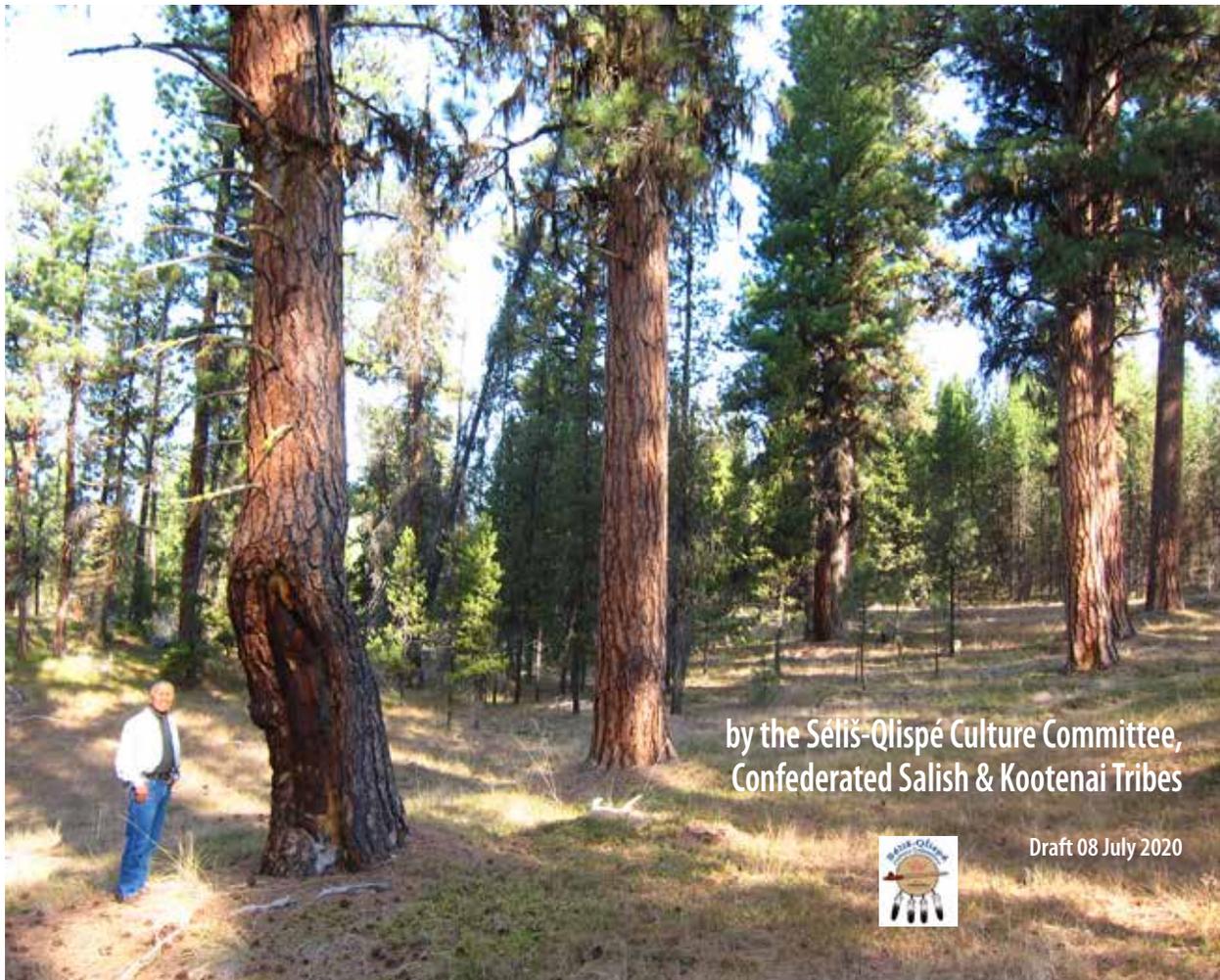


Indigenous Peoples and Forests

Montana Forest Action Plan



by the Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee,
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes



Draft 08 July 2020

Cover images:

Top: Firefighters of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, August 2000.
Photo by Andrea Booher for FEMA..

Bottom: Séliš elder Louie Adams (1933-2016) with culturally scarred sʔatqʷʔp (ponderosa pines) near Čʔqłlé (Referring to Lake—Placid Lake), 2006.
Courtesy Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (hereinafter SQCC).

Indigenous Peoples and Forests

This section of the Montana Forest Action Plan was written and illustrated by the Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, and the tribal representatives of the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council.

The state of Montana is now 131 years old. Indigenous peoples have lived in our valleys, mountains, prairies—and woodlands—from at least the end of the last ice age, over 12,000 years ago. Over that vast period, native nations have developed profound understandings of forest ecosystems and what it means to live with them in healthy and sustainable ways. Governor Bullock stated in the 2019 executive order establishing the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council, “Montana’s forests are culturally, biologically, and economically significant to Tribal Nations throughout the state.” As we develop our action plan for Montana’s forests, we would be wise to listen to and learn from the perspectives and experiences of the people who have been here from the beginning of human time.

In doing so, we are acting in full accord with both Governor Bullock’s vision, as well as numerous presidential directives regarding consultation with Tribal Nations, including President Bill Clinton’s Executive Order 13175 (2000), President George W. Bush’s memorandum on “Government-to-Government Relationship with Tribal Governments” (2004), and President Barack Obama’s “Memorandum on Tribal Consultation” (2009).

Within the state of Montana, there are eight federally recognized tribal nations, seven reservations, and twelve major tribes.¹ Each has its own distinct culture, history, and language, and each can provide unique insights into the diverse forest types and their management. In all of Montana’s disparate tribal cultures and histories, however, there are also certain shared aspects, many of which bear directly upon efforts to reassess forest management at the state level.

