

The use of fire by boreal forest Indians has been carefully and systematically studied only by H.T. Lewis. Lewis (1977, 1982) has used ethnographic studies to show that the Cree Indians of northern Alberta regularly and systematically burned certain habitats to improve game and plant resources at least as far back as the mid-1800s. These fires differed in seasonality, frequency, size and behavior from lightning-caused fires. The upland boreal forest was *not* systematically burned because of the difficulty in managing the fire spread and its limited resource benefits. Generally the areas burned were along the margins of lakes, sloughs, bogs, meadows and swamps. These fires were set mostly in spring and sometimes in late fall. The fires were of small flame length and were intended to kill shrubs and trees and encourage grass and herbaceous growth of value to wildlife. By burning in spring or late fall the surrounding shaded woods would have been wet or still snow-covered, thus controlling the fire spread. Trails in swamps were also kept open by spring burning. These spring fires were not necessarily annual but as frequent as was required to keep the brush down. Thus, Indian fires had *specific* purposes and were set at *specific* times, were of low intensity and small in size.

Significantly, the Indians burned habitats which tended not to burn during the lightning fire season (June–August) and the fires were much smaller in size than lightning-caused fires. In short, they were management burns with specific objectives and a clear understanding of the effect desired. The lightning fire season was considered a foolish time to burn since fires could not be controlled (Lewis 1982).

Johnson, E. A. *Fire and Vegetation Dynamics: Studies from the North American Boreal Forest*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.