (black spruce) grows in wet areas
- n Wadabiin (spruce roots) are gathered for sewing and lashing
- n Ideal roots are the width of a finger



# Wadabiig (spruce roots)

- n Ogiishkizhaanaawaan (they cut and trim the roots)
- n Ondewan (the roots are boiling) to loosen the bark to make it easier to peel from the woody center that is used for lashing the canoe



# Wadabiin (spruce roots)

- n Daashkibijigewin (root splitting) to make lashing for all sewing needs in the construction of the canoe
- n Split roots should have one flat side
- n Gashkoonowinan (lashing) keeping moist until use



# Aabadizo wenizhishid giizhik (the fine cedar is used)

- n Cutting and splitting the gizhik (cedar) for waaginaag (canoe ribs), bimikwaanag (gunnels), and apisidaaganag (slats)



Good canoe cedar is difficult to find,  
70-150 year old cedar with no knots is  
ideal

# Daashkiga'ige (he splits)

- Splitting the giizhik (cedar)
- Following the grain maximizes the flexibility of the wood for shaping it into the various canoe parts



# Mookodaaso (she whittles)

- n Rough shaping the waaginaag (canoe ribs) with a mookojigan (draw knife)



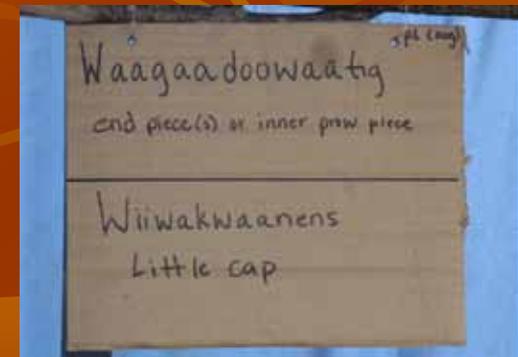
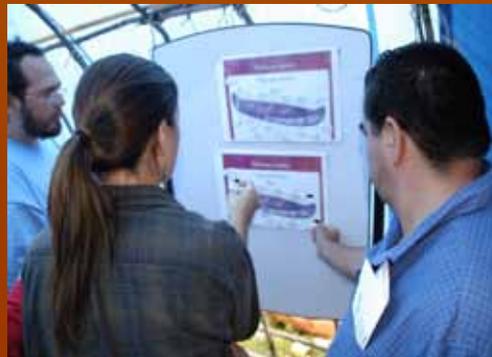
# Nabagisagoonsikewin (board-making)

- n Odoozhi'aawaan  
apisidaaganag (they  
make cedar sheathing)  
for canoe lining



# Anishinaabemowin Immersion

- Language transmits culture. Interwoven in the language are the lore, legends, values and the cultural practices of the Ojibwe.
- Canoe building skills and the language go hand in hand in maintaining each other.



# Maniwiigwaase (s/he gathers birch bark)

- Finding canoe bark trees takes a lot of time and effort
- 50-70 year old trees are needed
- The bark must be thick, flexible and have small horizontal lines
- When trees are peeled in the proper season it does not kill the tree



# Bishagaakobijigewag (they are peeling birch bark)

- n Good canoe trees are increasingly difficult to find due to many factors in modern times



# Gwayako-didibinan! (Roll it up correctly!)

- n One good canoe birch bark tree peeled in the proper season can yield enough bark for a complete canoe.
- n Bark is rolled up inside out



# Jiimaanike-Wigamig (the canoe building site)

- n A level spot is prepared of sand for laying out the canoe
- n The level spot keeps the bark on the bottom of the jiimaan (canoe) even while forming the canoe



# Anishinaabemowin

n Anishinaabemowin language CD's were developed and played during travel and for participant use

n Language was also available in visual and audio formats around the jiimaanike-wigwaming (canoe making house)



# Wiigwaasi-Gashkigwaasowin (birchbark sewing)

- n Migoosan (awls) are used to hold sheets of bark together in preparation for sewing
- n Wadabiin (spruce roots) are used for sewing the sheets of bark.
- n The sewn together birch bark sheet will form the outer shell of the canoe.