In the traditions of all twelve tribes, the world we inhabit is a gift from the animals, from the spirits, and from the Creator. Human beings were given a good and bountiful environment, prepared for and entrusted to us, full of everything we need to sustain life. We were given clean waters and fine land, abundant in all the plants needed for food and medicine and materials, and plentiful in animals and fish and birds, who offered to be food or provide clothing or tools for us, the human-beings-yet-to-come.

The diverse tribal relationships with forests all rest upon this shared foundation: a cultural imperative to remember that these are gifts that were given to human beings. We are therefore obligated to respect and care for them. The ethic of avoiding waste of the natural world, and of ensuring its well-being for future generations, is deeply woven into the fabric of all the tribal cultures of the region. Those cultural values of respect are reflected not only in creation stories and in ceremonial and spiritual practices that continue to be practiced today, but also in many of the formally adopted policies and programs of modern tribal governments, including policies relating to forest management.

Right: Séliš elder Felicite “Jim” Sapiye McDonald (1922-2017) picking stšá (huckleberries) in forests northwest of the Flathead Reservation, 1996. SQCC image.



Below: SQCC staff members Felicite McDonald & Josephine Quequesah (1937-2012) teaching Séliš-Qlispé cultural uses of forest plants, 2007. SQCC image.



For hundreds of generations, indigenous peoples in what is now Montana subsisted entirely or primarily by hunting, fishing, and gathering. They moved with the seasons and the fluctuating populations of animals and plants in a finely tuned seasonal cycle of life, which necessitated a highly-developed understanding of the region's ecology. Tribal people generally gathered enough food and medicine and material things for their own use, and sometimes a surplus to exchange with other groups, bands, or tribes. This was an economy based on subsistence needs and on tribalism as the organizing social system.² People conducted many activities communally for the collective needs and well-being of the community, and owned little personal property. There was no concept of land as something that could be owned or exchanged in a marketplace.



Above: Séliš elder Agnes Vanderburg (1901-1989) peeling q^wq^wli[?]t (lodgepole pine) near Ept Čix^wćx^wt (Has Ospreys—Seeley Lake), c. 1970. Mildred Chaffin photo, courtesy Upper Swan Valley Historical Society.

Left: Qlispé elder Michael Louis Durglo), Sr. (1935-2015) with culturally scarred s[?]atq^w†p (ponderosa pine) near Čtǫlǫlé (Referring to Warer — Placid Lake), 2007. SQCC image.

Tribal Relationships with Fire

While tribal peoples generally lived lightly upon the land, usually working within the terms and limits of natural systems rather than forcefully transforming them, theirs was not a passive relationship with the environment. Tribes actively employed many tools to nurture and augment the foods and materials that were of importance to human life. The single most powerful of those tools—the tool that most expansively shaped our forests— was fire. All of Montana, both east and west of the Continental Divide, was shaped by fire, whether of natural origin or human-caused. But in many places, the latter was far more frequent. For thousands of years, much of the region, including both prairies and woodlands, was primarily shaped by the deliberate, purposeful, and careful application of fire by Indian people.

Tribal nations treated the forests with fire for a variety of reasons and in many specific ways, each of them learned, honed, and perfected over their millennia of living in this place. Salish-Kalispel elders have described how the application of fire was a difficult, complicated, and dangerous task, one only learned through long experience, and entrusted to a person referred to as the *sx^wpaám*, the one who makes fire, a person of high knowledge and training. The *sx^wpaám* and his assistants used fire in certain places, times of the year, and conditions. They did so for a variety of purposes. One objective was to create and maintain lowland forests in an open, park-like state dominated by old-growth ponderosa pine and larch. Through the centuries, these practices produced the cathedral-like groves of massive trees that were often noted by early Euro-Americans, most of whom did not realize that they were observing not just natural landscapes, but also cultural landscapes.³

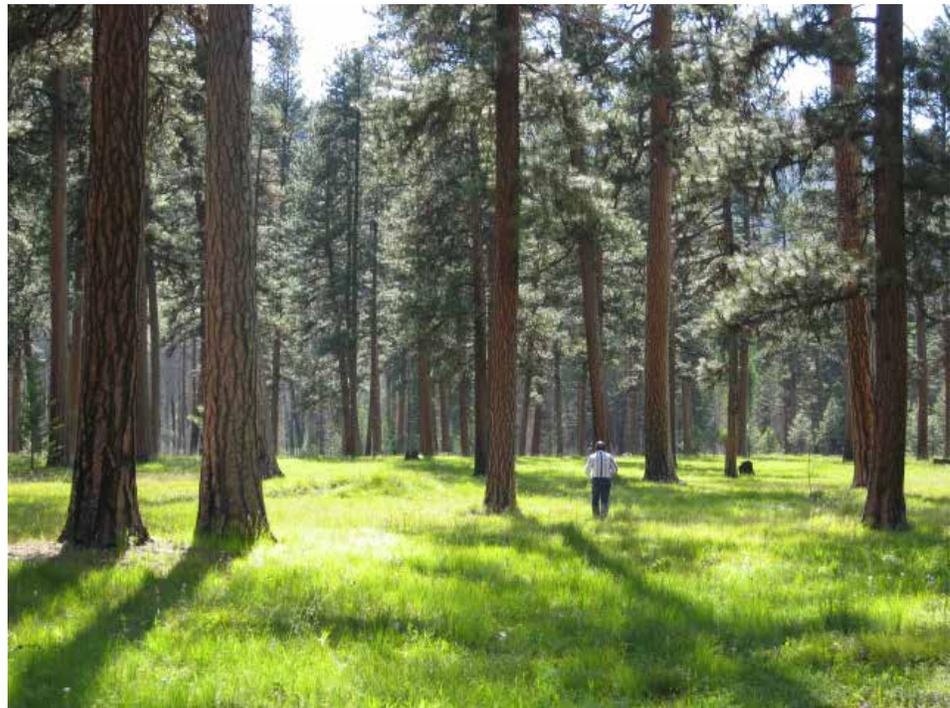
Tribal people also used fire to revitalize important medicinal and food plants, such as camas and huckleberries. They applied fire to clear trails that had been blocked by downed trees. They employed fire as part of their hunting practices. They often fired the prairies and grasslands to ensure rich and productive grazing for bison and other ungulates, and in more recent centuries, for horses. As the elders remind us, the ancestors used fire not only to benefit human beings, but also to help the plants and animals for their own sake.



