



Deniss J. Martinez  
PhD Candidate, UC Davis  
 @DenissJMartinez

## Cultural Burning

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## 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

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# 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



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# 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)



[djmartinez@ucdavis.edu](mailto:djmartinez@ucdavis.edu)

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