

The Social-Ecological Consequences of Future Wildfire in the West: A Workshop – June 13-14, 2024

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, in collaboration with the Royal Society of Canada

Panelists: Dr. Marianne Ignace and kukwpi7 Dr. Ronald Ignace

Skeetchestn Indian Band (Secwepemc) and Simon Fraser University

The Presenters:

- We are both community members in the Skeetchestn Community in the Secwepemc Nation – Ron by birth, traditional training, life-long residence, and Marianne by marriage, kinship and traditional adoption for nearly 40 years.
- As authors and academics collaborating with communities throughout the Secwepemc Nation, we have also written about our peoples' history, culture and language, including traditional ecological knowledge, cultural fire (e.g. *Secwepemc People, Land and Laws*, McGill-Queens 2017).
- Since July 2021, Ron has been the National Commissioner of Indigenous Languages in Canada. However what we present here expresses Ron's community voice and experiences prior to his Commissioner responsibilities.

The 2017 Elephant Hill Wildfire

- The 2017 Elephant Hill wildfire erupted on July 6, 2017 near our neighbouring community of Ashcroft in south-central Interior BC.
- It burned 1,900 square km of forest, grasslands, homesteads and houses on Indigenous reserves, affecting numerous Secwepemc communities through loss of houses and properties, forested areas, the impact of three or more weeks of evacuation on dozens of entire communities.

Skeetchestn community challenges and resilience building

- In 2017, Indigenous communities like Skeetchestn were stuck between provincial and federal jurisdictions, having to fend for themselves, although leadership reached out to provincial and federal authorities to come in and assist in the defense of our communities against the fire.
- We had to resort to defending ourselves under our own jurisdiction and laws: establishing our own emergency response teams, command centre, deployment of mobile firefighters, heavy duty equipment, fire scouts to report back on nature, extent, spread of fire, weather and environmental conditions
- In the end, led by Kukwpi7 Ignace, we hosted the provincial firefighting crew of 300 to establish their headquarters on our reserve.
- We guided this effort with our ceremony, traditional knowledge and community organization and leadership.
- This crew and our community co-led efforts to monitor and fight the fire, do backburns. No one was hurt, and we lost no property, although our traditional lands were severely burnt.
- The valuation of cultural and natural resources on our land amounted to \$1 billion.



Other Voices from community

“The government needs to understand the impact of this fire on our territories...that is our sustenance, that is our backyards, that is our livelihoods that we’ll never see again... our plants, and our foods, and our medicines, and our culture, and everything that is being completely destroyed by the fire...it is about our rights as Indigenous people living off the land...And I don’t think that that is taken seriously enough.”

- JENNY ALLEN, ST’UXWTÉWS (BONAPARTE FIRST NATION) – from Dickson-Hoyle and John 2021.



Yecwemín'men – our caretakership of our land



192,000 ha



AREA BURNED

582 km



FIREGUARDS REHABILITATED

360 km



FENCES REBUILT

1.03M m³



TIMBER HARVESTED

35.3M



TREES PLANTED*

*under Forest Carbon Initiative/Forests for Tomorrow

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES RECORDED





KNUCWENTWÉCW-KT ES PELQENTÉM RE TMCW TE M-QWEMPÚLECW TE TSERTSERPÚLECW, ELL ES YECWMENÚLECW-KT

Knucwentwécw-kt ne7élye ne Secwepemcúlecw re Secwépemc ell re tkwenm7iple7s re B.C. es pelqentém re tmcw te m-qwempúlecw te tsertserpúlecw te sts7eméts “Elephant Hill Wildfire” te tsílmes te m-sq7es re stetex7ém-kt re syecwmíns, ell es yecwménúlecw-kt cú7tsem xwexwéyt re stem ne tmcw-kt.

Ye7éne me7 tsetsúwet-kt:

- Me7 tséxúlecwentem thé7e k qwempúlecwes.
- Me7 knucwentwécw-kt es yecwménúlecwmentem es kúlem-kt te tsílmes te m-sq7es wel me7 yews.
- Me7 xpqenwénthem tkenhéh7e me xíltmes es p7ecws re sle7s re syecwménúlecwems ne xwexwéyt re Secwepemcúlecw.

“Me7 élkstmentwécwmentem es yecwmíntem re tmcw-kt wel me7 yews. Tsílem yerí7 te swuméc-kt re tmcw-kt, tikwemtús me7 re syecwménúlecw-kt tsílem te m-sq7es le stetex7ém-kt.”

COLLABORATION ON WILDFIRE RECOVERY AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Secwépemc communities and the Province of B.C. are working collaboratively on wildfire recovery and land base management in the Elephant Hill Wildfire area and surrounding area.

