

# RESTORING CULTURAL BURNING

Gitxsan lead fire stewardship in collaboration and partnerships with BC Wildfire Service and other First Nations



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is the initial stage of an ongoing initiative between the Gitxsan Lax'yip Management Office and the BC Wildfire Service to identify opportunities for restoring cultural fire for Gitxsan Huwilp. The objective is to support the decision making by each Wilp on priority values in fire stewardship. This will create an indigenous lead cultural burning program that applies cultural values and knowledge combined with western science while fostering partnerships and collaborations to mitigate wildfire and create climate change resiliency.



## METHODOLOGY

- Gathering oral and written histories and spatial identification of Gitxsan fire stewardship areas.
- Visiting field sites to determine present values and future opportunities for the application of good fire for cultural purposes.
- