



INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

Good fire, bad fire: Reintegrating fire into the landscape

Dr. Amy Cardinal Christianson amy.cardinal@ilinationhood.ca

April 23, 2025

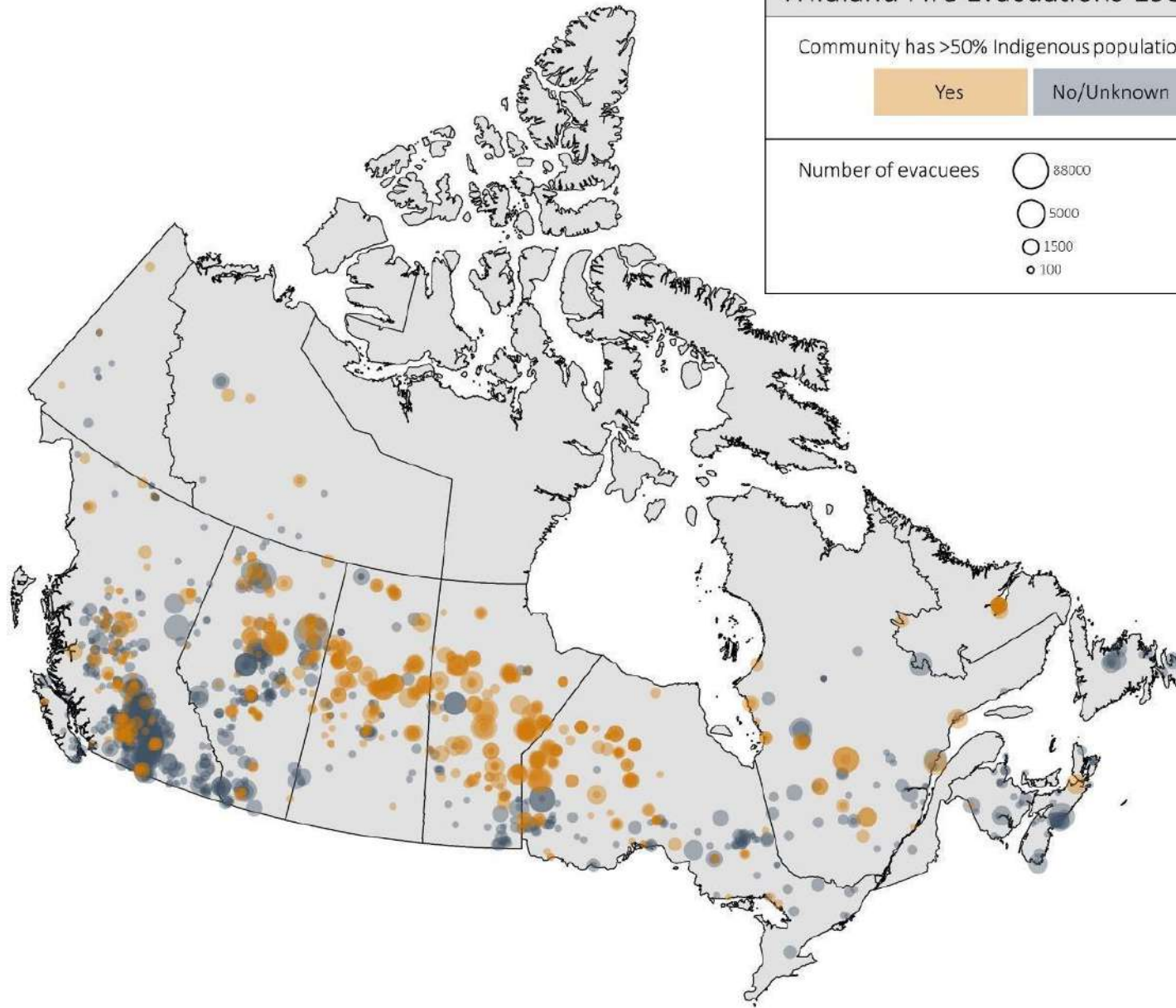
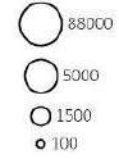