Tom Quequesah and Don Sam reenacting the traditional use of fire, c. 2003.
Courtesy Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes.

In recent decades, researchers have assembled massive documentation of the ways in which Indian people used fire to shape the Northern Rockies and surrounding areas. The evidence comes from many sources and in many forms: tribal oral traditions; journals, letters, and reports of early trappers, traders, explorers, and missionaries; scientific studies of tree rings and soils; and the photographic record. The specific documentation to date is as varied as it is voluminous:

- recordings of tribal elders describing the traditional use of fire, and the way in which it began to be repressed by the government beginning as early as the 1860s,
- first-hand observations of early trappers, such as Peter Fiedler, who detailed Piegan use of fire on the buffalo prairies of Alberta in the 1790s,
- Salish-upper Kalispel studies of fire-related place-names across their aboriginal territories,
- tree-borings of old ponderosa stands in the Bitterroot Valley, and studies of the frequent occurrence of fire even in moist old-growth larch groves near Seeley Lake,
- eyewitness accounts from the Isaac Stevens expedition of tribal use of fire in the Coeur d'Alene Mountains in the 1850s, and
- extensive archival records reflecting aggressive repression of tribal burning practices beginning with early Montana territorial governments.⁴



In 2006, Salish elder Louie Adams (1933-2016) walks through the Primm Meadows forest, one of the few remnant examples of the lowland old-growth ponderosa parks shaped over centuries by tribal application of fire. SQCC image.



In October 2017, staff and elders of the Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee visited the Girard Grove of caq^wlš (western larch) near Ept Čix^wčx^wt (Has Ospreys—Seeley Lake). Scientific research has documented how this ancient, moist larch forest was maintained frequently with fire for centuries by Qlispé (upper Kalispel or Pend d'Oreille) people (see endnote 3). At left and below, SQCC Director Tony Incashola and Qlispé elder Stephen Smallsalmon with the oldest known larch in Montana. SQCC images.



The Transformation of Montana's Forests

The traditional use of fire, and indigenous relationships with forests in a larger sense, were tied to certain defining aspects of tribal life here. Because there was nothing approximating money or markets in tribal economies, Indian people directly engaged with natural resources to meet their spiritual and material needs. Tribal relationships with animals—and with plants and forests—were and are defined by something that can perhaps best be encapsulated by the word *respect*. Those relationships have always been imbued with a sense of spiritual gratitude and indebtedness, frequently renewed and reaffirmed in ceremony and prayer.

The fur trade violently introduced a new set of relationships with indigenous lands and resources. Traders and trappers treated beaver, bison, and other animals as commodities, killed not for direct subsistence or cultural needs, but to make money by shipping hides and meat to national and international markets. Driven by this new economic dynamic, trappers quickly decimated populations of fur-bearing species in entire drainage systems, where tribal people had until then coexisted with those animals for millennia.⁵

Once the railroads reached Montana in the 1880s, non-Indians were able to apply this intensity of exploitation to other resources that had until then been protected by geographic barriers from the phenomena of commodification and marketization. Railroads enabled the transport of goods of virtually any quantity or weight. Now livestock, grain, ore—and trees—were connected to the demands of a rapidly industrializing world. The railroads thus sparked the explosion of the agricultural, mining, and timber industries.⁶ It was at this point in our history, in short, that forests and trees became lumber, a commodity to be harvested and sold.



The Northern Pacific Railroad's newly constructed Marent Trestle, near the southern border of the Flathead Indian Reservation, 1884. Francis Haynes photograph, courtesy Montana Historical Society.

In that process, indigenous ways of life were rapidly pushed to the margins of Montana society. In the case of tribal management of forests, this meant, most of all, the repression of the traditional use of fire. A quarter century earlier, in the various treaty negotiations between native nations and the U.S. government, tribal leaders consistently sought to ensure the continuance not only of their political sovereignty, but also of their ways of life



Anaconda, 1907. Courtesy Library of Congress.

on and off designated reservations. The use of fire to manage landscapes was an important component of those ways of life and essential for maintaining the cultural ecologies that long sustained tribal people. But non-Indians generally assumed that tribal fire practices, and the cultures of which they were a part, were “primitive” and at odds with “progress.”

