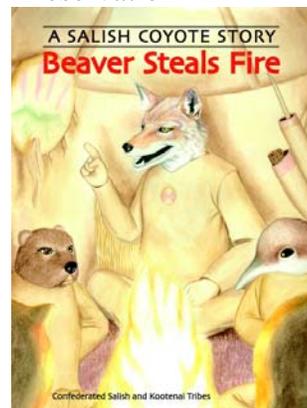


## Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes' "Fire on the Land" Education Project

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation in northwestern Montana have produced a multi-media fire education project of mammoth proportions called "Fire on the Land." This is the first wildland fire education project developed in Indian Country, perhaps anywhere, with a unique cultural perspective. The project provides documented history on the indigenous use of fire, describes the effects of fire exclusion on the landscape, and then reinforces current fire use applications and management planning efforts for ecosystem restoration. The Bureau of Indian Affairs' funded project consists of four elements: the traditional Salish Coyote story, *Beaver Steals Fire*, in storybook format and also depicted in a short movie, an interactive DVD, and a website. The project release is scheduled for winter 2005, as this is the traditional season to tell Coyote stories.



Storybook Cover

The storybook and short movie of *Beaver Steals Fire* is mainly intended for elementary school children. The Salish tale explains how fire was obtained from the sky by the animals. The story reinforces the theme of respect for fire and awareness of its significance, and also utilizes a rich and culturally vital storytelling tradition.

The interactive DVD is geared towards older students. The information contained on the DVD is extensive and covers the traditional use of fire and fire management by the Salish and Kootenai peoples. Using a photo gallery depicting historical and current forest conditions, a database on fire adapted species, historical journals and contemporary essays, elder interviews, and modern day fire management insight, the DVD does an amazing job of explaining indigenous use of fire and the creation of a cultural landscape, which has ultimately been altered by a century of fire suppression.

The website consists of the information from the interactive DVD and is designed for anyone interested in the traditional use of fire by the Salish and Kootenai peoples.

"Fire on the Land" is an excellent example of prevention through education—it shows with vivid detail the change in conditions after one hundred years of fire exclusion and makes clear the potential wildland fire risk associated with the current environment. By educating children of all ages to respect the power of fire, both prevention of unwanted starts and greater acceptance of current management practices will become easier. The project is an impressive example of historical research and the interactions between fire ecology, indigenous use of fire, and modern land management and planning actions.

“Fire on the Land” most importantly gives a Native American voice to the fire conversation. This project demonstrates that the Salish and Kootenai people were wise fire managers for millennia. It not only is an impressive learning tool, but shows great pride in the indigenous history on the landscape.

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