

NEZ PERCE PERSPECTIVES ON FIRE MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAM  
ACCESSIBILITY

By

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D.R.L.D.

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Abstract

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Land managers continually strive to serve diverse stakeholders and consider their perspectives. However, barriers and constraints to inclusion of diverse stakeholders' viewpoints exist. Natural resource researchers have attempted to uncover barriers to inclusive participation, but much of that research has come from the perspectives of the dominant culture. This study identifies barriers that inhibit access to and participation in current fire management programs as told from the perspectives and experiences of members of the Nez Perce Tribe on their reservation. Co-cultural theory, muted group theory, and standpoint theory were used as theoretical frameworks to analyze in-depth grounded theory style interviews with the Nez Perce Tribal members. The results demonstrate that both land agencies and Nez Perce create barriers to the inclusion of Nez Perce traditional fire knowledge in contemporary federal fire management practices. Primary barriers are identified. This paper demonstrates how these barriers impact fire program participation and highlights some of the traditional Nez Perce fire knowledge. Implications for research and professional practice are explored.

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## PREFACE

*My grandmother said I opened my eyes in the United States. When I was just two and a half years old, my family sought political asylum in the States. My parents claimed they came for freedom but my young eyes just saw a different kind of bondage. Although we were in a new land with a promised fresh start, my mom and dad struggled immensely to learn new ways and keep my brother, sister, and me alive. Unfortunately, or so I thought, their resistance from a previous hostile government kept them from truly trusting anyone. It was their old suspicion that made me dread simply asking to hang out or sleep over at a friend's house, fearing that my parents would question the friend's innocent motives for inviting me. "Dana," they called me by my nickname with a thick accent, "You need to be careful because not everyone is as genuine as you see them. By all means, be kind and polite, but be mindful of why they want to be with you and what they ask you about."*

*It was not until many years later that those chastising words made sense. I was leading a fire prevention campaign in the Lapwai schools on the Nez Perce Reservation, and I asked the students to share what they knew about fire. One five-year-old boy hung his head low as if I had just completely blown it. I crouched down by his table and asked him hesitantly, "Do you know about fire?" He nodded his head, and then informed me that he did know a lot about fire, but his parents would not want him to share. I was startled, but a wave of deep recognition swept across me and I felt more in touch with my own identity than I had before.*

*This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother who passed away this year. She would be so proud of me. She would also tell me it is time to start my own family.*

## INTRODUCTION

Fire management is a critical issue in the Northwestern United States. Property, among other valuable resources, is destroyed when fires burn out of control. However, fire is also a natural part of the ecosystem (Agee, 1993). In addition, fire has always been a part of Native American culture and practice (Williams, 2003). The Nez Perce people are no exception; fire use is embedded in traditional Nez Perce practices (Lewis, 1985; Stewart, 2002). Fire management has been intertwined in Nez Perce stories, important rites of passage, and ceremonial gatherings of significance for thousands of years (McWhorter, 1983; Spinden, 2006). “How the Beaver stole fire from the Pines” is one Nez Perce story that combines the cultural and ecological results of fire use. The Beaver in this story spread fire to other trees in order for all to stay warm in the winter. The Grand Ronde river landscape is considered a direct result of the Beaver’s journey (see Appendix 1).

As will be noted in subsequent pages, research substantiates the validity of Indigenous fire practices of the past. However, little is known or understood about historical Nez Perce fire practices and traditional fire knowledge on the reservation and even less information is documented about current fire management based on Nez Perce perspectives. Co-cultural theory, which combines standpoint and muted voice theories, suggests that insights gained from expressed and hidden ideas of a marginalized culture can provide a more complete view of emergent problems. The information learned from marginalized groups then provides for greater collaboration and more effective fire management practices. Inclusion of the views of the Nez Perce on fire may help develop better cultural awareness of the tribe as well as lead to potential improvements in fire management in the Pacific Northwest. The impacts and implications of fire management



could become more apparent if traditional fire knowledge is identified. For example, teams made up of members representing multiple agencies, age groups, and levels of expertise can hold regular management meetings. This study uses co-cultural theory as the framework to assess if traditional fire knowledge still exists and whether it can be relevant in current Nez Perce reservation management practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Indigenous land management and knowledge has been misunderstood for many years. The first European settlers to arrive in the Northwest thought that they were entering a pristine environment untouched by human hands (Shetler, 1982). Native Americans were thought to live in harmony with nature, like animals, and have no need or apparent knowledge of how to alter nature for personal use. For many years, land management professionals, among other scholars, ignored the fact that Native Americans had significant impacts on the ground they inhabited (Stewart, 2002). When encountering evidence of fire, professionals tended to cite natural causes like lightning as the potential source, rather than acknowledging human manipulation (Whitney, 1994). Although there is no consensus, in recent years, new evidence supports the view that when Europeans arrived they were not seeing 'virgin' forests. Native Americans had been purposefully using fire to establish or keep "mosaics, resource diversity, environmental stability, predictability, and maintenance of ecotones" (Lewis, 1985).

With respect to fire, almost all the vegetation in North America had been purposefully burned over at one time or another prior to the advent of white settlers (Stewart, 2002). Remarkably, about 70 different reasons for Indigenous burning have been documented (Lewis, 1973). Much of the data gathered to support these claims have

been about Northwest tribes. For example, the Lewis and Clark journals provide a narrative of how a tree was set on fire by Nez Perce to “bring fair weather” for their journey (Lewis and Clark journals). At least one tribe in the Northwest also started fires by the mouth of rivers to “call” the salmon to return from the ocean. Fire has also been reportedly used to bring rain to overcome drought (Kay, 1994). Ross’s (2005) study is an extensive review of Northwest fire strategies. He shares that the tribes’ environmental stewardship was based on an understanding of the “symbiotic dependencies as well as how the biotic potential of a particular biome was dependent upon and influenced by human intervention-controlled burning”. Selective anthropogenic burning attributed to early accounts of Native knowledge of ignition affects foraging and predation techniques.

Not only was Native knowledge and practice of fire use prevalent, fire use was also always tied to cultural values. Too-Hool-Hool-Zute, a Nez Perce Chief following the Dreamer Faith, once said, “The earth is part of my body. I belong to the land out of which I came. She is my mother” (Landeem and Crow, 1997). This view is more recently echoed in Greene’s (2004) *Culture and Tradition* essay:

‘We have always believed we’ve had an interconnected relationship with the land, people and all living things. We believed we were put on this earth to be the caretakers of the land and all living things that are upon it. We believed and believe that every living thing had and has a purpose’ (Page 3).

This spiritual connection to the land was a significant cultural difference between Euro-American explorers and the Native Americans they encountered. Typically speaking, Indigenous cultures do not separate their spiritual views from their environmental values. While one could say the same of settler cultures, the difference lies in a Native perspective of being integrated with nature instead of dominating nature. Native Americans believe that the decisions they make in cultivating the land directly reflects their spiritual

relationships. In essence, land suffers if Nez Perce do not hold it sacred and Nez Perce suffer if the land does not provide what they need to survive. The interwoven spiritual relationships with the environment attribute to Native American decision-making processes (McGaa, 2002). Much confusion about current Native resource management practices stems from this clash of interwoven spiritual thought versus a fragmented biological perspective. Native Americans, in regarding the land as sacred, were also strongly influenced by its “biophysical environment.” Durkheim (1954) has defined the sacred as:

“a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”

Walker (1987) explains that American Indian ideas about the sacred may deviate from this definition to some extent, but those two domains, “one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is a distinctive trait of most religious traditions.” One example of the relationship built on gathering of sacred plants from the land comes from the Nez Perce tribe of Northern Idaho. While several different plants hold significance for the Nez Perce, three main staples are traditionally used for ceremonial, among other, purposes: they are Camas (*Camassia quamash*), biscuit root (*Lomatium kous*), and snowdrops (*Lomatium canbyi*) (Spinden, 2006). The Nez Perce have historically been characterized as hunters, gatherers, and fishers. Many researchers would conclude that this dependence on the natural world to provide food could not be a subsistent way of life. Alvin Josephy, a famous Nez Perce historian, commented:

“The Nez Perce, like all the Northwest peoples, practiced no agriculture and suffered for it. The gathering of food supplies was an almost constant preoccupation, and although the villagers stored some of their surplus food, they knew lean

periods. They were shrewd hunters and artful fishermen, but the wild game came and went, and fish were plentiful only during the seasonal runs” (1965).

In the case of the Nez Perce, there was more to the story than meets the eye.