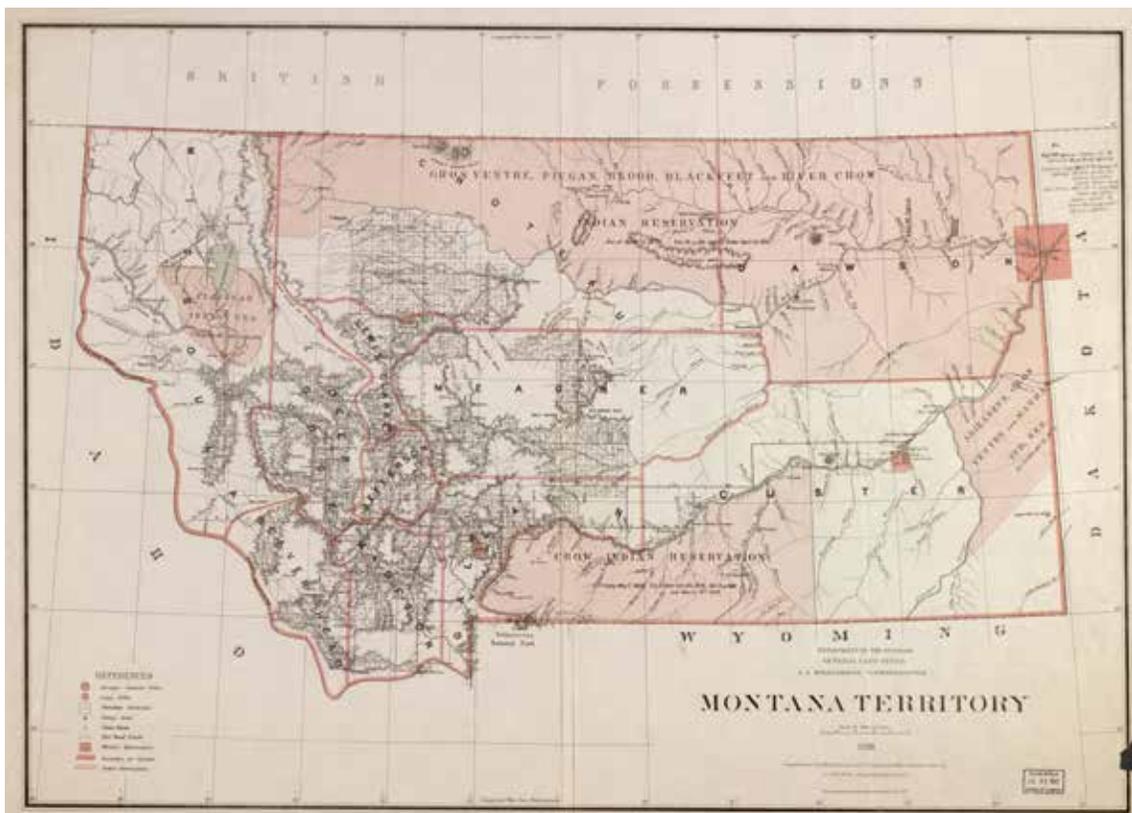
As non-Indian governing capacity expanded, federal, state, and local officials increasingly repressed tribal burning of prairies and woods, often at the same time they were repressing off-reservation hunting.⁷ Tribal hunters and fire-keepers had always been honored and respected for their ability to harvest game and to burn the woods and prairies in ways that helped ensure the future productivity of the land. Suddenly, newly-established non-Indian authorities were arresting them for those same actions, now characterized as “depredations.”⁸ At times, military or police units used lethal force to suppress the tribal use of fire. On December 21, 1875, for example, the Missoula *Pioneer* reported that 183 lodges of Pend d’Oreille (Qlispé or upper Kalispel) and allied tribes were hunting near the Canadian border when officers of the International line shot and killed two members of the party. They were killed neither for hunting nor for brandishing weapons. They were killed for setting fire to the prairie grass.

After the completion of the railroads, non-Indian settlement grew dramatically, but tribal life—and tribal forest management—was changed at least as much by the sudden availability of trains to haul almost unlimited quantities of logs to Montana mines, to distant cities or to other markets. The transformation of the forests into commodities fueled and intensified non-Indian friction with tribal parties trying to continue their fire management practices. Many of the richest timberlands were now owned directly by the Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR),

which Congress helped fund through the allocation of vast land grants.⁹ Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the NPRR gradually inventoried the potential merchantable timber of its forests and logged them heavily, often running into conflict with tribal parties exercising their off-reservation rights to hunt — and also to burn.¹⁰ NPRR managers frequently enlisted federal and state officers to protect the railroad’s interests against Indian hunting parties, despite the guaranteed rights delineated in duly ratified treaties. Even within reservations, federal officials began using their newly established systems of Indian police, judges, and jails to suppress the traditional use of fire.¹¹

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the United States forced many Indian people off of lands that the government has previously guaranteed to them, including:

- the 1880 executive order of President Rutherford B. Hayes, which drastically reduced the northern Montana reservation for the Gros Ventre, Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet, and River Crow tribes,¹²
- Congressional acts in 1882, 1891, and 1904 that greatly diminished the size of the Crow Reservation,
- the government’s forced removal of the Salish from the Bitterroot Valley in 1889-1891, and
- and the government’s taking of the “ceded strip” from the Blackfeet in 1895.



1879 General Land Office map of Montana Territory, showing the far larger size of tribally controlled lands prior to 1880. This map nevertheless underrepresents the extent of dispossession during that time by omitting the Bitterroot Reservation, where the majority of the Salish remained until the US Army forced them north to the Flathead Reservation in October 1891. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Meanwhile, as the federal government developed its management of forests during this time, officials imposed increasing restrictions on tribal people entering public lands, as well as outright prohibitions on burning.¹³ All of these developments further reduced tribal use and management of Montana forests. Throughout Montana, Indian people resisted these pressures, and where possible, continued to use fire, even at the considerable risk of openly defying non-Indian authorities. Numerous studies have documented a consistent record of burning throughout the nineteenth century in those parts of western Montana where tribal people were able to maintain their traditional practices.¹⁴ In most areas, however, the increasingly widespread exclusion of Indian burning quickly resulted in the overgrowth of once open forests and the massive buildup of fine and woody fuels. By 1889, the year that Montana was granted statehood, the effects of the diminution of native burning over the previous two decades, combined with a massive drought and unusually high summer temperatures, resulted in forest fires raging across the Northern Rockies. By some estimates, the total burned acreage exceeded that of the Great Fire of 1910.¹⁵

But it was the 1910 fire—the Big Blowup, as it was called—that marked the culmination of the preceding half-century of dispossession and transformation, the end result of removing from the land both Indian people and Indian use of fire to manage the forests.¹⁶ The 1910 fires burned most intensely over an area that was overlapping territories of the Salish, upper Kalispel, Coeur d’Alene, and Nez Perce nations. Fire historian Stephen Pyne has noted:

“The winds riled old burns all over the region. But their main force smashed with particular power along the Bitterroots between [the] Pend Oreille [River and lower Clark Fork River] in the north and the Selway River in the south. Four great blotches of fire scoured out the landscape in roughly east-west swaths.”¹⁷

As noted above, railroads had for decades played a decisive role in changing — in many cases, devastating — the region’s forests. In July 1910, that pattern continued, as the newly completed Milwaukee Road literally lit the fuse. Along its tracks running through the northern Bitterroot Range and adjacent areas, the Milwaukee’s coal-fired locomotives set off most of the initial fires, which over the following month gradually coalesced into the Big Burn.¹⁸



On May 19, 1909, Milwaukee Road officials gathered near Gold Creek, Montana for the driving of the last spike on the railroad’s Pacific Coast extension. Courtesy K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana.

