Junior Cook, Mohawk Elder: Well, if you’re going to keep up your way of life, then I think you’re going to need to pass on what knowledge you do have.

Narrator: Despite efforts being made today, the future of the black ash in Akwesasne is uncertain.

Richard David, Mohawk Basketmaker and Assistant Director, Department of Environment, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne: It’s kind of hard, because we don’t have the emerald ash borer here. And we hope we don’t get it.

Les Benedict, Assistant Director, Environment Division, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe: We’re going to continue to work to restore our trees, even though EAB is, I guess, on the horizon. We’re hopeful that maybe it can be controlled. We will also continue to collect seeds, so that we can preserve those in case the ash trees are wiped out. Then maybe once they are able to control it, then they can restore the trees, maybe sometime in the future.

Narrator: It has always been part of Mohawk culture to consider future generations when making important decisions. For the Mohawks, saving the black ash is about more than just saving a tree. It is about helping to preserve cultural knowledge for the future.

Salli Benedict, Mohawk Basketmaker: You have to get the most out of the resource you can. You know, so now the resource can also help us tell stories about important things in our culture. So, my folks have a little stand of black ash growing out here that was put in by Department of Environment. People are trying new ways to help to support black ash growing today.

Les Benedict: This is an example of what you can do. And it might be a way of maybe preserving trees and preventing them from being attacked by the emerald ash borer. If we set up seed orchards like this, or plantations, we could actually manage basket trees on a agri-business or agri-forestry-type setup. So, we could actually set aside land, produce trees specifically for baskets, and it’s not so far out of the question.

Richard David: My great-grandchildren are going to benefit by this. I’m not going to be here to see it, or if I am I probably won’t be in any condition to be making baskets then.

Les Benedict: It’s a long-term investment. The work that we do today will probably have a visible or tangible impact maybe 15, 20 years, 50 years from now. So, like, planting trees—if I plant a tree today, I won’t see the benefit of it. But the next generation will see the benefit of the trees.
Narrator: With an eye toward the future, Mohawk people continue to remember the values of their ancestors, as expressed in the Thanksgiving Address.

Aronhiaies Herne, Principal, Akwesasne Freedom School: The most important thing is that the kids today understand you know that this stuff is, was a gift to us. And that’s what we teach our kids, is that these things were a gift, and if that you’re not thankful for those things, they’re going to be taken away someday. So it’s real important that people start to teach that and start to understand that this natural world is not going to be here very much longer, if we keep going the way we’re going.