Wildland Fire Evacuations 1980-2021

Community has >50% Indigenous population



Number of evacuees



Christianson, Johnston, et al. in prep

Wildfire Evacuation Events

4.9%

Canadian population
identifies as

Indigenous

42%

(583/1387)

of wildfire

evacuation events

between 1980-2021

were of

**Communities with
>50% Indigenous
population**

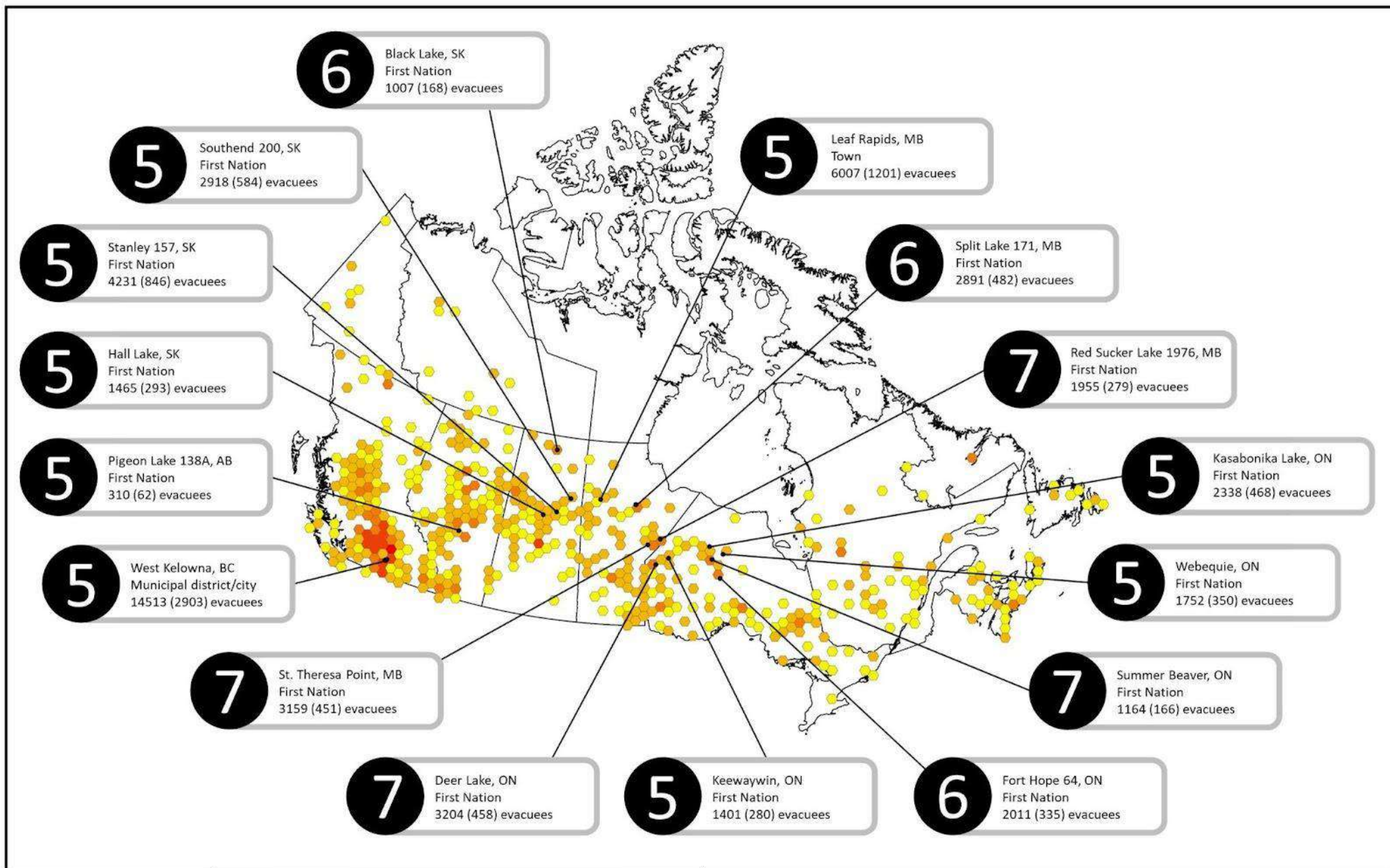
© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Natural Resources, 2017