# Onaakosijigewin (forming frame making)

§ The onaakosijigan (forming frame) is cut from boards or a modern plywood pattern



# Onaakosijigan gaye asiniig (frame and rocks)

- n After the bark is sewn together inside out, the onaakosijigan (forming frame) is positioned and weighed down with asiniig (rocks) to keep the bark stationary



# Maananoons (ironwood)

- n Forming stakes are made of maananoons (ironwood/hop hornbeam) to hold and shape the bark around the pattern into it's canoe shape



# Onaakosijigewag (they use frame and stakes to bend the canoe into the proper shape)

- n Gezhaagamideg  
(warm water) keeps  
the bark flexible while  
shaping the bark up  
around the pattern
- n Aatwaakosiziganag  
(framing stakes) bend  
and hold the bark into  
its canoe shape



# Bimikwaanike (he forms gunnels)

n Drawing bimikwaanag  
(gunnels) on the log



n Cutting bimikwaanag  
(gunnels) out of log



# Bimikwaanike (he forms gunnels)

- Cut and shaped bimikwaanag (gunnels ) ready for lashing onto the bark to form the canoe shape



# Bimikwaanike (s/he forms gunnels)

- n Bimikwaanag (gunnels) are the longest pieces of giizhik (cedar) in the canoe
- n Once the flattened side is formed with the draw knife, then the log is split



# Bimikwaanag (gunnels)

§ Bimikwaanag (gunnels) ends are split, steam heated, and bent to make the curved ends of the canoe



# Bimikwaanag (gunnels)

- n Bimikwaanag (gunnels) are shaped to fit the onaakosijigan (forming frame) and prepared to be sewn to the birch bark to form the top edges of the canoe



# Bimikwaanag (gunnels)

- n Positioning the bimikwaanag (gunnels) to be sewn in place
- n Framing stakes are tied and secured in place to stabilize the canoe form while the gashkoonowinan (lashings) are being done



# Gashkoonowin (lashing)

n Bimikwaanag (gunnels)  
are being lashed with  
wadabiin (spruce roots)



n The bark is trimmed for  
shaping canoe end



# Gashkoonowin (lashing)

- The bark is placed between the two gunnels and lashed securely with wadabiin (spruce roots)



# Gashkoonowin (lashing)



Four generations of canoe lashers.  
Joanne Olson helps granddaughter Kyra  
and great-grand niece lash gunnels

- After bimikwaanag (gunnels) are lashed to the bark, then the final sewing is done on the side panels and end pieces



# Apikaanikaanan (temporary thwart)

- n Apikaanikaanan (temporary thwarts) are crafted to be fitted for keeping the canoe in its shape while sheathing and ribs are prepared for fitting



# Baashkinede'igan (steamer)

- n Bashkinede'igan (steamer) is used to heat and moisten the cedar for bending the waagaadoowaatig (end pieces) and waaginaag (ribs)



# Waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces)

- Steamed and bent  
giizhik (cedar) fortifies  
and strengthens the  
canoe ends



# Waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces)

- n Waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces) are steamed, bent, formed, and wrapped tight
- n They are tied, then dried into their final shape



# Waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces)

- Sewing, trimming, and forming canoe ends
- Forming bimikwaaanag (gunnels) to canoe ends
- Preparing bark for waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces)



# Waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces)

- n The dried and shaped waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces) are inserted into canoe
- n Holding the canoe shape is a apikaanikaan (temporary thwart)



# Niigaan/Ishkweyaang (front/back)

- n Waagaadoowaatigoog gaye bimikwaanag (end pieces and gunnels) come together to form top ends of both the niigaan (front) and the ishkwyaang (back) of the canoe.



# Wiigwaasi-Jiimaanikewin (birch bark canoe making)

- n After waagaadoowaatigoog (end pieces) and bimikwaanag (gunnels) are lashed together, the onaakosijigan (forming frame) is taken out



# Ogaashgaashkinaanaawaa (they scrape the bark)

- n After the canoe form is removed, the inside of canoe is scraped smooth and prepared for the apikaanag (permanent thwarts).



# Ogashkigwaadaan (s/he sews it)

- n The waagaadoowaatig (end piece) is being fitted and sewn



# Ogashkigwaadaan (he sews it)

- n The waagaadoowaatig (end piece) is sewn into the canoe with a different stitch than the stitching used to sew bark together



# Apikanike (S/he makes permanent thwart)

§ Each apikan (thwart) must be individually handcrafted and measured to fit.



# Apikanike (S/he makes permanent thwarts)

- n Different types of canoes (ricing canoe, traveling canoe) have different thwart placements.



# Apikanike (S/he makes permanent thwarts)

- n Apakanag (thwarts) are fitted into slots that have been made in the inner bimikwaanag (gunnels)
- n They are then drilled, and lashed to gunnels



# Gashkoono (S/he lashes)

- Permanent placing and fitting of apikwaan (thwart).
- Lashing of the apikwaan (thwart).