Marshall’s research (1999) proposed and provided evidence for Nez Perce horticulture. “Simple” technology created patchy growing grounds that were unrecognizable through a Euro-American lens. The Nez Perce used specialized tools such as digging sticks and fire to disturb the land, and thus promoted a desirable place in which their special plants could grow. These unusual gardens went unnoticed for many years because not only were wild, native plants being cultivated, but they required marginal maintenance as compared to traditional European gardens (Marshall, 1999). Such practices yielded high results and the abundance of camas plants were even noted in journals from Lewis and Clark’s travels (September 1805). The acknowledgement of these practices contributed to the shattering of the European “myth of ecology” as recounted in anthropological texts (Marshall, 1985).

The Nez Perce were more “domesticated” than the Euro-Americans first imagined because of their agricultural adaptations. Marshall argues that settlers didn’t understand Native actions because of their “human attempt to reintroduce ecosystem complexity by expanding the boundaries of the system” and he claims that those who “control such exchanges control human relationships and the environmental dimensions of group life” (Marshall, 1999). In an earlier study, Marshall noted that Nez Perce view ecological relations in what many might call a “religious category” (1985). This supports the notion that Native Americans treated the land with respect even through their procurement of natural resources for subsistence. In addition, it enlightens those who believe that Native Americans lived in a pristine state with nature.

The pervasive idea that Native Americans were incapable of controlling the natural environment or manipulating it for advantageous purposes may help to explain why traditional Native American fire management knowledge has been little incorporated into current fire policy – a situation that may have resulted in disastrous ecological consequences. However, the catastrophic fire conditions evident in North America today were not the desired result of past native or non-native land managers. For example, the Smokey Bear wildfire prevention campaign, which doggedly promoted fire suppression, was thought wise and many people followed the message. Smokey Bear is just the well known propaganda tool utilized to spread a message that the U.S. Forest Service was embracing shortly after its establishment (see [smokeybear.com](http://smokeybear.com)). Their widespread message and action became one of fire eradication until relatively recently.

Over one hundred years of forest fire suppression has now been documented as a misjudgment (Loveridge, E.; Busenberg, G. 2004). Additionally, an ever-growing body of literature exalts traditional Native management practices of the past (Raish and González-Caba and Condie, 2005). It is now known that Native Americans allowed natural fires (ignited by lightning for example) to burn and sometimes ignited fires as key landscape management tools (Vale, 2002). Thus, management options other than fire suppression may have been pursued if Indigenous fire knowledge and practices had been considered. For example, stories of burn benefits were dismissed shortly after U.S. government reservation resource managers developed their policies. In 1914, jail time was a consequence for those who practiced controlled burns (Ross, 1999). Current Nez Perce spiritual leader Horace Axtell, in discussing the intimate knowledge of land management of the old people stressed: “In the days before all these changes, the people prepared ahead of time for things, not like today - rush or last minute” (Axtell, 1997). As settlers,

backed by the U.S. government, moved westward in increasing numbers, Indigenous families began to lose decision-making power over land management practices. There is growing concern that the cumulative result of this history may be that traditional Nez Perce fire knowledge and practices are at risk due to cultural assimilation and the influence of the majority culture, particularly since the time of white settlement.

During the Nez Perce Colonial Era the aboriginal sites of the Nez Perce were still intact, meaning that Nez Perce families were freely conducting their traditional practices on traditional family lands. The significant meetings with explorers, Lewis and Clark, began the process of Native partnerships with U. S. government representatives. Starting out, Indian affairs agents prioritized establishing a trading system among Indigenous groups. Interestingly, what we now call the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was the Office of Indian Affairs housed under the War Department. The BIA was transferred to the newly developed Department of the Interior in 1849 and the breadth of its governing presence increased on reservations. During the 1880s, Indian agents with the Nez Perce became responsible for “operating schools, dispensing justice, distributing supplies, administering allotments, and leasing contracts” (Henson, 1996).

Land management in Nez Perce territory by Nez Perce people has been drastically reduced since the signing of their first treaty with the U.S. government. Six eras in the diminishment of lands and the evolution of multiple land managers have been identified (Nez Perce Tribe, 2003). The table below provides an Indian policy timeline and overview on the effect it had respective to traditional Nez Perce land management.

Figure 1: Nez Perce Land Management Timeline

Indian Policy Timeline of the U.S. as Relative to Nez Perce	Significant Happenings	Effect Overview on Nez Perce Land Management
Nez Perce Colonial Era (1805-1855)	Lewis and Clark first contact	Aboriginal Territory sites still intact; Multiple Nez Perce Families have exclusive use and occupancy of important hunting/fishing/gathering sites traveling seasonally to their specific areas; Non-Native explorers are few and allowed to share resources and trade
Nez Perce Relocation or Removal Era (1855-1893)	Treaty of 1855 Treaty of 1863 Treaty of 1868 Nez Perce War of 1877	Some, but not all Nez Perce families forced to sign treaties allowing white settlers access to traditional lands which eventually forced Nez Perce families to live stagnant on significantly smaller land parcels; Nez Perce continue to practice traditional management customs but on a reduced scale; Settlers move in and privatize land parcels with active farming/ranching/mining practices
Nez Perce Allotment Era (1889-1930)	Nez Perce Agreement 1893 Land Distribution and Classification System	Land was further reduced to 160 acre family allotments and "extra" land was opened for white colonization; Nez Perce attempt European style farming
Nez Perce Reorganization Era (1934-1935)	Tribal Sovereignty	Rejection of Reorganization Act led to giving up some traditional management ways and creating a tribal government; Nez Perce begin merging new and traditional management strategies
Nez Perce Termination Era (1953-1970)	Howard Wheeler Act Relocation Act	Among the onslaught of U.S. dominance, land disconnection and alluring off reservation monetary incentives led to sale of allotments and further encroachment of Non-native peoples; Nez Perce significantly reduce traditional management practices and "outsiders" become majority managers
The Self-Determination Era and The Education Act of 1975 (present)	Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)	Nez Perce reject BIA paternalistic offers and create their own departments (e.g. Forestry, Fisheries, and Land Operations); Nez Perce struggle to work with multiple stakeholders and reintroduce traditional land management on "checkerboarded" reservation

Source: Nez Perce Tribe

The 1887 General Allotment Act, known as the Dawes Act divided reservations into privately owned tracts of land. Each head of household, individuals over 18 years of age and children under 18 years of age received an allotted amount of land within the 1863 Nez Perce reservation boundary. The rest of the land was considered “surplus” and sold

to non-tribal members. The Trust for Public Land explains how this led to what we now know as a “checkerboard” reservation:

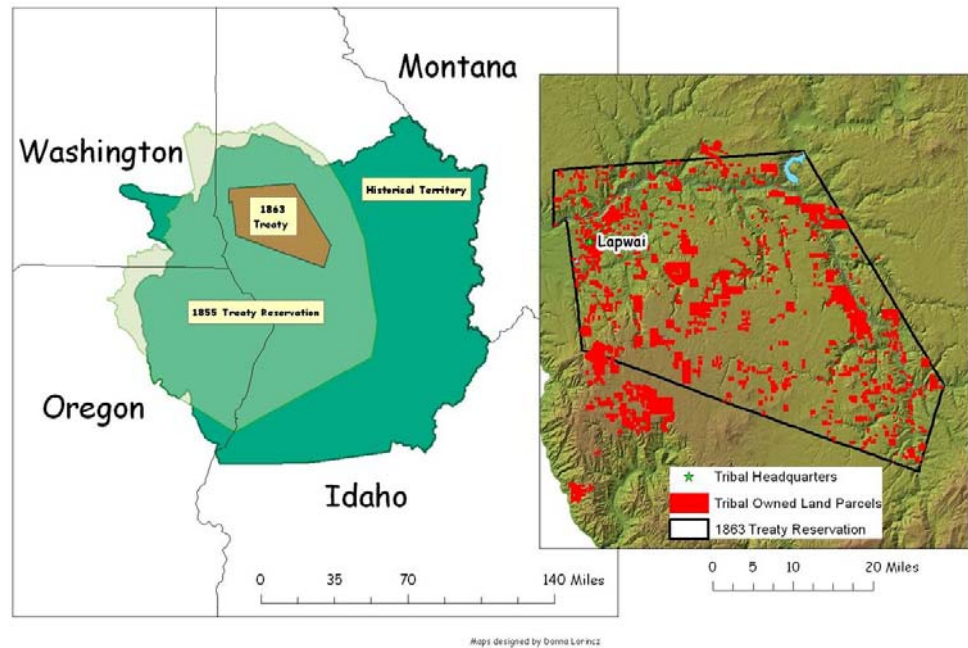
“In an effort to protect Indians from being defrauded of their land, the federal government decreed that each allotment be held in trust for twenty-five years, during which it could not be sold, leased, or exchanged. The Dawes Act further stipulated that when a property owner died, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) must give each heir an undivided share that had not been partitioned or physically divided. As a result, the number of owners was allowed to grow with each generation and the ownership of reservation lands became increasingly divided.