Natural Resources
Canada

Ressources naturelles
Canada

Canada



Legend

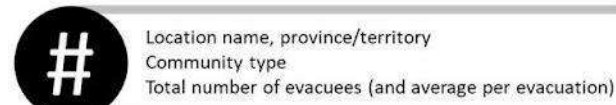
Map grid:

Evacuation density



Callout boxes:

Number of evacuations



Christianson, Johnston, et al. in prep

Cause of Evacuation

Canada

Direct Threat

78.2%

~1083 events

Smoke Only

16.8%

~232 events

Other/Unknown

5%

~70 events

Communities with >50% Indigenous population

Direct Threat

60%

~349 events

Smoke Only

35.7%

~208 events

Other/Unknown

4.3%

~25 events





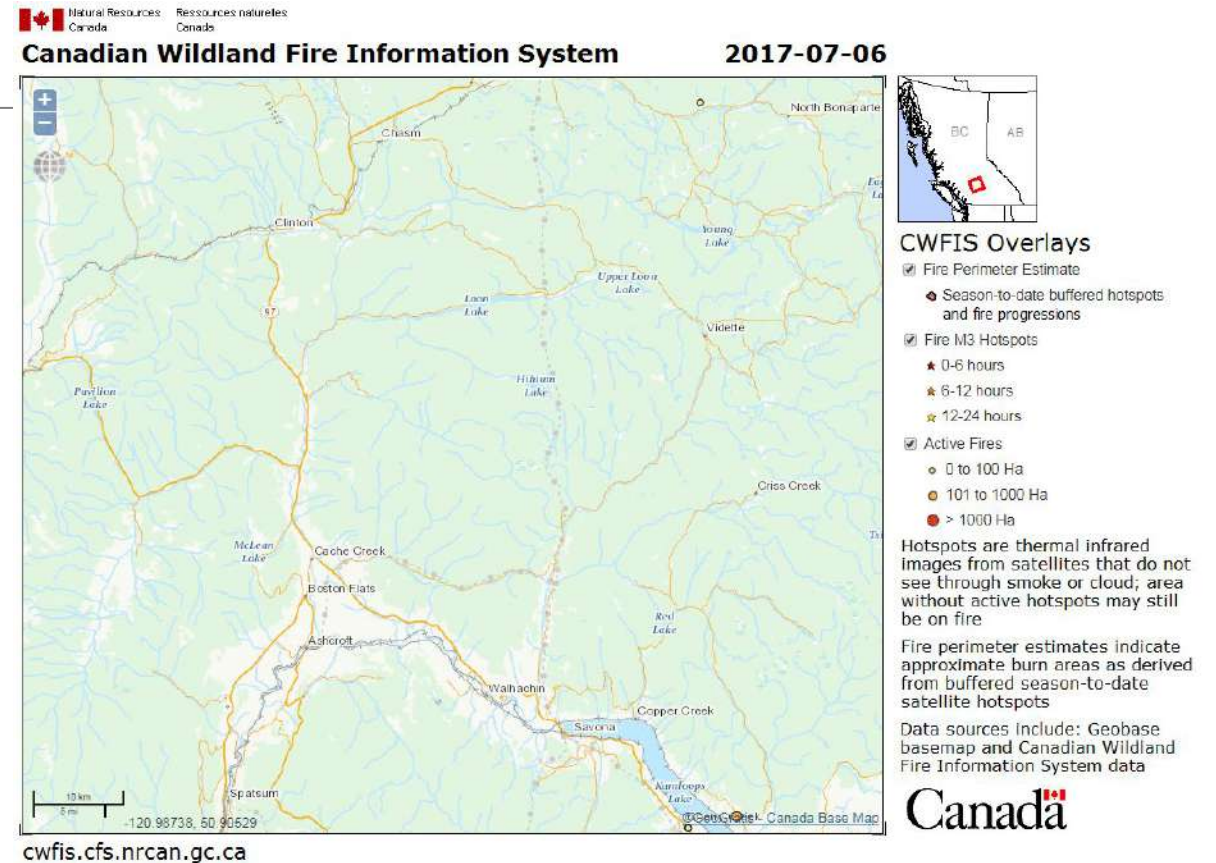
FIRST NATIONS WILDFIRE EVACUATIONS

A **GUIDE** FOR **COMMUNITIES**
AND **EXTERNAL AGENCIES**

TARA K. MCGEE and
AMY CARDINAL CHRISTIANSON
with the First Nations Wildfire
Evacuation Partnership

Increasing risk

- Climate change
- Fire exclusion
- Fire suppression
- Forest management practices
- Expansion of wildland-urban interface
- 60% of First Nations reserves located within or intersect the wildland-human interface



What is Indigenous Fire Stewardship?