Activities associated with the Elephant Hill Wildfire area include:

- Secwépemc Territorial Patrols,
- Collaborative recovery and management initiatives,
- Guidance for forestry activities and other economic development.

“Working towards a thriving and sustainable relationship in stewardship”

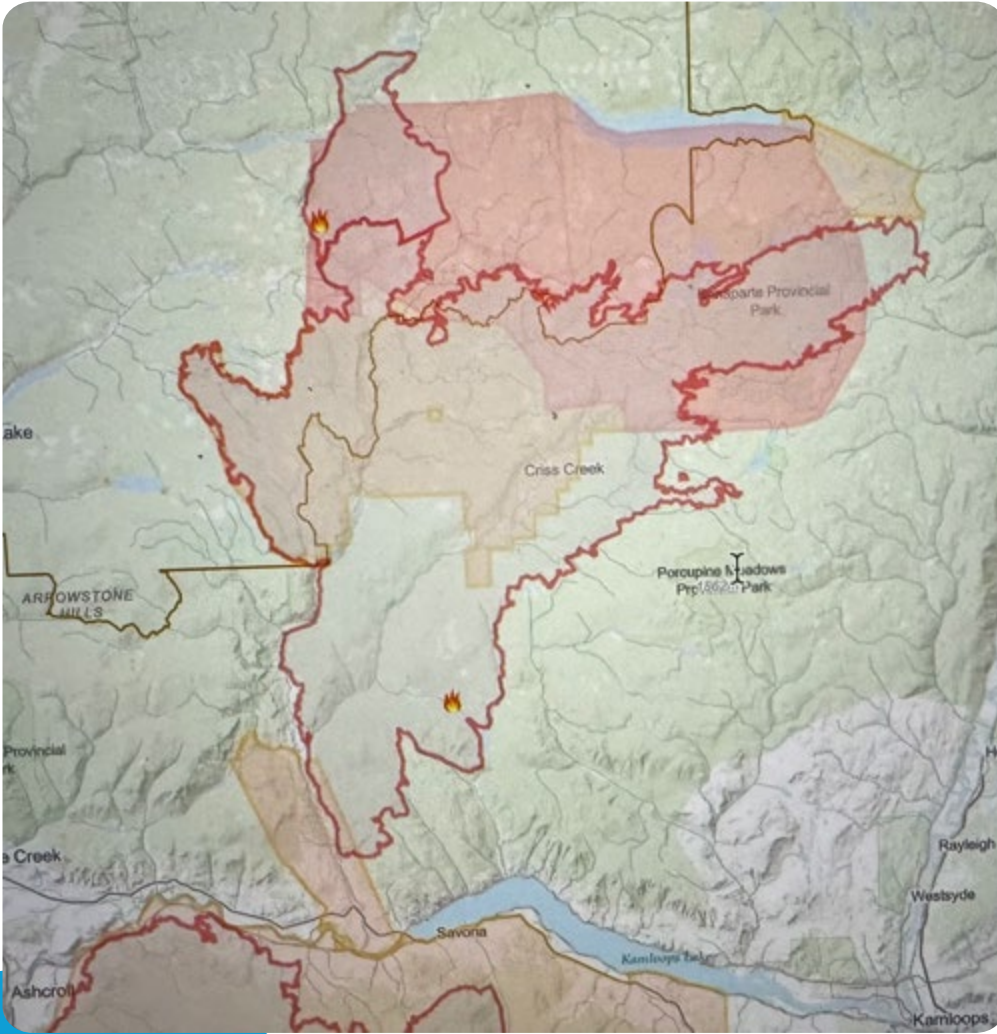


Ministry of
Forests, Lands, Natural
Resource Operations
and Rural Development



SECWÉPEMCÚLECW
RECOVERY AND LAND MANAGEMENT





Challenges and Impacts from the 2021 Sparks Hill fire:

- When the fire broke out in late June 2021, it took BCWS five days to notice our presence on the reserve across the mountain.
- It again took kukwpi7 Ignace's intervention with BCWS leadership to get their help.
- Between 2017 and 2021 community members took in-depth training in firefighting, planning, emergency response and community protection, prescribed fire use (*Secwepemcul'ecw Natural Infrastructure Resiliency Project, 2020*).
- Skeetchestn was evacuated for ca. 6 week, but our community deployed the same emergency response and patrol team to avert damage.
- The Tremont Hill fire south of us caused similar damage, for a total of \$1,540 square km affected.

The 2021 Sparks Hill Fire: Skeetchestn, July 2021 – view from our house



Near loss of our
community
school and
community –
saved by a
community led
back-burn





Q'wempú'lecw – the land has become depleted

Resiliency building: Restoring Cultural Fire





Approach: Walking on two legs