Further afflicting the economic well-being of Indians on the reservations were the “checkerboard” land ownership patterns that developed where parcels were variously owned by tribes, individual Indians, the government, and non-Indian interests. Because individual tribal members were not allowed to sell, lease, or exchange their property, they were prevented from consolidating acreage to create economically viable plots of land “(2009).

The result has become a fragmented reservation with significantly smaller land holdings than the historical Nez Perce territory. The land diminishment map below provides a visual representation of the decline. The 1863 reservation boundary is valid today, however the Nez Perce tribe only owns about 13 % of the 770,453 acres (Columbi, 2005).



Figure 2: Nez Perce Land Diminishment



Source: Nez Perce Tribe

As evident above, land tenure has changed and following it, traditional Nez Perce land management has had to adapt. Multiple stakeholders ranging from federal, to state, to county, and all the way to private land owners have an interest in managing Nez Perce lands (see Appendix 2). As a sovereign entity, the Nez Perce tribe must find its own funding for land management projects. Even though they are separated from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) on paper, they rely heavily on siphoning government resources through that agency in order to complete projects.

With respect to fire management, the Nez Perce Tribal Forestry/Fire Division receives money from the BIA Northwest Regional Office (NWRO) to complete treatments and planning activities in conjunction with the National Fire Plan. This money is available

from two programs: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and Hazardous Fuels Reduction (HFR). Wildland Urban Interface projects and activities may be conducted on tribal trust and restricted land, tribal fee, private, state, and federal property located in and adjacent to tribal communities. Agencies and tribes are cautioned to assess liability issues associated with the application of any treatment on non-tribal land. Hazardous fuels reduction (non-WUI) projects will be conducted on tribal trust and restricted land only. The only exception to this policy is where planning and implementation of projects on non-tribal property is a collaborative effort with the neighboring agency. This type of project is justified for cost effectiveness, firefighter/public safety, and/or community protection of property (BIA Fuels Program Business Management Handbook, April 2004)

## BACKGROUND ON LAND MANAGEMENT

The historical context review has provided insight on the evolution of the non-Native majority residing within the Nez Perce reservation. Placed after the historical context, the following background on land management section extends the view of these multiple stakeholders. Management strategies are gleaned by examining some of the dominant land agency rules, regulations, and governing documents.

Community inclusion has been recognized as a critical component of successful fire prevention strategies in contemporary fire practice. The U.S. Federal Government established an extensive National Fire Plan in 2002 that emphasized prevention and suppression, hazardous fuels reduction, and restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems (National Fire Plan Overview, 2009). The National Fire Plan calls for several strategic and sub-structure coordinating groups (see Appendix 3). Group members range from Federal Agency Heads to local interagency teams structured under the National Wildfire

Coordinating Group. Part of the reason for this division of labor among groups is the fact that fire is region specific and requires effective localized approaches that divide fire prevention work equitably among integrated teams.

These groups are tasked with enhancing community-based wildland fire approaches within their geographic area. However, this objective is not always translated in practice. Since public tax dollars drive the wildland fire research, management, education, and employment opportunity, the National Fire Plan suggests that public attitudes and perceptions should steer the direction of policy. The Wildland Fire Communicator's Guide considers the public "providers, consumers, and ultimate stakeholders" (National Interagency Fire Center, 2009). This guide stresses "responsibility" as a primary attribute for wildland fire managers when defining the public, how the public is contacted, and what information is shared and retrieved. The National Fire Plan emphasizes prevention and suppression, hazardous fuels reduction, and restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems (National Fire Plan Overview, 2009). However, considering public opinion does not necessarily include respectful exchange of scientific fire information and local people's knowledge and traditions. In other words, an inclusive approach cannot be assumed even though fire management documents such as the National Fire Plan and the Wildland Communicators Guide are in place.

This Thesis is based on an assumption that more precise definitions of what constitutes the "public" are necessary. In addition, effective communication with the public should also consider how the public is contacted and what information is shared and retrieved. The National Fire Plan states that input is taken from those "actively involved in decision-making on their respective lands" (National Fire Plan Overview, 2009). Yet, "active" public participants may not always include the most knowledgeable groups or

those with a direct stake in the decisions being made. It is not unusual to find the same small group of people participating in civic engagement activities over and over. The frequent absence of certain groups from the public sphere is in part explained by standpoint and muted group theory, discussed later. Civic engagement can be defined as making a difference and promoting the community's quality of life (Ehrlich, 2000). According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching "all citizens can contribute ideas, energy and action for proposals for improving community" (see <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>). The foundation also finds that citizens who play an active role in planning processes are more likely to accept management decisions or to be involved in implementation processes. However, if effective civic engagement happens by representing various segments of the community, what does that mean for ethnic minority groups, such as the Nez Perce, who have been historically marginalized?

The Nez Perce National Historic Park manages several sites within the current boundary of the Nez Perce reservation and it operates under the guidance of the National Park Service. The National Park Service, a federal agency with extensive wildfire-prone landscapes, operates under several guiding documents. One such blanket document is the National Park Glossary. This glossary is part of the repertoire used by fire managers, as well as other National Park employees. The document states that "[civic engagement] strengthens public understandings of the full meaning and contemporary relevance [of natural resources]" which provides a framework for how the National Park Service conducts civic engagement dialogue (Turley, 2006). The implication is that the Park Service already understands the "full meaning" associated with the lands they oversee while the "the public" needs to be educated. However, the lessons of civic engagement are pertinent for both the public and managers. For instance, contemporary management

approaches often do not account for historic, cultural land usages, such as burial grounds, ceremonial sites or gathering areas where fire was used to promote certain vegetation (Jonston, 2005). In addition, the primary issue of temporal scale in Park management versus traditional Native land management means that contemporary Park managers plan in increments of decades (e.g., have goals to build roads or attract tourists) whereas Nez Perce and other tribes have used fire management to plan on the scale of generations. Thus, where Indigenous land values, past and present, are not taken into account, contemporary meanings fall short. The Service's exclusive and short term viewpoint simply cannot provide the public, as well as professionals with a "full" understanding of natural resources; assuming so likely furthers a divide between cultures

#### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This research uses the same major theories employed in Allison and Hibbler's study on how barriers impact leisure participation for disenfranchised groups. Allison and Hibbler were interested in gaining minority recreation professional's perspective of what other ethnic minority populations see as issues and barriers inhibiting their access to a typically dominant run recreation program. Co-cultural theory provided a framework for analyzing their interview responses with the goal of providing equal status for the minority viewpoint. This framework can provide a model for analyzing Nez Perce perspectives on barriers of current dominant run fire management programs within the Nez Perce reservation.

Co-cultural theory was used to address the directed questions of this research. In order to understand the pertinence of using a co-cultural framework, an explanation of its theoretical underpinnings, muted group and standpoint theories, is necessary. In a sense, muted group theory and standpoint theory add depth to co-cultural theory.

Muted group theory stresses the importance of providing information “from the perspective of those without power,” and suggests that marginalized groups cannot fully express themselves in public. (Orbe, 1998) Muted group theory suggests that even though marginalized groups “mute” their voice in public, they express themselves in private. An elder may contact a resource manager, for example, with concerns over a management project at home in lieu of the public forum.

Standpoint theory values the marginalized perspective as providing “key standpoints” often missed by those in dominant positions. It asserts that there are many world views and that the less dominant groups can provide a more well-rounded perspective than the perspective of the dominant group alone. A primary example is the infamous 1831 journey of Nez Perce warriors to St. Louis. According to missionary accounts, these men were in search of the “book of Heaven” (e.g. the Bible) to save their people: “My people will die in darkness and they will go on a long path to other hunting grounds. No white man’s Book to make the way plain. I have no more words.” (Lapwai Methodist Church Records quoted in Woodward, 2005). In other words, the missionaries believed that the Nez Perce were in search of Christianity. The Nez Perce, on the other hand, give another account. Alan Pinkham, a Nez Perce historian and former tribal chairman, says: “They didn’t go there for the Bible. They went to learn how to communicate with written words. They wanted the technology of writing that they’d first seen with Lewis and Clark, not the Christian faith.” In fact, Nez Perce already had a well-established faith (Josephy, 1997). It is clear that the two perspectives provide polarizing views of the same historical event. Generally, the dominant perspective is more prevalent and yet, a more accurate understanding of the situation is reached with including and valuing the marginalized viewpoint.