The most lasting environmental change stemming from the Great Fire came not from the flames themselves, but from the subsequent reaction of the U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies. The few non-Indian voices that questioned the wisdom of the preceding decades of exclusion of Indian burning were quickly silenced. The federal government not only doubled down on preventing tribal use of fire, but now created the infrastructure of active fire suppression, including a vast fire-fighting system of lookout towers, roads, supply lines, and command centers, all of it organized with military discipline.



Above right: Vast burned areas in Northern Bitterroot Range, 1911. Asahel Curtis photograph, courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

Below right: An early U.S. Forest Service map of the 1910 fires in northwest Montana and Idaho, encompassing enormous portions of the traditional territories of the Séliš (Salish or “Flathead”), Qlispé (Kalispel or “Pend d’Oreille”), and Kootenai nations
Courtesy US Forest Service. https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5357030.pdf, accessed June 2020.



After 1910, professional foresters developed a nearly unanimous consensus that any forest fire, including “light burning,” should be avoided as something wholly destructive and even morally evil. They came to define their primary responsibility as preventing fires from starting and putting them out immediately when they did.¹⁹ In the following decades, the use of fire to manage the forests of the Northern Rockies was virtually eliminated, creating a vicious cycle of fuel buildup and devastating fires.²⁰

In April 1935, the Chief Forester, Ferdinand Augustus Silcox, announced the “10 AM policy.” In every national forest in the country, fires of any size, in any location, were to be controlled by 10 AM the following day. This directive would govern national fire policy for decades.²¹

In the early twentieth century, even the sovereign lands of Montana’s Indian reservations were subjected to the paired policies of fire suppression and intensified timber operations. During this time, the power of tribal governments reached its nadir, especially after the General Allotment Act was passed by Congress, subjecting reservations to non-Indian settlement in violation of the treaties that originally established them.²² These were also the years prior to the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), in which the federal government partially reversed its previous policies and began supporting the restoration of tribal sovereignty. From the 1890s to the 1930s, and especially after 1910, the federal



Above right: Log drive near mouth of Flathead Lake, Flathead Reservation, c. 1905. Elrod photo.

Below right: Polley Lumber Co., Missoula, c. 1924, when the company was logging intensively on the Flathead Reservation. McKay photo. Both images courtesy K. Ross Toole Archives, Univ. of Montana.



government consistently sought to undermine the social and political power of chiefs and other traditional leaders within reservations, often establishing “business councils” comprised of tribal members selected by U.S. officials in the hope that they would be more amenable to the rapid development of a market system and the commodification of reservation resources. During this time, federal Indian agents or superintendents were free of any oversight as they developed corrupt deals with private business interests, often resulting in the devastation of tribal resources.²³ The pace and extent of logging on the Flathead Reservation is an illustrative case. Between 1917 and 1928, close to half a billion board feet of lumber was stripped from reservation lands by non-Indian companies. Some of the timber consisted of ponderosa pines so large that individual logs filled entire rail cars.²⁴



NPRR car hauling enormous *łi?álqʷ* (western white pine), n.d.
 Courtesy K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana

Even after Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal began instituting greater accountability on reservations and rebuilding tribal governing capacities, the federal government in other ways continued and even intensified policies that had transformed Montana’s forests over the preceding half century. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) programs in Indian country, for example, devoted significant resources to building the infrastructure necessary to suppress fires, as well as assembling fire-fighting crews comprised of tribal members.²⁵ For many tribal families, the employment meant a great deal during the Great Depression; any concern about the cultural and ecological changes stemming from the CCC initiatives were pushed to the background.

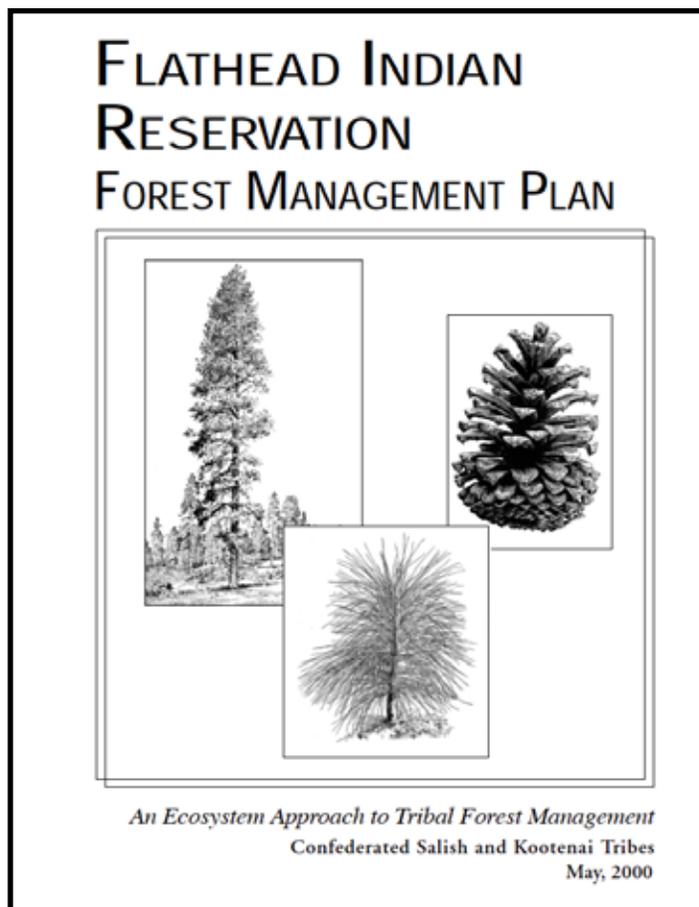


CCC training meeting for firefighters, Flathead Reservation, 1939.
 SQCC image.