Any activity where Indigenous Peoples assert their jurisdiction and exercise their rights related to fire

Indigenous Cultural Burning



Indigenous peoples 'sought to replace fires of chance with fires of choice' (Pyne, 2007, p. 23).
"cleaning the land"

Using fire to achieve specific cultural objectives

"I didn't set the forest on fire just for the sake of burning, but so that I could return to hunt the next year and live" (Ferguson, 1979, p.81).



Figure - Indigenous peoples demonstrating a prairie fire start, 1903 (From the Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton)



Indigenous Knowledge Systems



- Stewarding biodiversity
 - Reyes-Garcia et al. 2021, Fernández-Llamazares et al. 2021, Hoffman et al. 2021, Ogar et al. 2020, Lake & Christianson 2019, Schuster et al. 2019,
- Nature-based solutions to climate change
 - FireSticks Alliance, Townsend et al. 2020, Etchart 2017
- Disaster Risk Reduction





By: Daniel Harrington
For: Blazing the Trail

Cultural Severance

aka fire exclusion/
suppression

Wildfire management agencies racialized 'light burning' and delegitimized or erased Indigenous peoples and knowledge through three key narratives: (1) Discrediting - 'savage' narrative; (2) Downplaying - vanishing 'Indian' narrative; and (3) Erasure - terra nullius narrative.

Vinyeta K. Under the guise of science: how the US Forest Service deployed settler colonial and racist logics to advance an unsubstantiated fire suppression agenda. *Environ Sociol.* 2021:1-15
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2021.1987608>

Fire Science and Management (ME Alexander, Section Editor) | [Open Access](#) |
Published: 27 July 2022

Centering Indigenous Voices: The Role of Fire in the Boreal Forest of North America

[Amy Cardinal Christianson](#) , [Colin Robert Sutherland](#), [Faisal Moola](#), [Noémie Gonzalez Bautista](#),
[David Young](#) & [Heather MacDonald](#)

Current Forestry Reports **8**, 257–276 (2022) | [Cite this article](#)

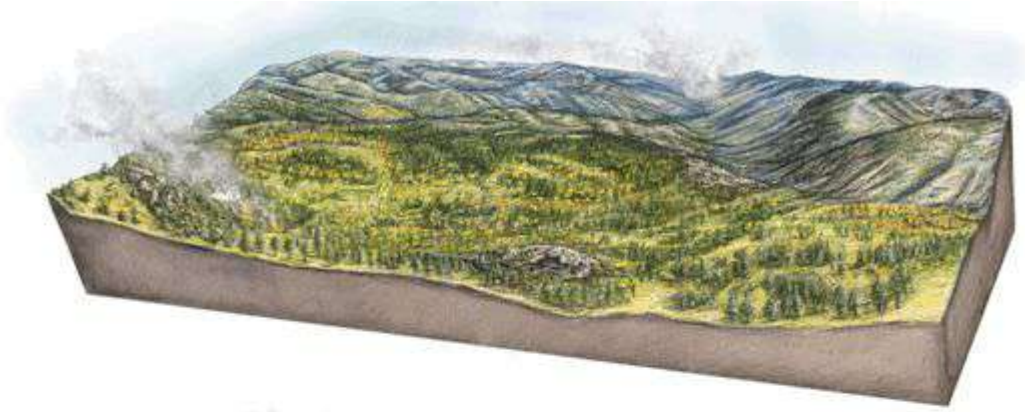
2685 Accesses | **2** Citations | **83** Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40725-022-00168-9>

Table 1 Species that are known to have been managed with Indigenous burning practices in the boreal forest

