

Fire and Water in the Saskatchewan River Delta

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People in the Saskatchewan River Delta have been using fire as a regenerative tool for generations. In the late 1980s, the use of fire on trap lines was discouraged to protect forestry interests and to assert provincial jurisdiction over fire in the area. Trappers and other land users stopped burning on trap lines for fear of liability. The lack of cultural burning and alterations to water flows allowed an invasive grass (*phragmites australis*) to flourish choking out native vegetation such as sedges, rushes, water lilies, and pond weeds are food for Muskrats, Moose and fish. The lack of food has contributed to a collapse in Muskrat and Moose populations in the Saskatchewan River Delta. Interviews with elders in the delta describe how the extensive leaf litter from *phragmites australis* reduces water flow into wetlands and sets up successional processes creating ideal habitat for willows that dry out the delta. Locals within the delta have advocated successfully to change the policy to allow burning on trap lines. Moreover, local leaders have developed a comprehensive website wearefire.ca that describes a two-year collaboration to reclaim fire within the delta. Locals are advocating to change the policy to allow burning according to favourable conditions versus according to set wildland fire calendar dates. In 2022 and 2023, two on-the-land “We Are Fire camps” were hosted for professionals and youth within the Saskatchewan River Delta to re-learn how fire can be used as a regenerative tool to enhance water flows and support thriving wildlife and culture.