

Secwepemc Landscape Burning Practices: Views from Practitioners

By Ron Ignace and Marianne Ignace

Introduction

Secwepemc ethnobotany research has confirmed the use of fire management in Secwepemc traditional territory (e.g. Turner 1999). Since the large wildfires in the Interior of British Columbia in 2003, there has been a renewed interest in forest management practices that incorporate burning into contemporary management regimes. This poster provides information from Secwepemc practitioners' perspectives about:

- Methods of burning
- Knowledge of season and local moisture levels at various elevations
- Secwepemc terminology for landscape burning

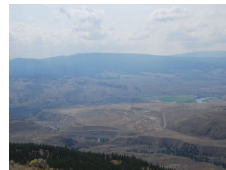


Method

This information derives from Ron Ignace's own memories about burning on the Skeetchestn reserve in the 1950s, and continuing practice of burning old growth shrubs, understorage and grassland on the reserve. Information was also recorded with a group of Skeetchestn elders who observed and practised burning in the 1930s to 1950s.



The Skeetchestn reserve, one of 17 communities of the Secwepemc Nation in the Interior Plateau of British Columbia, extends for more than 20,000 acres and includes valley bottom and lower elevation bunchgrass-ponderosa pine areas, some of it cultivated now, as well as mid-elevation Douglas fir stands and open meadows. Especially in the valley bottom, our people have continued to practise some measure of fire management.



Results

Most burning in open grasslands and bunchgrass/ponderosa pine areas was done in early spring (late March to early April), just after the snow has melted and the ground still retains moisture. In mid-elevations this would be up to a month later.

During this time, the Deadman Creek Valley, a north-south Valley, often has shifts in wind patterns with a reversal of wind in the early afternoon, which is factored in to control the spread of fires, set early in the morning.

Elders described ways in which slope burning was carried out in short cycles in some areas, in longer 10 year cycles in other areas, and the use of fire guards.

Experiments with burning have shown how plant communities (e.g. yellowbell – *Fritillaria pudica* or ts'uwéw'ye and biscuitroot, *Lomatium macrocarpum* or qweqw'ile) have returned not after one burn but after several seasons of burns in 1-2 year intervals



Sloped grasslands with bunchgrass – 15 years after being fenced off and after 10 years of intermittent burns



Tsuwéw'ye (*Fritillaria pudica* returned after 10 years or more!



Sagebrush taking over before a burn



The same area five years after a burn – maximum grass

Conclusion

- Recording remaining traditional knowledge about burning practice is crucial
- Next to grassland burning, it would be extremely useful to carry out burning experiments on wooded slopes and measure the return of plant communities

Acknowledgements

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