From: [Centering Indigenous Voices: The Role of Fire in the Boreal Forest of North America](#)

Common name	Species	Indigenous Nation	Indigenous name	Geographical location	Reasons for burning	Key references
Lowbush blueberry; Dwarf blueberry	<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i> ; <i>V. caespitosum</i>	Anishnaabe; Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en	yintimī? (W) 'myahl(G) <u>miinan</u> (A)	Northwestern Ontario; Northwestern Alberta,	Creation, maintenance and renewal of productive berry patches, including enhanced berry patch productivity (number of berries), increased berry sweetness,	[9, 72, 106, 110]



1930 William B. Osborne



2011 John F Marshall



2015 John F Marshall





What is the difference between cultural burning and prescribed fire?

PCA National Fire Management Plan and Prescribed Fire Standard Operating Procedure differentiate the two practices.

*Nations may have different terms they prefer to use. For example, the term cultural burning can have a strictly ceremonial meaning for some Nations. Local terms should be used.

Indigenous/Cultural Fire*

- Indigenous led around cultural objectives, land stewardship
- Creation of mosaics, reduces risk
- Spiritual/ceremonial aspects
- Indigenous knowledge-driven around time to burn and techniques for burning
- Generally, “slow cool burns” – fire we can walk beside
- Community roles / traditional governance / community involvement
- Ignition using traditional methods
- More than fire
- Living with the land