Co-cultural theory is based on the merging of muted group and standpoint theory and seeks to identify and explain the unique views of non-dominant cultural groups, particularly those that struggle to be heard in a dominant society structure (Orbe, 1998). In essence, co-cultural theory allows minority perspective equal status with dominant views and further stipulates that minority views are essential to effective management because they elucidate factors that “inhibit program attractiveness and access to other historically marginalized groups in our society” (Allison and Hibbler, 2004). In particular, current fire management could benefit from this holistic perspective by promoting civic engagement and recognition of those who may have important knowledge to share. The hope is to provide more successful fire programs by providing a space for non-dominant groups to share their knowledge.

Co-cultural theory removes a hierarchical, unequal stance between groups that may be implied from its two constitutive theories. Thus, the terms “intra-cultural, sub-cultural and non-dominant” should not be exclusively used to classify relationships between majority and non-majority groups as they imply inequality (Orbe, 1998: 50). Partly by removing this bias in language, co-cultural theory helps to explain the “various communication orientations of co-cultural members” utilize such as averting controversy or emphasizing commonalities (Orbe, 1998: 54).

This study uses the co-cultural theory framework to better understand who participates in fire management decisions and why. It is actually standpoint theory, however, that provides a basis for understanding the implications of the answers to the directed questions presented in the next section; especially the theory that inclusion of Nez Perce knowledge and perspectives on fire management will improve current fire management from policy to implementation. Standpoint theory is premised on the understanding that

individuals with less power are able to see a clearer view of what is happening around them, much like a theater patron seated in the balcony as opposed to the front row (Wood, 1993). Marginalized group members who gain access into dominant structures have the opportunity to experience patterns of beliefs and/or behaviors from a vantage point near and obscure in its examination stance. Orbe refers to this situation as “outsider-within” status (1998:30). This unique vantage point allows those with less power “a capacity for new kinds of experience and for seeing features and dimensions of the world and of history masked to other social actors” (Ahlstrom, 2005: 79). Thus, the implication for fire management is that understanding Nez Perce (e.g. the non-majority group) fire perspectives and incorporating them into current fire policy is likely to improve fire management because it will bring in a perspective that is absent to others and, when combined with other perspectives, it provides a more accurate assessment of problems and their solutions.

Finally, muted group theory, which developed out of cultural anthropology into feminist theory on gender inequality, is used to help explain communication modes between majority and non-majority groups. Feminist muted group theory on gender inequality is based on three primary assumptions:

1. Because men and women have different social locations, they have different roles, experiences, privileges, and barriers, and therefore they form different perceptions;
2. Men occupy positions of power and tend to use their political power to suppress “women’s ideas” and ability to engage in the public sphere;
3. Thus, women are forced to compensate by attempting to make their voices heard through “male language” (Kramarae, 1981: 3)



These assumptions lead to a number of hypotheses in feminist muted group theory most generally in situations where unequal power exists that a) women have more difficulty expressing themselves than men b) women tend to understand the needs of men more than vice versa and c) women are less likely to be satisfied with communication (Kramarae, 1981: 3). In this sense, language is “culture bound” because it is concerned with power and how it is used against people. This paper extends Feminist muted theory from gender to the cultural sphere by using the same assumptions and hypotheses to understand the relationship between majority (non-Native) and non-majority groups (e.g. Nez Perce). This theory would lead us to test the assumptions that a) Nez Perce have more difficulty expressing their views about fire than dominant management groups, b) Nez Perce understand the dominant view of fire better than the Nez Perce view of fire is understood, and c) that the Nez Perce are not satisfied with communication and thus that outside agencies such as the National Park Service has not achieved “full meaning” in terms of fire policy.

Allison and Hibbler’s research findings suggested that the agencies, “often unwittingly or unknowingly, foster organizational barriers that inhibit the perceived program accessibility or attractiveness to ethnic minorities” (Allison and Hibbler, 2004). This research will examine whether the same barriers exist for Nez Perce in their perception of how their fire knowledge is used in current fire management practices.

## DIRECTED QUESTIONS

Co-cultural theory, when blended with feminist theory, suggest that there will be various perspectives of reality and that these perspectives will not be on equal footing. When applied to the problem of land management, particularly with respect to the use of

fire in land management, these theories would suggest that the Non-Native view of fire and the Indigenous fire are different and non-equal in representation in current management. Of course this assumes, perhaps incorrectly, that both perspectives exist. This leads me to inquire whether the Native view still exists, or if it has been suppressed out of existence.

Native Americans now confront a dilemma between needing to conform to majority viewpoints and wanting to preserve their autonomy to manage their own lands. According to the 2000 census, of the 17,959 residents living within the reservation, only 2101 (11.7%) were Indian. The fact that Nez Perce are far outnumbered on the reservation makes it even more difficult for them to influence fire policy. As an apparent coping mechanism, Native American groups appear to be adapting their response to the dominant fire management practices on contemporary landscapes and are struggling to balance often competing cultural perspectives on wildland fire. In light of the aforementioned response and using standpoint, muted group and co-cultural theory as frameworks, the main driving questions of this research are that:

- I. Native knowledge and perspectives on fire policy and management still exist;
- II. The inclusion of Native knowledge and perspectives on fire management and policy is only employed marginally, or not at all in current fire management policy and management;
- III. The exclusion or “superficial” treatment of Native knowledge in current fire management practice is caused by identifiable barriers;
- IV. Inclusion of Nez Perce perspectives on fire policy and management will improve current fire management policy.

It is further supposed that earlier exclusion of marginalized views in federal fire management practices has led to further barriers against inclusion of traditional perspectives in today's fire management practices. This thesis examines whether there are a number of barriers to the inclusion of Native American knowledge and views into modern day land management. Barriers manifest in current federal organizational programs, whether as a result of deliberate insensitivity or cultural misunderstanding. These barriers could undermine the effectiveness of community based management efforts. An excerpt taken from past personal field notes illustrate the case poignantly:

The dancers are stomping to the beat of the drums. The elaborate costumes blur into one big color wheel. Corndogs are sold next to dream catchers. This is the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Indian Pow Wow held at the Wildhorse Casino in Mission, Oregon. The Student Conservation Association Fire Education Corps, of which I am part, has a booth set up to pass out firewise information and random trinkets such as Frisbees, magnets, and glow in the dark pencils. Here we are a group of newly trained wildland fire prevention educators, eager to pass along fire knowledge to the crowds around us. If only we had known that the people we were trying to educate have a knowledge base of fire that goes thousands of years beyond our two week training, our approach and effectiveness could have improved immensely.

The goal of this thesis is to discover or not discover and assess barriers to the inclusion of Nez Perce knowledge and perspectives using a co-cultural theoretical approach. This research suggests that better understanding and incorporating Nez Perce perspectives on fire could improve fire management today.

## METHODS

This study took place in the Inland Northwest region of eastern Washington and northern Idaho. All interviews were conducted between May 2005 and December 2005. Fifty-five Nez Perce tribal members and ten other non-native key informants were interviewed using an in-depth, semi-structured grounded theory style approach. Non-native interviewees were associated with Nez Perce tribal land and fire management and provided logistical information regarding current reservation fire rules and regulations. Names of Nez Perce interviewees were first recommended by the Nez Perce Cultural Resource Center and then suggested by word of mouth. Nez Perce tribal members, Nez Perce tribe staff, Bureau of Land Management staff, Idaho Department of Lands staff, U.S. Forest Service staff, and Nez Perce general reservation public are represented in the interviews.

The qualitative and inductive interview approach used in this study originated from grounded theory. In grounded theory, data collection and analysis are carried out in such a way as to allow for an awareness of the poignant occurrence rather than testing a set of unwavering hypotheses (Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Emerging insights typically lead to observed patterns early on in the collection process and are confirmed with further observations. Data collection is complete when patterns become stable and no new information is garnered from additional observations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

In this study, it was desirable to understand the viewpoints and knowledge of Nez Perce with regard to fire management. Variations in viewpoints could exist based on connection to specific locations, use of the land, and economic stability of the interview

participants. Nez Perce people were not presumed to be homogenous either in terms of the type of fire use, the entity that held the fire management responsibility or their reasons for fire use and the economic benefits of such an action. The wide range of study participant views and experiences could not be brought out by using a rigid questionnaire or hypothesis-testing approach. Therefore, the use of a written interview guide allowed for the recording of reliable, comparable narrative data (Bernard, 1994). Interview topics covered personal views and knowledge of fire and how they relate to current perceptions of fire use. The responses included information on personal and professional land management on family, tribal, federal, and private lands. Interviewing continued until all relevant categories of subjects were represented in the data (Charmaz, 2000).

