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Cultural Burning

Cultural Fire in California

- Fire is essential to ecosystem functioning
- Many California Native people practiced using fire as a tool to shape and support healthy ecosystems



What is Cultural burning?

- Burning led by a Tribe that has cultural, community, and ecological goals.
- Usually a part of a broader strategy that benefits the wellbeing of all beings including Indigenous community members, general public, plants, and animals as well as the broader ecosystem.
- Intergenerational
- Relationship to fire and each other is less about hierarchy and more about being in good relationship
- Different in every community*
 - This is just a starting point as this practice is unique in every community

Traditional Fire Stewardship & Knowledge

- Some California Native people consider their cultures to be fire-dependent.
- Cultural fire practitioners around the state have used low intensity, controlled fire to:
 - reduce pests in acorns (a key traditional food staple),
 - stimulate regeneration of native plants,
 - reduce invasive species,
 - increase water use efficiency,
 - create habitat for wildlife,
 - and improve the quality of basketry material.

**caveat: list is not exhaustive and each is informed by cultural values, institutions and knowledge.

Fire Suppression and Settler Colonialism

- Early 19th century forest management policy prohibited fires.
- Cultural suppression: no cultural fires were allowed
 - Native people starting fires could be shot on sight (1918 letter from Orleans District Ranger)
 - Arrests for arson
- Buildup of fuels made culturally important, Native plants decline and led to bigger wildfires



Fire Suppression and Settler Colonialism

“Burning is a spiritual obligation and also an act of political defiance in the context of governmental oppression and regulation of such retained cultural rights” (Dr. Frank Lake, in Norgaard 2019)



Community is Leading for Change

(Beth Rose Middleton)

Emerging State policies:

California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (2021) recognizes tribes as partners in developing prescribed fire plan; recommends fund to support cultural burning; CCA4, EO N-82-20 (Biodiversity) recognize the importance of cultural burning in CA, SB332 and AB 642

On-the-ground

collaborations: TREN, workshops, cross-jurisdictional partnerships

Recognition of Tribal/ Indigenous leadership in

fire: Cultural Fire Management Council, Indigenous Peoples Burning Network, TREN, Indigenous Stewardship Network, and national and international initiatives

Increasing learning

opportunities: SW CASC postdoctoral fellow; TREN; intertribal collaborations; Keepers of the Flame workshops and course; university partnerships

Learning from Practitioners: Keepers of the Flame Course

NAS 198

- Quarter long course intended to teach students about cultural fire, policy, and practice
- Guest speakers are cultural practitioners
- Fire workshops and reciprocity with practitioners



Fire Workshops

- Building relationships throughout the state
- Opportunities for Inter-tribal collaboration
- Agency-Tribal collaboration
- Student opportunities for growth
- Landscapes are burned

















Paxkatkatsini (Thank-you)



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