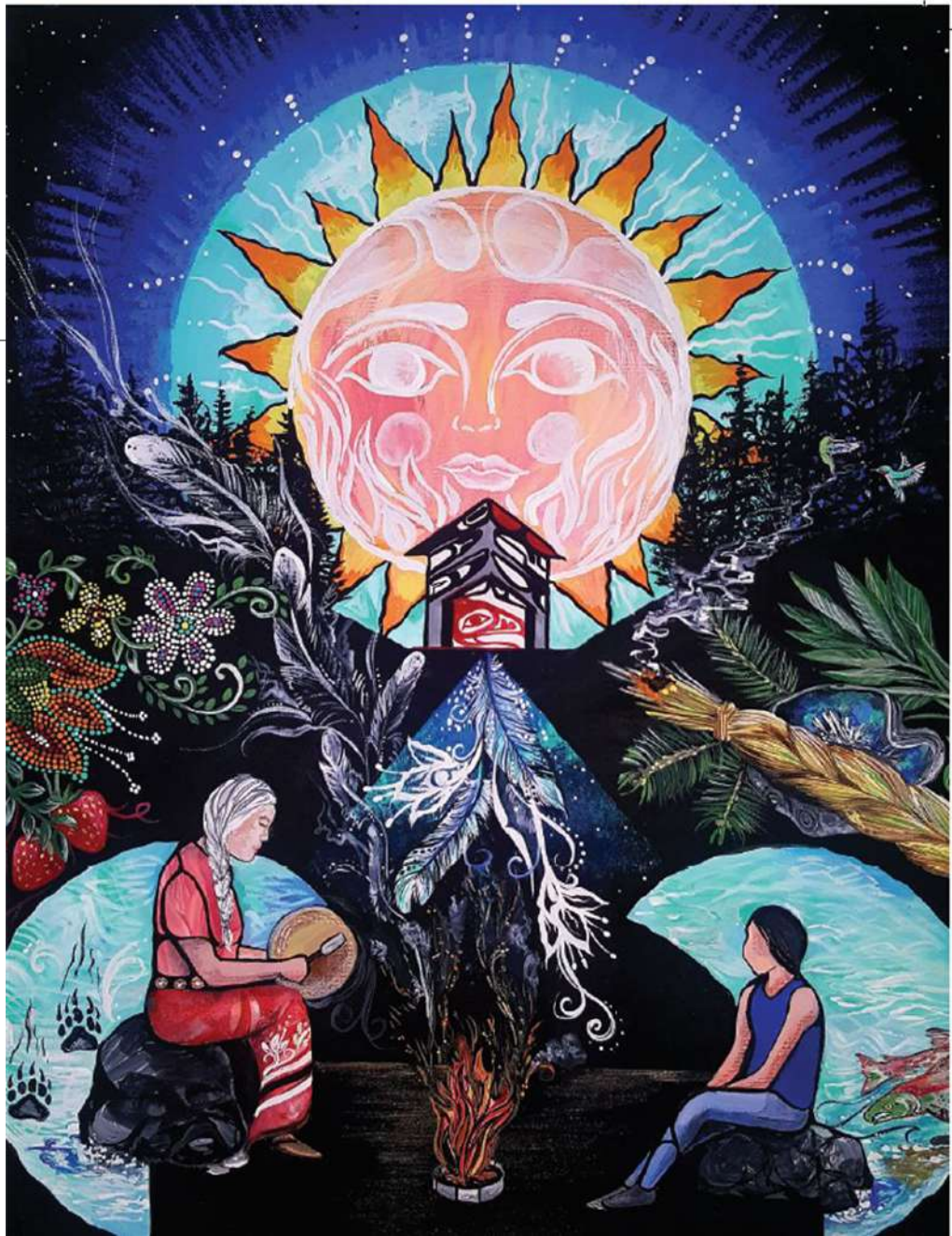
Prescribed Fire

- Agency/organization driven
- Objectives – usually hazard reduction or ecological (including restoration)
- Production burning – as much in as little time as possible
- Vary in intensity – including crown fire replication
- Para-military structure, top-down approach, bureaucratic
- Ignition using accelerants
- Job
- Working off the land



Blazing the Trail:

Celebrating
Indigenous Fire
Stewardship



By: Karen Erickson
For: Blazing the Trail

Cultural Safety of Indigenous Wildland Firefighters

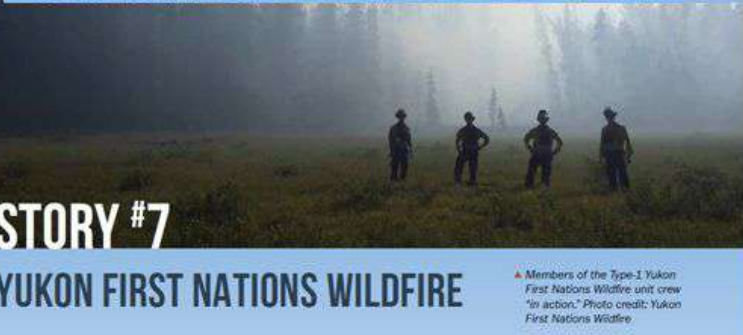
<http://www.turtleislandconsulting.ca/cultural-safety.html>



- *What are Indigenous wildland firefighters' and wildland fire operations staff's experiences regarding accident/injury rates, sickness presenteeism/absenteeism, chronic illness (cancer, respiratory illness, etc.), close calls, racism/discrimination/harassment?*

- *What is currently working on the fireline and fire operation centres to promote cultural safety of Indigenous wildland firefighting personnel?*

- *What are the priority needs/issues and recommendations for enhancing cultural safety for Indigenous wildland firefighting personnel?*





