

Fire Ecology Chats: A Podcast Series by the Association for Fire Ecology



Transcript of Episode 4 – Incorporating Traditional Knowledge into Fuels Treatments

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Guest: Monique Wynecoop (Ecologist, USDA Forest Service, Colville National Forest)

Link to Full Article in Fire Ecology: <https://fireecology.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s42408-019-0030-3>

Bob Keane: Good morning everybody. My name is Bob Keane. I'm the editor of Fire Ecology, the AFE journal, and also I'm the host here at Fire Ecology Chats. Today we have a very special guest Monique Wynecoop, who has just published a paper in Fire Ecology. Monique, do you want to introduce yourself?

Monique Wynecoop: Sure, my name is Monique Wynecoop. I am a Region 6 ecologist. I'm part of a 2-person, northeastern Washington ecology team and stationed on the Colville National Forest. I also do some part time work with the Northern Rockies Fire Science Network as a fire ecologist and tribal liaison.

Bob Keane: Very good. Monique's paper today she's going to talk about is "Getting back to fire sumés: exploring a multi-disciplinary approach to incorporating traditional knowledge into fuels treatments." So Monique, could you keep please do the correct pronunciation of that and tell us all about your paper?

Monique Wynecoop: Yeah, "su-mesh." I start off the paper talking about the meaning of sumés, which is a Salish word that the Spokane Tribe uses to describe spirit power. It's kind of more, I think that's kind of a really simple description of it, but sumés is kind of used to describe a spiritual connection to the land that people have. Actually my husband and children are Spokane, so I kind of gravitate toward the Salish language because we use it a lot at home. So anyways, I wanted to talk about bringing back that cultural and spiritual connection to fire. And with the Spokane Tribe historically the role of fire use and the knowledge of how to use fire in the landscape was held by spiritual and cultural leaders. It had different purposes. So women in the tribe knew when to burn certain plants that were gathered by women. They would go out and they would teach that and pass that knowledge down to other future leaders, and it would be the same with men. So, there is different roles in the tribe that fire served. With the paper, the main purpose that I wanted to convey to people was not so much how to collect data, though that was part of it, but it was also how to apply all these different facets of fire ecology—the cultural component, the human component, and also the fire ecology, the data collection, and the monitoring component—to bring them all together to show how we can be collaborative and to work cross cultural to achieve a common goal.

Bob Keane: That is why I find this topic incredibly fascinating, bringing what I guess the current word is traditional ecological knowledge into fire management. I think it's one of the great alternatives we have as managers. Yet in the paper, you go ahead and tie this kind of knowledge of fire, all this traditional knowledge of fire, to fuel treatments. Could you expand on that a little more?

Monique Wynecoop: Yeah, there's so many traditional uses for plants that we could have gotten into that the paper could have been a book, but it was more of trying to show a case study for how fuels managers can look

and address the need for fire to manage for tribal cultural values. And so, we kind of kept it simple and we used very commonly known cultural plants. So we weren't, you know, publishing a paper that was releasing any sensitive information. But just to show the practice of it, to show how you can interview tribal members with this participatory GIS program that we use in a way that talks about their general values that they want to manage for. And then how we can go out and monitor and see how our fuels treatments are impacting those values and bring that information back to the participants so that they can see what we have found and kind of have a little bit of a voice in future management. It is kind of an adaptive management approach, how we can change some of our management practices to better manage for those values. So we had just some very well-known plants like bearberry, wild strawberry, and huckleberry, stuff like that, that we could talk about.

Bob Keane: It's an incredible topic and after all, who better to tell us or look at for asking advice on fuel treatments, is the native peoples who prior to European settlement were burning a lot more area for fuels than we've done in the last century. So would you like to acknowledge anyone from your paper that you'd like to credit for funding or helping out?

Monique Wynecoop: Yeah, definitely. There was a ton of players in this paper. The Colville National Forest had received CFLRP, or Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program funding, and a big portion of that funding was going towards monitoring and so they funded a majority of this project. But we also received funding from University of Idaho because this project was completed as part of my master's program. Penny Morgan, Eva Strand, both working for University of Idaho at the time; Penny Morgan's retired now, but they put a ton of work into this paper and then Fernando, he was the GIS specialist that helped us do a lot of the interviews with the tribal members. And Chasity Watts with the Confederated Colville Tribes; she was a key player in getting tribal members to come and participate in their interviews. And yes, my husband, he did a lot of the data collection with me so I definitely don't want to leave him out; he didn't get paid out of all these people.

Bob Keane: Well, it's fascinating. What what's your next steps?

Monique Wynecoop: Since this paper went out, we actually got a call for proposals for project proposals from the Spokane Tribe. So we were able to do a similar project, the Colville National Forest did, with the Spokane Tribe talking about the same thing just about managing cultural values with fields treatments. And so that was really awesome. Both projects, the end product ended up helping speed up collaboration. It really benefitted collaboration. The one we did with the Confederated Colville Tribes, it helped speed up some projects that had been done in the Sanpoil project area, some roadside thinning, so it helped them start a discussion with the fuels programs. And then with the Spokane Tribe, they actually use one of the proposed treatments. They did mastication in a community WUI area on the reservation because of some of the recommendations by the participants. So I'm really hoping we can do more projects, hopefully with the Kalispel Tribe or other tribes and just show how this is a tool for sparking discussion for better managing cultural values. And also, the tribes own the data so the data is not subject to FOIA. And so it becomes a product that helps the tribe and can spark that discussion, help keep that communication going between our fire and fuels programs and other programs as well.

Bob Keane: Monique, I want to thank you for your time. This has been a fascinating talk. I hope you write a book about it and thank you again.

Monique Wynecoop: Yeah, thanks so much for having me.