# Niigaan/Ishkweyaang (front/back)

- After the waagaadoowaatigoog gaye bimikwaan (end pieces and gunnels) are lashed to the canoe, they are tied and secured together to form the niigan/ishkweyaang (front/back) of the canoe



# Ozhiitaawin (getting ready for...)

- n Temporary sheathing is placed in bottom of canoe for rib shaping
- n Apikwaanag (thwarts) are tied to side stakes to keep canoe the height it will be when finished while fitting the ribs



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

- n Rib wood has been soaked for several days to prepare it for steaming and fitting into canoe
- n Ribs are sized according to placement in canoe



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

- Ribs are numbered and then steamed



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

- During waaginaa (canoe rib) fitting process, gezhaagamideg (hot water) is poured on bark to keep it flexible and prevent tearing
- Ribs are fitted and placed while steaming hot



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

- It takes two hands and two feet to fit ribs
- They are secured in place until they dry



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

Progression of rib placement from center to ends



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

- Boards are inserted and secured to hold waaginaag (ribs) in their places while drying to their desired shape



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)

- n For final drying, the rough shaped and semi-dried ribs are carved, bundled, and numbered for proper placement in the canoe



# Waaginaa (canoe rib)



# Mookodaaso (s/he carves)

- While the waaginaag (ribs) are drying, the apisidaaganag (sheathing) are shaped and tapered to create the canoe lining
- Edges are tapered to overlap slightly



# Anishinaabemowin



# Gashkigwaaso (s/he sews)

- Waagaadoowaatigoog (canoe ends) final sewing attaches gunnels to end pieces



# Apisidaaganike (He makes sheathing)

- n Tapering and measuring apisidaaganag (sheathing)
- n Apisidaaganag (sheathing) is the inner lining held in place by the ribs



# Apisidaaganag (cedar floor sheathing)

- n Placing and fitting the sheathing
- n Each sheathing piece is individually carved as it is placed



# Apisidaaganag (cedar floor sheathing)

- n Layering the apisidaaganag (sheathing) starts at both ends of the canoe and goes towards the middle
- n These four sections are held temporarily in place with several ribs



# Waagaadoowaatig (prow inner end piece)

- n With the end sheathing in place, the waagaadoowaatig (prow inner end piece) is fitted to strengthen the ends



# Waaginaag (canoe ribs)

- n Waaginaag (ribs) are fitted in between the gunnels
- n Waaginaag (ribs) holds sheathing in place and stretches the bark into its permanent shape



# Waaginaag (canoe ribs)

- n During the critical stage of the ribs stretching the canoe into the proper shape, gezhaagamideg (hot water) is poured on the bark to keep it flexible to prevent tearing and other damage



# Waaginaag (canoe ribs)

- Waaginaag (ribs) are checked for proper and secure fitting by placing weight on them



# Agowanewaatioog (gunnel caps)

- n Agowanewaatioog (gunnel caps) are added to the tops of both sides to protect the lashing when paddling the canoe



# Bikwakokaanike (S/he makes wooden pegs)

- n Bikwakokaanan  
(cedar pegs) are carved  
for attaching the  
agowanewaatic  
(gunnel cap) to the  
canoe



# Agowanewaatic (gunnel cap) Bikwakokaanan (wooden pegs)

- n Holes are made in agowanewaatic (gunnel cap) for wooden pegs
- n Gunnels caps are held in place with bikwakokaanan (wooden cedar pegs)



# Wiiwakwaanens (little cap)

- n Wiiwakwaanens  
(little cap)  
is added to the canoe  
ends to make the canoe  
feel confident while it  
swims



# Naajibigiwe (s/he harvests spruce pitch)

- n A lot of time is spent searching for dried bigiw (spruce pitch) because few trees seep pitch in sufficient amounts
- n Bigiw is gathered by scraping it into a container from where it has dried on the tree



# Bigiwikewag (they make pitch)

- n Bigiw (pitch) is melted and strained to remove pieces of bark and other impurities



# Bigiwikewag (they make pitch)

- Charcoal is crushed and sifted
- Mix charcoal with pitch
- Mix in waawaashkeshi bimide (deer fat) for flexibility



# Bigiw (pitch)

- n A small test piece of birch bark is dipped in the processed bigiw (pitch) and cooled in cold water
- n The pitched bark is bent to test for flexibility, pitch should not crack when slightly bent



# Jiimaan

- n The word Jiimaan comes from the Ojibwe root word ojiim “to kiss”.
- n Jiimaan are tested for holes and imperfections by putting your lips to the bark inhaling or exhaling to search for small holes in the bark needing to be pitched



# Bigiw (pitch)

- n The processed bigiw (pitch) is heated and the seams, holes, or any naturally occurring imperfections in the bark are pitched to make them waterproof



# Abwiikewag (they make a paddle)

- n Different types of woods can be used to make abwiin (paddles)
- n Cedar makes a light abwi (paddle), but birch makes a strong one