Thunderbirdcollective.ca

info@thunderbirdcollective.ca



INDIGENOUS
LEADERSHIP
INITIATIVE



- <https://www.ilinationhood.ca/events/ili-virtual-fire-workshop>



Home

Giving Thanks

Grounding the *We Are Fire* Toolkit

Navigating the *We Are Fire* Toolkit

Using Fire

Knowing Our Land

Understanding the Politics of Fire

Moving Toward Fire Reconciliation

Engaging in Indigenous-Led Fire Prescriptions

Disclaimers

Welcome to We Are Fire

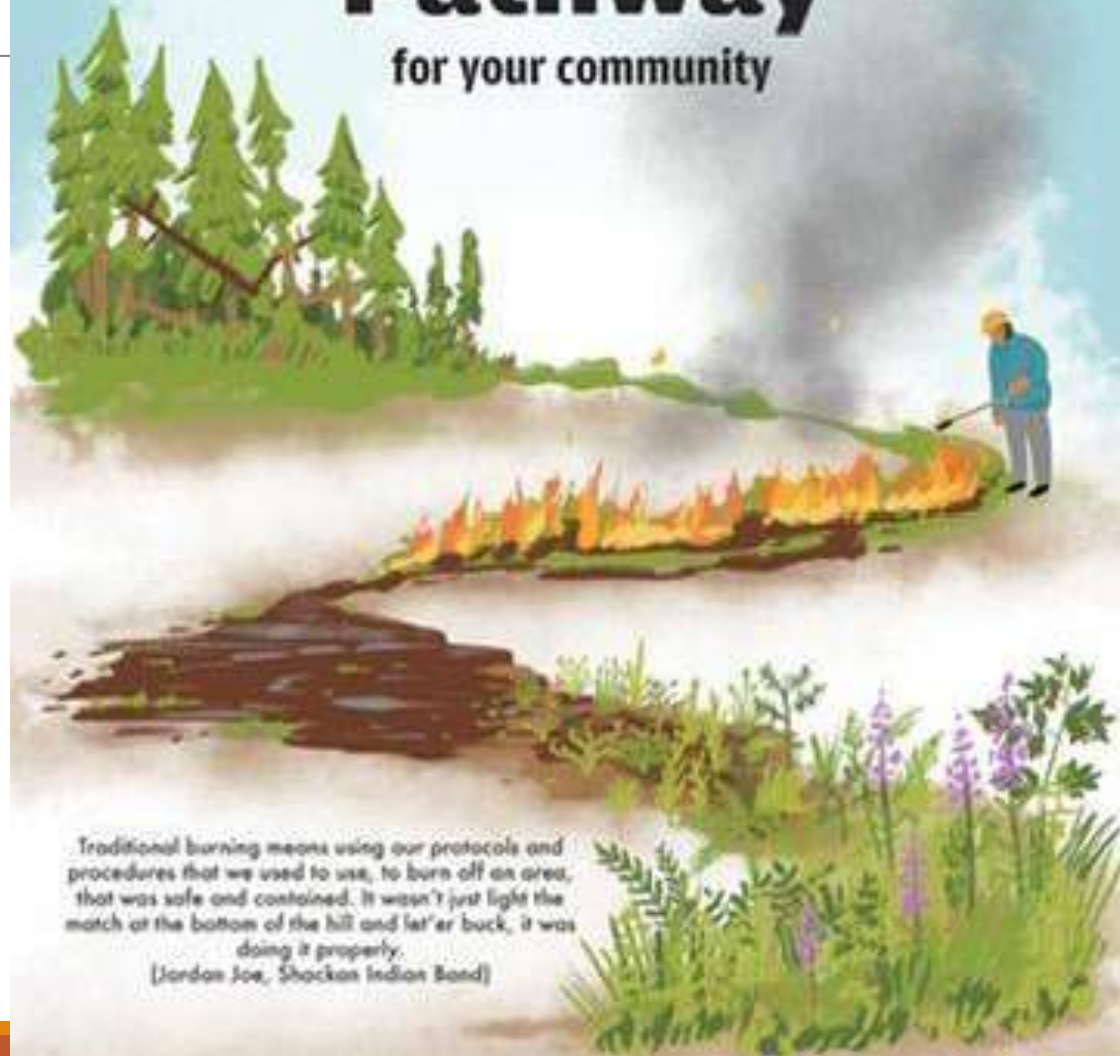
A Toolkit for Applying Indigenous-Led Fire Practices and Western Fire Management in the Saskatchewan River Delta

tawaw kinanaw oma iskotēw:
oma apacīcikan oci ininiwak ka
nīkanōtak iskotēw kākētawam
itotamowina ēkwa pakisimōtāk
iskotēw ōpimpanītowāk ōta
kisiskāciwani-sīpiy maskēko
askīy

[Listen to Cree](#)



Creating a **Cultural Burn Pathway** for your community



Traditional burning means using our protocols and procedures that we used to use, to burn off an area, that was safe and contained. It wasn't just light the match at the bottom of the hill and let'er buck, it was doing it properly.

(Jordan Joe, Shocksan Indian Band)







Issues

- Low recognition of Indigenous expertise related to fire – we are still here
- Power dynamics – Indigenous sovereignty, land-back etc
- Non-Indigenous interest and appropriation
- No(?) sustained funding (5+ years) for jobs for Indigenous peoples
 - Guardians program funding is a start
- One-off projects and overwhelming requests
- Social justice