By using this particular qualitative method, it was possible to explore different dimensions such as reasons for fire use on the land, awareness levels of current fire practices and the effectiveness of such programs for including traditional Native perspectives. Open-ended questioning was important to gather information, since little was actually known about the current factors motivating Nez Perce applying fire practices to the land or how agency fire management plans may affect those decisions. Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. In addition, the author took detailed notes and put them into summaries. Qualitative research analysis software, Atlas.Ti was used to systematically code data into more manageable categories. Categories of barriers to inclusion of Nez Perce knowledge in current land management emerged as data collection and analysis continued.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Nez Perce are now accustomed to federal propoganda about fire behavior: “in school we watched movies...about wildfires and everybody knows about Smokey the

Bear” (interviewee). Another interviewee notes that they learned their fire making skills from the Boy Scouts. Both of these are examples of how dominant culture formal and informal education has at least partially replaced traditional concepts of fire management. The effect for tribal managers has been to merge management practices emanating from both past traditional and contemporary standpoints. For example, the Tribal Forestry Division along with Nez Perce tribal members employed the innovative use of goats for fuels reduction in place of using fire in 2005. Clearly, this generation of Nez Perce shares some of the same perspectives about fire as the dominant majority and have adapted accordingly.

Research for this study breaks down into two themes corresponding to the research questions: traditional fire knowledge and barriers to inclusion in current fire management practices. Traditional fire knowledge is defined differently than modern management practices primarily because of its spiritual connection to the land. This finding supports the directed questions, claiming that Nez Perce fire knowledge still exists, although it may be encrypted because of internal and external factors. Key factors that inhibit the inclusion of Nez Perce fire knowledge in contemporary fire management and policies emerged from the study are identified below as barriers to the inclusion of traditional knowledge. These barriers help explain why Nez Perce knowledge is not incorporated into modern fire management practices.

## TRADITIONAL FIRE KNOWLEDGE

One interviewee gives an overview explanation of Nez Perce traditional fire knowledge:

Traditional Fire Knowledge is conveyed by the oral traditions that show how to perceive the phenomena of fire. Yet it is

not just about the phenomena of fire as it stands alone. The stories relate how to value the *relationship* between fire and people. We offer it our commitment of respect and it offers to take care of us by warming us and cooking food. The traditional Fire Knowledge is put in to practice each time we use it because we remember the relationship as conveyed by the stories.

The Nez Perce viewpoints about fire include perspectives on its uses and the human limitations of its management. A central concept in traditional Nez Perce fire knowledge is that fire cannot be “owned” (interviewee) or controlled: “you can’t control your heart and you can’t control the earth and there are people who were born, they can’t control their body, they can’t control their movement anymore, that’s just the way it has to be” (interviewee). In the same way that one may not be able to control their body, people may not be able to control fire. In this view, natural fire is wild and people should be cognizant of where they choose to settle: “if the fire is naturally started, like through lightning...[residents] can’t live in a dangerous area and expect...the Forest Service to come and put the fire out just because you have your house there” (interviewee). Thus, in the Nez Perce view, people who live in fire prone areas accept a certain level of risk.

Fire is an integral part of a balanced ecosystem in the traditional Nez Perce understanding. One respondent shared that “tree burning...doesn’t hurt Mother Earth” because “it goes back to the dirt” (interviewee). This theme linking fire and renewal appears time and again. Fire “makes new life” and Nez Perce understand the intricate balance between the tool and their own survival: “[fire] provides habitat for the deer and the elk...brings nutrients into the earth...herbs and medicines that we use and the foods that we eat start to thrive after fire goes through...it benefits us” (interviewee). As part of the natural environment, fire has to “play a role” in order to avoid “repercussions” (interviewee). Nez Perce respectfully admit that they “have no ability to gauge the

response the environment will have when it lacks something that originally was always a part of its ecosystem” (interviewee). This quote infers two main points. It highlights the intricacy of natural ecosystems and the destruction that could result when anthropogenic disturbances occur. For example, the Nez Perce view is that the full suppression strategy employed by federal agencies in the past altered the balance of nature in drastic ways.

Fire is not only necessary for maintaining biotic integrity; to the Nez Perce it is something to be respected. A key re-emerging theme was the interconnectedness of fire in all aspects of both biotic integrity and Nez Perce life:

[fire] is a kind of reflection of that element and those kind of geological types of phenomena that are found... rocks and fire and water, all the elements are present in those types of ceremonies and I think that's kind of reinforced in the environment and the importance of all those different elements combined into something that's spiritual I (interviewee).

Here fire is linked to the geological elements of the earth and yet it is also an integral part of important Nez Perce spiritual practices. These spiritual elements are viewed “not as just resources, but really truly gifts from God or the creator and when you view it in that sense it's a little bit different” (interviewee). Spiritual practices which were not recognized as legitimate by missionaries but which are linked to fire in a way that Christianity is not in the non-indigenous world, shows the existence of two worldviews. Similarly, another respondent added: “It's sacred; tribes throughout the country use fire because it is sacred. Sometimes fires are burned all night or all three days, all seven days during ceremonies, depending on where you're coming from” (interviewee). Clearly, fire and its uses are much more tightly woven into the fabric of daily Nez Perce life than is generally the case in the dominant culture.

When fire is viewed as part of a whole (e.g. in conjunction with other elements) and is considered sacred, management is impacted. Fire transitions from just being a tool



to becoming personal, like a relationship. Fire's interdependence with other geological elements and Nez Perce culture, spirituality, and community is evident in the sweat lodge ceremonies:

The sweat lodge itself is known, as the man, the old man... and the fire and the pit; the fire in the pit is there and that's known as the *ala*, that's the fire. There's a connection between that because you know the bones are like the rocks and they're going in the water. They all come together and it puts a breath out and that's what the fire creates (interviewee).

This individual described how he relates fire to his community in a sweat lodge ceremony. The rocks used to heat the sweat lodge represent bones, which in turn represent the history of the people. The fire is called *ala*, which is the Nez Perce word for grandmother. When water is added to the fire it creates steam that signifies the breath of life. Therefore, the combination of water and fire is vital for survival. Finally, the sweat lodge structure itself is representative of the old man, like a grandfather. The linkage of fire to respected community members demonstrates how highly it is regarded in Nez Perce culture - one cannot distance fire from the self and family. Thus, Nez Perce view traditional fire managers and fire management from a unique standpoint.

In the Nez Perce conceptualization, fire management is not exclusive to humans.

People really believe that the creator managed the property... whatever happened, like a wild fire, you know, there's nothing that we could do back in the old days. We just knew and prayed that the fire was gonna make the land more healthy and when the forest is healthy ... the earth will take care of our people (interviewee).

Perhaps contrary to dominant perspectives on fire management, some Nez Perce believe that a higher power has the potential to organize landscapes by controlling fire. Still, others claim that "in our culture...there's songs and stuff that go way back before time,

time immemorial when fire was over the whole earth and everything burned up, it managed the earth” (interviewee). In other words, some Nez Perce argue that modern, dominant fire management concepts are overly anthropocentric. In fact, human management styles are recognized to be transient, as “years ago, our people could burn, let it happen” but now modern management emphasizes the “concept of management, who’s gonna manage, how’s it gonna happen” (interviewee). Some Nez Perce believe that while traditional burning was an appropriate tool in the past, they also recognize that landscapes change and management must adapt.

Thus, salient aspects of Nez Perce knowledge and perspectives on fire continue to exist. However, that knowledge is not always shared outside the Nez Perce community. For example, during field research, some Nez Perce respondents said that they may not voice their opinion about fire in public fire management meetings because there is a Native perception that their insights will not be valued and their ideas will not be implemented (Author field data). Similarly, because meetings may be administered by individuals, or with methods, extraneous to the community, utilizing overly technical communication or verbiage, some Nez Perce members choose not to attend meetings or to withhold their comments. In addition, numerous other reasons were identified in the research that helps explain why the inclusion of Nez Perce knowledge and perspectives in fire management are so slight. These reasons maybe understood as barriers to the inclusion of Nez Perspectives in fire management and are considered in detail in the following section. These examples show feeling of how Nez Perce perceive traditional fire knowledge not being incorporated. However, Nez Perce know that influence of the dominant culture has had an impact on their actions. They may still believe in traditional fire ways, but they have had to adapt their practices in order to survive.

## BARRIERS TO INCLUSION IN MODERN FIRE MANAGEMENT

Barriers are interesting because they were not exclusively stated as such. For example, Nez Perce referred to past misunderstandings to explain why they may not participate in current formal management practices. This action relates back to muted group theory and its explanation of undercover communication strategies, which states marginalized groups don't fully express themselves in the public sphere. However, marginalized groups can express themselves in private based on who is listening.