Tribal Nations & Forest Management

Gradually, from the 1930s to the present, tribal nations throughout Montana have restrengthened their sovereignty and developed their governing capacities. Tribes have been supported by additional federal laws and policies that expanded upon the IRA, including the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638). Many indigenous communities have organized and funded efforts to document, protect, and revitalize the languages and cultural practices — including the use of fire to manage the land.

Throughout all of these efforts, tribal nations have helped lead a shift in perspective in American forestry and forest management that has taken root over the past quarter century. On the Flathead Reservation, this was demonstrated in 1995, when the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes used Public Law 93-638 to take direct control of the reservation's forestry program from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In May 2000, after many months of study and meetings involving a wide range of tribal members, from professional foresters to traditional elders, the governing Tribal Council unanimously adopted a new forest management plan that in many ways stood as a revolutionary departure from previous policies.²⁶ The new plan put a premium on the restoration of pre-European forest conditions, replacing commodity lumber production as the primary driving force. Its goal was a balance between what it called the needs of sensitive species and human uses of the forest. Where logging continued, it would now strive to mimic natural disturbances as much as possible. Once again, fire would be returned to the landscape in a widespread, systematic fashion: Silvicultural treatments would be designed to reverse the effects of fire exclusion and undesirable forest practices of the past. The plan reestablished prescribed fire as a major tool of tribal land management.



Tony Incashola, the Director of the Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee, articulated the larger purpose of CSKT control of the forestry program, and the new vision of the CSKT Forestry Plan:

“We need to keep in mind as we go forward here to reintroduce fire, the reason we’re doing it...to retain a culture, is to retain a way of life...look back to the mountains...Our religion is up there, our prayers. Everything that is as important to traditional people is there.”

Both tribal histories and current tribal policies show us that a different path, a healthier and more sustainable relationship with our forests, is both possible and preferable. Certainly, the rapidly accelerating and worsening climate crisis will make this already difficult task far more difficult. We must do whatever we can to halt and reverse our contributions to global warming. For us to reach our goals, we will certainly need the full might of modern scientific inquiry and technological innovation. But as we consider the indigenous history of woodlands in the area we now call Montana, it becomes clear that the change we need will also require a cultural shift. It will require us to take seriously the ways shown by the ancestors, to develop an approach defined by respect for the forests as living entities — and a more humble sense of our own place as human beings.



Felicite “Jim” Sapiye McDonald and Tony Incashola amid the forest of manintp (subalpine fir) and ts̓s̓étp (Engelmann spruce) near Čłsusuwēne? (Referring to the Water Receding — Upper Jocko Lake), 2010. SQCC image.

Endnotes

1 The eight federally recognized tribes within Montana are the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Blackfoot Nation, Fort Belknap Indian Community, Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes, Chippewa Cree Tribe, Crow Tribe of Indians, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, and the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe. The seven reservations are the Flathead Reservation, Blackfoot Reservation, Fort Belknap Reservation, Rocky Boy Reservation, Fort Peck Reservation, and Northern Cheyenne Reservation. The twelve major tribes are the Séliš (Salish or “Flathead”), Q̓lispé (upper Kalispel or “Pend d’Oreille), and Ksanka (Kootenai) of the Flathead Reservation; the Blackfoot Nation of the Blackfoot Reservation; the A-n-nin-nin and Nakoda of the Fort Belknap Reservation; the Cree and Chippewa of the Rocky Boy Reservation; the Nakoda and Dakota of the Fort Peck Reservation; the Northern Cheyenne of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation; and the Little Shell.

2 For a trenchant discussion of these systemic issues by an indigenous scholar, see D’Arcy McNickle, *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals* (London: Oxford University Press, rev. ed. 1993).

3 In recent years, forest scientists have added greatly to what the elders have long told us about tribal use of fire by examining the tree rings of many surviving old growth ponderosa pines, western larches, and other trees in western Montana. They have discovered that these trees tell us much about the frequency and kind of fires that Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai people set over many years in western Montana. Most of the ancient ponderosas and larches the scientists have studied dated to the 1500s, 1600s, or 1700s; a few of the very oldest of the trees began growing in the 1300s and 1400s. Across western Montana, primarily in ponderosa forests, the rings of these trees show signs of fires at average intervals of between 5 and 30 years, depending on forest type, elevation, and topography. In most places, these fires were far too frequent to have been caused by lightning; the tree rings are direct evidence of native use of fire. This means that for many forests across Salish-Pend d’Oreille territory, and for many centuries, tribal people set frequent fires, but did not ignite “stand-replacement” fires (meaning fires that burn all the trees in a given area). The old trees survive to this day because the Indian fires were low-intensity surface burns that did not kill mature fire-resistant Ponderosa and larch, but did remove the kinds of fuels that create much bigger fires if they are allowed to accumulate: brushy undergrowth, stands of young c̓q̓ét̓p (Douglas fir), and pine-needle duff. The big trees in a literal sense were, as Stephen Arno has written, the “result of frequent fires.” S.F. Arno, H.Y. Smith, and M.A. Krebs, *Old growth ponderosa pine and western larch stand structures: Influences of pre-1900 fires and fire exclusion* (USDA Forest Service Intermountain Research Station, Research Paper INT-495. Ogden, UT: USFS, 1997), frontpiece (our emphasis). See also S.W. Barrett, S.F. Arno, and J.P. Menakis, *Fire Episodes in the Inland Northwest, 1540-1940, Based on Fire History Data* (USDA Forest Service Intermountain Research Station, General Technical Report INT-370. Ogden, UT: USFS, 1997) and Stephen F. Arno, *The Historical Role of Fire on the Bitterroot National Forest* (USDA Forest Service Intermountain Research Station, Research Paper INT- 187. Ogden, UT: USFS, December 1976). Arno and Steven Allison-Bunnell have also written an excellent overview for popular audiences of current scientific understanding of fire history, *Flames in Our Forest: Disaster or Renewal?* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2002).