# Aabajichiganan (tools)

- n Bagone'igan – drill
- n Mookomaanens – little/carving knife
- n Minjiminigan – clamp
- n Mookojigan – drawknife
- n Waagikomaan – curved knife
- n Biiminakwaan – rope
- n Mookobaajigan – plane
- n Waagaakwadoons – hatchet
- n Waagaakwad – axe
- n Giishkiboojigan – saw
- n Chi-emikwaan – big spoon
- n Oshkiinzhig – eye
- n Mookomaan – knife
- n Minjikaawan(an) – glove(s)
- n Migoos - awl



# Mewadishiwejig (visitors)



Hundreds of intergenerational  
community members,  
visitors, and volunteers  
participated in and observed  
Wiigwaasi-Jiimaanikewin  
in 2010



# Partners

- n Administration to Native Americans (ANA)
- n Fond du Lac Reservation Business Committee
- n University of Minnesota Extension Service
- n Fond du Lac Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Forestry
- n Fond du Lac Natural Resources Management Division



# Ikidowinan (words)

- § Aabadizo wenizhishid giizhik-the fine cedar is used
- § Aatwaakosijigan(ag)-framing stake(s)
- § Abwiikewag-they make a paddle
- § Abwi(in)-paddle(s)
- § Agowanewaatic(oog)-gunnel cap(s)
- § Anishinaabe- “original man” also known as the Ojibwe, or Chippewa nation
- § Anishinaabemowin- language of the Anishinaabe
- § Apikanikaan(an)-temporary thwart(s)
- § Apikan(ag)-thwart(s)
- § Apisidaagan(ag)-slat(s) or sheathing
- § Apisidaaganike-s/he makes sheathing
- § Asemaa- tobacco
- § Asin(iig)-rock(s)
- § Baashkinede’igan-steamer
- § Bigiw-spruce pitch
- § Bigiwikewag-they make pitch
- § Biindakoojigewin-offering of tobacco
- § Bikwakokaan(an)-wooden or cedar peg(s)
- § Bikwakokaanike-s/he makes wooden pegs
- § Bimikwaan(ag)-gunnel(s)
- § Bimikwaanike-s/he forms gunnels
- § Bishagaakobijigewag-they are peeling birch bark
- § Daashkibijigewin-root splitting
- § Daashkiga’ige-s/he splits
- § Gashkigwaaso-s/he sews
- § Gashkoonowin(an)-lashing
- § Gawaandag-black spruce
- § Gezhaagamideg-warm water
- § Gidinawemaaganinaanig-all our relatives

# Ikidowinan (words)

- n Giizhik-cedar
- n Gwayako-didibinan!-Roll it up correctly!
- n Ishkweyaang-back of the canoe
- n Jiimaan-canoe
- n Jiimaanike-wigiwaaming-canoe making house
- n Maananoons-ironwood/hop hornbeam tree
- n Maniwiigwaase-s/he gathers birch bark
- n Mewadishiwejig-visitors
- n Migoos(an)-awl(s)
- n Miigwech-thank you
- n Mookodaaso-s/he carves or whittles
- n Mookojigan-draw knife
- n Naajibigiwe-s/he harvests spruce pitch
- n Nabagisagoonsikewin-board-making
- n Nagaajiwanaang- also known as Fond du Lac Reservation
- § Niigaan-front of the canoe
- § Obishagaakobidoon Wiigob-s/he peels the inner bark of the basswood
- § Odoozhi'aawaan apisidaaganag-they make cedar sheathings
- § Odoozhitoonaawaa Jiimaanike-Wigamig-they build the canoe making house
- n Ogiishkizhaanaawaan-they cut and trim the roots
- § Ojiim-to kiss
- § Onaadinaanaawaan wadabiin - they go get spruce root

# Ikidowinan (words)

- § Onaakosijigan-forming frame
- § Onaakosijigewag-they use frame and stakes to bend the canoe into the proper shape
- § Onaakosijigewin-frame making
- § Ondewan-the roots are boiling
- n Ozhiitaawin-getting ready for...
- n Waagaadoowaatig(oog)-end piece(s) or inner prow piece
- § Waaginaa(g)-canoe rib(s)
- § Waawaashkeshi bimide-deer fat
- § Wiigob(iin)-inner basswood bark string(s)
- § Wiigwaasi-Gashkigwaasowin-birch bark sewing
- § Wiigwaasi-Jiimaan- birch bark canoe
- § Wiiwakwaanens-little cap



# Miigwech

- n Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- n Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum
- n Administration for Native Americans (ANA)
- n Fond du Lac departments and staff
- n Participants, artists, resource experts, community members, and volunteers