On further inquiry as to whether or not traditional fire knowledge exists, many Nez Perce begin their responses with stories from past significant elders. Nez Perce recognize that elders traditionally had a deep understanding of fire. However, not all of the knowledge is passed down to the current generation. One interviewee expressed her loss of a family fire expert:

I can recall that one of my uncles when we'd be camping or somewhere, he would be watching the smoke as it come up off the fire. I don't know how, but he must have had knowledge from his old people. He could tell the weather based on how the smoke would go up. I didn't really understand that, being as young as I was and not having it explained to me, but I think our people had a real deep understanding of those things.

Understandably, many Nez Perce lament the gradual loss of past fire practices. The young woman's narrative expresses the central role that oral history played in transferring fire knowledge. Yet, that knowledge was not shared with her. This represents one of the key factors in why some fire knowledge in Nez Perce culture is disappearing. Another elder provided input to similar situations by explaining the cyclical nature of

learning. This elder believed that the fire of the past is not useful in today's world, but when it was necessary to use traditional fire the Nez Perce will learn how to again.

Nez Perce interviewed also expressed interest in fire management activities. "I would go to a meeting in order to find out...what they [management staff] are doing" (interviewee). This particular respondent indicated an interest in participating in formal management proceedings, but inferred that he does not take an active role. Lack of participation is a key factor in why Nez Perce knowledge is often not incorporated into modern management decisions.

Some Nez Perce purposefully withhold information due to past experiences in order to avoid misrepresentation of their information: "I can't really tell you any stories because somebody might hear the recording...wonder who said that and say that's not right...so I'd rather just not say anything about it" (interviewee). For many, fear of being typecast or misunderstood is an internal barrier to sharing their knowledge in the public sphere. However, knowledge is shared within families but "to say that this is my family's fire and only my fire from this certain tree" was considered selfish for this respondent. There is an acknowledgement here that fire knowledge and uses are diverse and their contributions should be respected and shared, and the knowledge is family specific.

Another barrier to inclusion is external and stems from the attitudes revealed by interview respondents towards the actions and philosophies of land management federal employees. One individual said "they act like the forest didn't exist until they got here" (interviewee). Another noted "those [fire related cultural significances] are meaningless to white people, they could have cared less, they didn't even ask". Others expressed similar sentiments: "what I call management and what a white person might call management are...miles apart" (interviewee). Therefore, there is a perception by some Nez Perce that

their cultural values would be disregarded by those seen as outside the tribal community. This perspective developed over years of cultural friction regarding the management of natural resources, including fire: "I imagine they never listened to [old Nez Perce fire experts] on what they were doing wrong. I imagine my grandfather just rolled his eyes and walked off" (interviewee). The tension surrounding modern fire management practices are rooted in the difference between traditional Nez Perce and contemporary managers:

Indian people, we don't have a problem with leaving things alone. That's not true of the Forest Service or [other agencies] they think they gotta get in there and twist it and turn it and do something to it because otherwise you're not managing. Sometimes the best management is leaving it alone (interviewee).

Many Nez Perce plainly accept that land management does not always require direct human intervention. They likewise believe that the "management" strategies are less likely to include traditional perspectives because these may be perceived as less active or mistaken for ignorance.

While Nez Perce families historically took care of the land, over time non-Native people began to assume authority over their "territory".

I think it's always important to make use of those areas because we had numerous areas where not only my family, but other families have used for generations. It was used for digging or [fire related activities] and for whatever reason it stopped for a brief period of time and then when somebody else tries to set it up... that privilege is no longer there. Usually non-Indians have some kind of control of that land, it becomes an issue at that point... to continue those practices is always a challenge for the next generation. ..once you stop, it's hard to start up again (interviewee).

Among the newcomers were ranchers and farmers who were and are often strong proponents of burning: "it's all for the farmer's sake... there are other people who agree, but mostly the farmers who are advocates for field burning" (interviewee). Further, "it's

permissible for ranchers and farmers to go ahead and burn on the property, even without the consent of the landowners” (interviewee). Thus, while farmers are using fire as an economical tool to improve their crop yields, Nez Perce are concerned about adapting their own practices to changing landscapes:

Now we've got so many different species of brush and its hard to manage. I'd really be worried about the natural fuels taking off because our property is checker board ed with the non-tribal members...we could be subject to [law] suit...if the fire got out of control and burned into another parcel of property that didn't belong to tribal members (interviewee).

While the ecological transition from sustainable ecosystem to agricultural production isn't desirable, Nez Perce recognize that management practices must adapt. In other words, burning must be one option among a variety of strategies in today's fire management conducted by the Nez Perce tribe. Where traditional management was conducted on a wider temporal and spatial scale, Nez Perce are now caught in a Faustian bargain, where the need to survive requires actions that may be considered evil. The “basic concept [was] no one owns [the land], but see now they do...they want to cut [trees], they need money” (interviewee). Tribal members must use management strategies that supply an income even though it may not be sustainable. It seems that economics sometimes takes priority and suppresses traditional knowledge and practice.

## DISCUSSION

From this research, we can determine that traditional fire knowledge, while prevalent within Nez Perce culture, is not shared outside the culture and as such is not incorporated into modern day fire practices. Internal and external barriers perceived by the Nez Perce contribute to the exclusion and non-sharing of traditional fire knowledge. External examples include cultural assimilation or changing economic priorities. In

addition to barriers imposed by the dominant culture, the Nez Perce themselves often filter the knowledge that they choose to share. The Nez Perce also have merged some traditional fire knowledge with that produced in the dominant culture through formal education and propaganda. Co-cultural theory, an amalgam of muted group and standpoint theory, was used to establish the framework for understanding why including Nez Perce fire knowledge is important for improving current fire management and policy and why Nez Perce fire perspectives and those of the dominant culture must occupy equal stature legally and in terms of financing to achieve the former. The section below is divided into two sections. The first outlines how the literature is linked to the research findings and the emergent policy implications. The second outlines interprets the research findings according to the theoretical framework.

#### LINK TO LITERATURE & THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The policy implications of this research are numerous and not necessarily limited to the Nez Perce reservation. As previously identified, a major finding of this research is that a notable gap exists in the participation of some Nez Perce in contemporary fire management decisions, especially those executed by high ranking or more knowledgeable groups responsible for fire management.. As a result, despite the focus on community inclusion and civic engagement publicized by the U.S. Federal Government (enshrined in the National Fire Plan) and the National Interagency Fire Center, Nez Perce involvement in fire management decision-making is minimal. From the interviews, five themes were identified as contributing factors in the lack of Nez Perce participation and involvement in contemporary fire management. These five themes appear to represent identifiable barriers to the inclusion of Nez Perce fire knowledge in management decisions on the reservation and include: 1) Intentionally withholding fire information for fear of being

typecast because of perceived culturally incompatible views about fire management (e.g. fire is spiritual or does not always need to be managed) and hardened attitudes and skepticism toward sharing due to past negative experiences; 2) ecological and population changes, which render some traditional N.P. practices impractical (e.g. burning in areas where houses now stand or degraded condition of landscapes) and may account for part of the reason why much of this knowledge is not being passed down to Nez Perce youth; 3) decades of cultural assimilation into the dominant culture (e.g. Boy Scouts, Smoky Bear, formal education) which now shapes a generation's ideas about fire management; 4) the reality of needing to employ management strategies that garner an income which has contributed to the slow transition of N.P. from fire burners to fire fighters 5) and finally, a diminishing elder population from whom fire knowledge was traditionally learned. In essence, Indigenous land management and knowledge has been misunderstood and underutilized for many years and the inclusion of Nez Perce perspectives on fire management would go a long way in helping to decrease skepticism and promote cooperation and effective civic engagement.

A key finding of the research indicates that Nez Perce perceptions and fire knowledge has the potential to contribute and improve current fire management and policy decisions, especially given the now accepted recognition that total fire suppression is not the best strategy. The Nez Perce have a long history of utilizing fire to achieve balanced ecological ends that could integrate the Nez Perce tribe and other land agency fire management practices on the Nez Perce reservation. The literature indicates that fire management has been part of Native American fire practices for hundreds of years (Lewis, 1985; Lewis, 1975; Stewart, 2002). Their fire knowledge has been passed down regularly, via oral tradition until recently, from family member to family member from generation to



generation. While it is true that this chain link of traditional knowledge has been weakened over time, it has not been severed. In fact, much of this fire knowledge remains. The Nez Perce have always held fire in high regard. Respect for fire is reflected by its emphases in their creation story, naming systems, role in ceremonies and a myriad of utilitarian uses from the conventional (e.g. cooking or to encourage succession forest growth) to the almost supernatural (e.g. using smoke to predict weather). Because Nez Perce respect fire and consider it sacred, it is integrated in all the most important aspects of their lives. Nez Perce tend not to separate fire and fire management from their spiritual and cultural views or from environmental stewardship. In other words, fire management is holistic. In fact, during interviews it was nearly impossible to ask a question about fire and get an answer only about fire.