4 The single best source to date that brings these diverse kinds of records together, and offers a combined cultural and scientific understanding of fire and its history in Montana forests, is the interactive DVD produced by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, *Fire on the Land: Native Peoples and Fire in the Northern Rockies* (Lincoln: the University of Nebraska Press, 2006). At the time of completion of this essay, the CSKT Department of Tribal Education is in the process of bringing

the content of the DVD online. By January 2021, it will be accessible at <http://www.cskteducation.org/resources/online-resources>

5 Peter Skene Ogden, a trapper for the Hudson's Bay Company who married a tribal woman (Julia Rivet, whose descendants today are enrolled members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes), exemplified the view of the fur trade when he wrote that the Indians "can form no idea of a Country abounding in Beaver... a small stream with six lodges appears to them inexhaustible." To Ogden, such a notion seemed ludicrous; the trappers could rid an entire valley of beaver in a summer's work, and they often did. Ogden could only explain the Indians' seeming misperception of their environment as "Ignorance in not knowing better." Ogden was blind to his own ignorance of the entirely different sets of relationships with beaver and other animals that the tribes of the Columbia River drainage had maintained for millennia. In that different economic and ecological system, such resources had indeed been "inexhaustible." Lewis O. Saum, *The Fur Trader and the Indian* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), 170-171. See also Jennifer Ott, "'Ruining' the Rivers in the Snake Country: The Hudson's Bay Company's Fur Desert Policy." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 166-195.

6 See the Anaconda Mining Company papers, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Box 132, folder 3, "NP timber, 1898-99."

7 For a case study of how the government simultaneously repressed tribal off-reservation hunting and off-reservation burning, see Thompson Smith, "The Ecology of Violence: The Swan Massacre, Treaty Rights, and Fire," in *Fire on the Land*, op. cit.

8 See, for example, J.B. Collins, Forest Superintendent, General Land Office, Missoula, MT to W.H. Smead, U.S. Indian Agent, Flathead Reservation, July 27, 1900. National Archives Rocky Mountain Regional Branch (Denver), Record Group 75 (BIA), Flathead Indian Agency, Misc letters received, Box 68, folder "WH Smead – Incoming Correspondence – Unarranged – 1899-1900 (1) FRC56168."

9 See Ted Schwinden, "Northern Pacific land grants in Congress" (unpublished master's thesis, Montana State University, 1950), Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers 4807, <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/4807>, accessed 2020-03-04.

10 See Smith, "The Ecology of Violence," in *Fire on the Land*, op. cit.

11 In 1885 on the Flathead Indian Reservation, for example, U.S. Indian Agent Peter Ronan formally codified the "Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offences," which reads in part:

"The 'sun-dance' the 'war dance' the 'scalp dance' and all other so called feasts assimilating thereto, shall be considered 'Indian Offences'... Any plural marriage hereafter contracted or entered into by any member of the Indian tribes of this Reservation shall be considered an 'Indian offense'... The usual practices of so called 'medicine men' shall be considered Indian offenses...It shall also be the duty of the Court to suppress gambling, burning of grass...All of the above will be considered Indian offenses and shall be punishable by imprisonment in the Reservation Jail for a period of not less than ten days nor more than thirty days or by the withholding of Agricultural implements and government supplies therefrom at the discretion of the Court and approval of the Agent."

National Archives, Record Group 75 (Bureau of Indian Affairs), Letters Received 1881-1907, document number 1885-4436-enclosure.

12 President Hayes' Executive Order of July 13, 1880, eliminated most of the reservation previously assigned to the Gros Ventre, Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet, and River Crow tribes through

President Grant's Executive Orders of July 5, 1873 and April 13, 1875, as well as the Act of Congress of April 15, 1874. President Grant had himself reduced a part of that reservation, in the area between the Sun River and Marias River, through his Executive Order of August 19, 1874. But as an act of dispossession, it was far exceeded by President Hayes action of 1880.

13 In November 1898, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs instructed Montana Indian agents to try to prevent Indians 'altogether from entering forest reservations for the purpose of hunting at any season of the year', and that they "be advised of the rules and laws and be cautioned as to fires." In June 1899, National Forest Superintendents wrote to the Commissioner to complain that Indian people were "roaming over the Forest reservations in Montana and Idaho." The Commissioner responded by impressing upon U.S. Indian agents the need to enforce "the law positively prohibiting the causing of forest fires on the public domain, which includes Forest Reservations." National Archives, Washington DC, Record Group 75 (Office of Indian Affairs), Letters received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1881-1907, Letter number 1903-62224, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Montana and Idaho Indian agents, June 22, 1899, quoted in letter from Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to William H. Smead, U.S. Indian Agent, Flathead Agency, August 4, 1900. Commissioner of Indian Affairs outgoing correspondence, 1900 Lands Letter Book 448, pp. 326-327.

14 See note 3 above.

15 On the Flathead Reservation, U.S. Indian Agent Peter Ronan reported, "The outlook for the Indians on this reservation for the coming fall and winter is gloomy and dismal in the extreme. The drought of this summer has been unknown even to the oldest of the Indians. The face of the country is simply parched and the usually luxuriant bunch grass is burned to the roots on prairie and uplands.... To add to this, the forest is on fire all around us, in every direction. The prairies, where any grass grew this season, was fired also. The smoke covers the country, obscuring the sun, and causing business houses in the town of Missoula to be lit up at early in the afternoons." National Archives, Washington DC, Record Group 75 (Bureau of Indian Affairs), Letters received by Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1881-1907, Letter number 1889-22434 (monthly report for July 1889).