The policy implication is that more options in holistic management on the reservation are necessary. Such options must include making fire management decisions that improve the whole ecosystem and considering the long-term effects of any management strategy on all: plant, animal, and human. Further, Nez Perce fire knowledge accounts for the possibility of multiple fire managers including the Divine and fire controlling itself. The Nez Perce also emphasize the complexity of ecosystems as a whole and are cautious about human intervention regarding fire. They recognized that fire is natural, “wild” and sometimes dangerous. The Nez Perce respect the sometimes uncontrollable nature of fire and the unknown ecological links; as such, rather than seeking to control fire, policy should be directed toward eliminating or at least limiting anthropogenic disturbances in naturally fire prone areas. The focus should be placed instead on furthering research into the relationship between fire, landscape ecology and anthropogenic disturbance.

Finally, Nez Perce reservation specific fire policy recommendations are suggested based on the research findings and field experience and are itemized below:

- I. The establishments of multi-generational and integrated workshops on fire management that last an appropriate length of time (perhaps three days instead of one) are suggested. Such workshops should be held frequently to build trust and a sense of community between land managers and the Nez Perce. This approach may aid in acknowledging the stature of Nez Perce perspectives on fire management so that they share equal status on fire perspectives with non-Natives.
- II. Those involved in land management should be prepared for a long-term commitment, ideally a life-long commitment, to working with the Nez Perce.
- III. Although Nez Perce perspectives on fire knowledge and perspectives still exist, there are indications that it is disappearing for a myriad of reasons. The loss of this knowledge represents a great loss in potentially new information that could improve current fire management. Therefore, Nez Perce fire management knowledge and perspectives need to be documented in an appropriately funded (e.g. at funding levels comparable to status quo funding), culturally sensitive manner. This research and documentation should be directed by the Nez Perce. Funding should not be dependent on meeting federal grant objectives. Establishing a non-profit run by Nez Perce in order to do autonomous research is one option.

Not only would including Nez Perce perspectives and fire knowledge make these goals more fully realized but it could lead to improvements in current policy that would reduce risk and damage to all involved.

## LINK TO THEORY

Co-cultural theory, based on muted group and standpoint theory provide a framework for understanding the research findings. Muted group theory suggests that marginalized groups cannot fully express themselves in the public sphere. Put simply, group actions can change based on who is listening. The research shows that this holds true for Nez Perce as well. Nez Perce fire knowledge often goes unheard in public fire management meetings for a myriad of reasons. It is common for Nez Perce not to attend or to otherwise withhold fire information at such meetings because Nez Perce perceive that their words may be misinterpreted due to the culturally distinct standpoints between themselves and those outside the community. Some tribal members indicate that even when they speak in more public arenas, their suggestions are not give equal weight or are poorly considered. Over time the situation has changed the attitudes of many Nez Perce to skepticism and silence. One Nez Perce claimed that they were tired of “always trying to validate our culture through the eyes of outside people, outside agencies” (interviewee).

However, standpoint theory makes it clear that integration of Nez Perce perceptions on fire management is essential to effective fire management. Not only because their knowledge is rooted in an age-old cultural, practical and spiritual relationship with fire but because they, as a non-majority group, understand fire management as a function of their position within the dominant society in ways that majority groups are not privy to. Dominant groups are powerful in their voice, writing, and actions and Nez Perce can also demonstrate their own power in their inaction and silence. The notion that even the non-dominant group can impose barriers is a significant contribution to the theories used. In other words, Nez Perce fire knowledge can provide a unique standpoint on fire management simply because their ideas and perspectives are

distinct to those of current management; thereby essentially providing new information about fire management that could augment current practices and ultimately improve fire management. However, it is doubtful that Nez Perce perspectives on fire management will become integrated into current management practices until Nez Perce actively seek to integrate their knowledge with the dominant society. Current managers must also appreciate the unique standpoint from which Nez Perce perspectives on fire management come and make extensive efforts to understand those perspectives and incorporate them into management plan. In essence, they need to stop pushing them aside as a marginalized group. According to co-cultural theory, Nez Perce (e.g. the non-majority group in this case) fire knowledge has to be given equal weight with majority views or the inclusion of their unique standpoints on fire management will remain superficial.

## CONCLUSION

One of the major themes to emerge from this research is a sense of loss regarding traditional Nez Perce fire experts and their expertise. However, on deeper analysis, many of the core values and concepts surrounding traditional fire practices are not lost, but rather, encrypted. Such values include recognizing traditional fire knowledge as a relationship. Part of this relationship includes respect for nature and accepting that it cannot be owned or controlled and therefore it imposes risk. Whatever risk, fire is also necessary in support of ecosystem health and life itself. Further, the anthropocentric management of fire should not jeopardize the land benefits for future generations. Utilizing fire for economic gain is a struggle among those trying to keep their tradition within a larger society. Only a spiritual connection can provide a balanced view of the role of fire. Fire is culturally significant as it is used during ceremonies and related to respected

community members. It is important to note that each family has a different approach and personal stories about fire. With many of their experts no longer here or no longer practicing, traditional fire practices are not always passed down explicitly.

Many Nez Perce are interested in learning about current fire dominant practices, but they are not invited or sometimes choose not to participate in formal management activities [conducted by the Nez Perce tribe and other agencies] partly to avoid misunderstandings. The shift from practiced traditional fire management to its symbolic inclusion in today's management is made complex because it merges two different management definitions and styles. Participant responses highlighted the existing tension between a private decision and a public benefit. Generally speaking, Nez Perce tended to view using traditional fire knowledge in modern fire practices as a personal decision that spoke to their cultural ideals, while discounting the need to create transparency to demonstrate certain research and public management benefit. Due to the large volume of data collected and the acknowledgement of very diverse and sometimes hidden views, it is important to note that this discussion provides a glimpse, but by no means exhaustive view, of how some Nez Perce view traditional fire knowledge and its inclusion into contemporary fire management practices.

Even though traditional knowledge exists, there is lack of participation in formal medium. One reason for this is the negative feeling towards being typecast or misunderstood. This approach aligns with the principles of muted-group theory. When Nez Perce are in the minority, it is sometimes less aggravating to subdue to the dominant viewpoint than to participate. This restraint can perpetuate a barrier to traditional fire knowledge inclusion.

Keeping knowledge within a family is another way Nez Perce choose not to include the majority population. This knowledge is precious and they realize that it can be misused and abused. Standpoint theory lends insight to this notion by its claim to only find balance when both perspectives are valued at the same level. If Nez Perce cannot trust those that would benefit from their insight, there is an imbalance in both cultures and in nature, and thus it is expected that the Nez Perce will not share their knowledge.

There is no doubt that the change of ecological and political structure on Nez Perce land presents a barrier to including traditional practices. In the present society, Nez Perce are faced with the dilemma of choosing economic stability as a priority over their spiritual ways with fire. Nez Perce primarily fight fires instead of burning fire for traditional use. It is the lack of that experiential education with setting fires that contributes to disconnected management decisions. When all fire experience is siphoned through a formal education system, it does not provide the tangible knowledge that comes from being directly connected to the land. Co-cultural theory acknowledges the sub-culture exclusivity as needing to rise above the bias and be part of the management.

Finally, fire management questions of interest concern public, tribal, and community managers. Past actions and misunderstandings contribute to the marginal inclusion of traditional fire knowledge in current fire management practices. However, management cannot be compartmentalized. In order to allow for significant cultural input into modern management, managers must be respected, trusted, humbled, and integrated. Native Americans have clung to a distinctive philosophy and cultural identity despite continuous efforts seeking to urbanize, modernize, and Americanize them. While unwilling to give up their values, the Nez Perce are willing to adapt in order to survive. This struggle offers possibilities that address the shortcomings of fire suppressing

strategies while developing fire management approaches that minimize economic loss, sustain natural resources, and increase respect for and inclusion of Native American cultural values into the larger American cultural mosaic. Future programs can advocate hands on integrated outside workshops with experts, non-experts, elders, and youth. In this way, it may be possible to learn more about how fire can be managed as a natural part of the ecosystem, thus minimizing the economic costs of fire damage, as well as developing a greater awareness and understanding of a particular Native people of the United States.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### *How the Beaver stole fire from the Pines*

Once, before there were any people in the world, the different animals and trees lived and moved about and talked together just like human beings.