16 Fire historian Stephen Pyne has written that "the removal of Indian burning had further destabilized the old regimes, had, in particular, stirred more fuels into the cauldron. By 1910 routine burning by Indians in the greater Northwest was twenty to forty years in the past. For sites, like grasslands, that had experienced near-annual burning, woody scrub was invading the scene and locally overwhelming it. Spared the purging flame, sagebrush and juniper especially rooted and thrived. For forests like those of ponderosa pine that had known fire on a two- to eight-year rhythm, needles and windfall and clusters of young saplings crowded the land 'thick as the hair on a dog's back.' Forests more infrequently visited by fire absorbed the loss most easily; forty years meant less when fires had come every four hundred years than when they had arrived every five. The former might still be within the prevailing cycle of fire's return; the latter might have missed eight passes of the flame." Stephen Pyne, *Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great Fires of 1910* (New York: Viking, 2001), 65.

17 Pyne, op. cit., 129.

18 Pyne, op. cit., 45.

19 The consensus view that fire should be suppressed whenever and wherever possible was not challenged in a high-level, public setting for nearly three decades. Finally, at the 1935 convention of the Society of American Foresters, Professor H.H. Chapman of the Yale School of Forestry held a session that invited open challenging of the conventional wisdom on fire. Critiques and doubts erupted during the session. Among those most forcefully advocating for a radical revision of fire policy was Eelers Koch, a ranger on the Flathead National Forest who had served in the thick of the 1910 fires and had then worked for decades to make sure it didn't happen again. As historian Stephen Pyne

has written, Koch “now regarded ‘the whole history of the Forest Service’s attempt to control fire in the backcountry of the Selway and Clearwater’ as ‘one of the saddest chapters in the history of a high-minded and efficient public service.’ Despite ‘heroic effort,’ the country remained ‘swept again and again by the most uncontrollable conflagrations.’ In 1934, despite thousands of firefighters and unlimited dollars, crews had made no better progress than in 1910.” Koch had the courage to face the obvious truth – “the unquestionable fact that the country is in worse shape now than when we took charge of it.” Pyne, op. cit., 265-266. Pyne notes that Koch felt the building of roads was not only tied to an impractical, ultimately futile attempt to suppress fire, but was also destroying the backcountry. See his essay “The Passing of the Lolo Trail,” in his book, *Forty Years a Forester* (Missoula, Mountain Press, 1998).

20 See Thompson Smith, “After 1910: Suppressing Dissent, and Escalating the Suppression of Fire,” in *Fire on the Land*, op. cit.

21 Pyne, op. cit., 267-268.

22 On the Flathead Reservation, the effects of allotment were as dramatic and as damaging as anywhere in the nation. Between 1910 and 1929, 409,710 acres of the reservation’s best agricultural lands were made available to homesteaders. Between 1910 and 1935, another 131,239 acres of original Indian allotments were transferred into fee patent status, with nearly all eventually sold to non-Indians. Many of the sales were forced upon Indians by federal agents helping storeowners and others cash in small debts. Tens of thousands of additional acres were seized by the government to build townsites, create “villa sites” on Flathead Lake for generally wealthy vacation-home builders, establish a 16,000-acre National Bison Range, support public schools, build roads, construct dams and canals for irrigation, establish research stations for the University of Montana, and other purposes. Federal maps for a while referred to the area as the “former Flathead Indian Reservation.”

23 See Thompson Smith, “Fire, Forestry, and Sovereignty on the 20th Century Flathead Reservation,” in *Fire on the Land*, op. cit.

24 See Smith, “Fire, Forestry, and Sovereignty on the 20th Century Flathead Reservation,” op. cit., and Historical Research Associates (Missoula, Montana), *Timber, Tribes, and Trust: A History of BIA Forest Management on the Flathead Indian Reservation (1855-1975)* (Dixon, MT: Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, 1977). In 1917, two enormous sales were executed in the southern end of the Flathead Reservation. The Polley Lumber Company logged over 46 million board feet in the Schley and Arlee areas. And the Heron Lumber Company, headed by Edward Donlan, clearcut almost 62 million board feet of mature pure ponderosa stands in the Evaro area. Other major timber sales during the period included the Heron Lumber Co (Edward Donlan), 24 million board feet logged in the Camas Creek Unit in 1919; Henry Matt, 46 million board feet logged in the Lower Frog area near Schley in 1921; and the Dewey Lumber Co., 49 million board feet logged in the Big Arm area in 1923. In 1923, Heron Lumber would cut an even bigger swath in the Valley Creek area, harvesting a staggering 146 million board feet. Tribal elder Harriet Whitworth, who was born in 1918 and grew up in Valley Creek, remembers the heartbroken feeling among many Salish people as the great trees were knocked down and hauled out. The creek itself, a teeming trout fishery, completely dried up for a period of time after the trees were removed. See Thompson Smith, “Fire, Forestry, and Sovereignty on the 20th Century Flathead Reservation,” in *Fire on the Land*, op. cit.

25 On the Flathead Reservation, the CCC employed hundreds of tribal members, many in building forest roads, constructing and manning lookout towers, and fighting fires. A 200-man camp was established in the Jocko River canyon, and a 100-man camp along Mill Creek near Niarada. Among other projects, the Jocko camp built the Jocko lookout, the South Fork of the Jocko truck trail, the Jocko Lakes truck trail, the Pistol Creek truck trail, the St Mary’s Lake road, and the Jocko River road.

Among the projects completed by the Mill Creek camp were the Mill Creek truck trail, the Mill Creek road, the Mill Pocket Creek truck trail, and the Bassoo Creek truck trail. *Timber, Tribes, and Trust*, op. cit., 91.

26 Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, “Flathead Indian Reservation Forest Management Plan: An Ecosystem Approach to Tribal Forest Management,” (Pablo, MT: Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, May 2000).



Paden and Nikko Alexander, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, in the forests of astq^w (western red cedar) above K^wtnémép Čtqíí?s (Waters-of-the-Narrow-Opening's Lake — McDonald Lake), Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness, Flathead Indian Reservation, 2013. SQCC image.