The pine trees had the secret of fire and guarded it jealously, so that no matter how cold it was, they alone could warm themselves.

At length an unusually cold winter came, and all the animals were in danger of freezing to death. But all their attempts to discover the pines' secret were in vain, until Beaver at last hit upon a plan.

At a certain place on the Grande Ronde River in Idaho, the pines were about to hold a great council. They had built a large fire to warm themselves after bathing in the icy water, and sentinels were posted to prevent intruders from stealing their fire secret.

But Beaver had hidden under the bank near the fire before the sentries had taken their places, and when a live coal rolled down the bank, he seized it, hid it in his breast, and ran away as fast as he could.

The pines immediately raised a hue and cry and started after him. Whenever he was hard pressed, Beaver darted from side to side to dodge his pursuers, and when he had a good start, he kept a straight course.

The Grande Ronde River preserves the direction Beaver took in his flight, and this is why it is tortuous in some parts of its course and straight in others.

After running for a long time, the pines grew tired. So most of them halted in a body on the river banks, where they remain in great numbers to this day, forming a growth so dense that hunters can hardly get through.

A few pines kept chasing Beaver, but they finally gave out one after another, and they remain scattered at intervals along the banks of the river in the places where they stopped.

There was one cedar running in the forefront of the pines, and although he despaired of capturing Beaver, he said to the few trees who were still in the chase, "We can't catch him, but I'll go to the top of the hill yonder and see how far ahead he is."

So he ran to the top of the hill and saw Beaver just diving into Big Snake River where the Grande Ronde enters it. Further pursuit was out of the question.

The cedar stood and watched Beaver dart across Big Snake River and give fire to some willows on the opposite bank, and re-cross farther on and give fire to the birches, and so on to several other kinds of trees.

Since then, all who have wanted fire have got it from these particular trees, because they have fire in them and give it up readily when their wood is rubbed together in the ancient way.

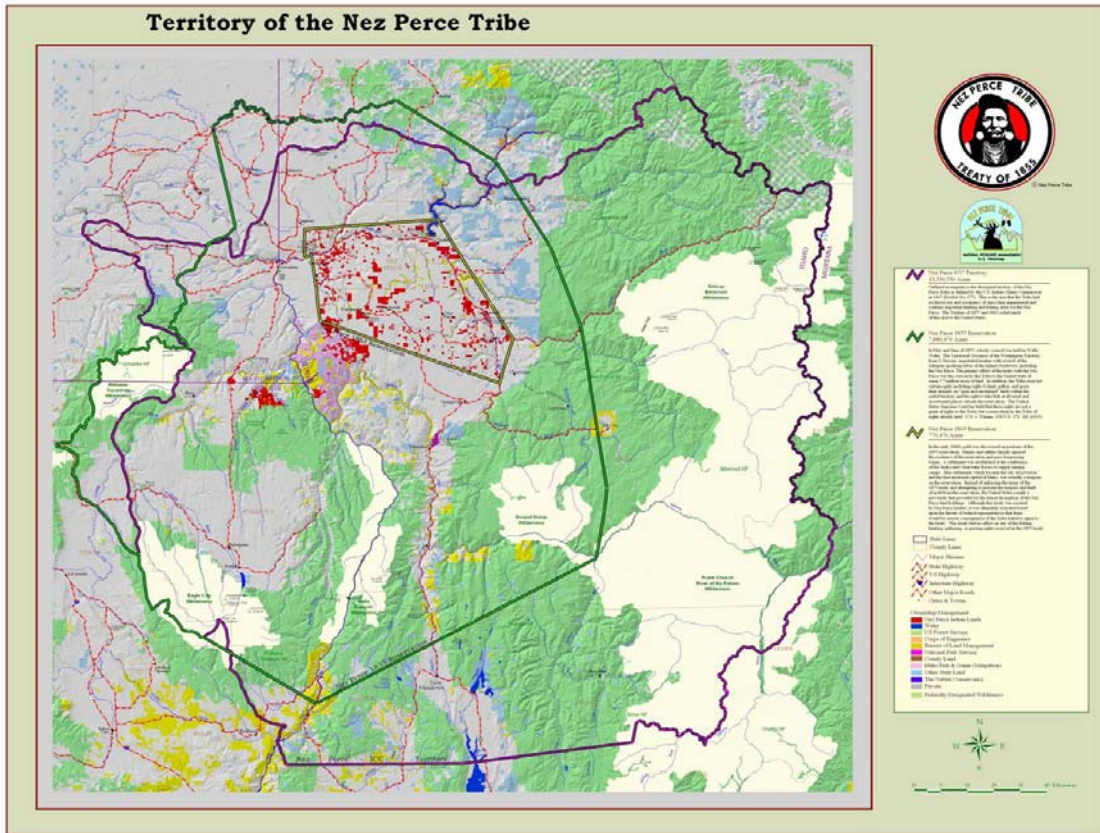
Cedar still stands alone on the top of the hill where he stopped, near the junction of the Grande Ronde and Big Snake rivers. He is very old, so old that his top is dead, but he still stands as a testament to the story's truth.

That the chase was a very long one is shown by the fact that there are no cedars within a hundred miles up stream from him. The old people point him out to the children as they pass by.

"See," they say, "here is old Cedar standing in the very spot where he stopped chasing Beaver."

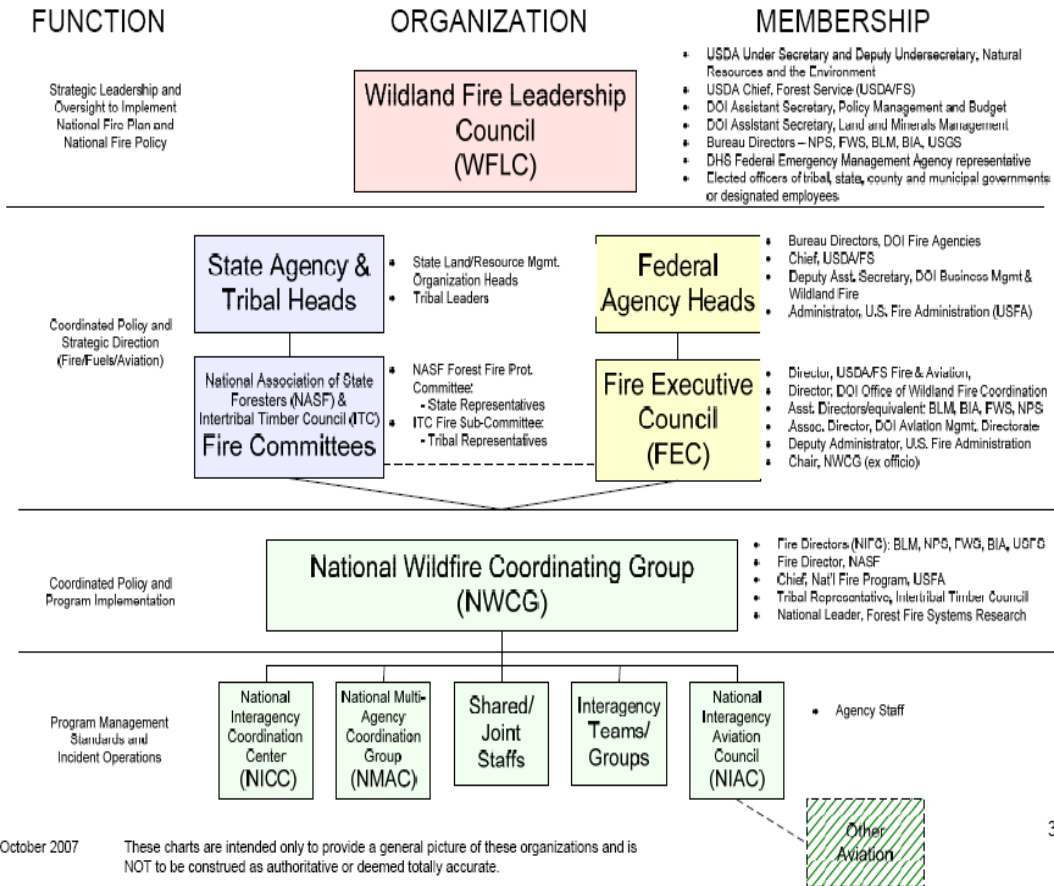
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APPENDIX 2



APPENDIX 3

# Interagency Wildland Fire Governance Structure



October 2007 These charts are intended only to provide a general picture of these organizations and is NOT to be construed as authoritative or deemed totally accurate.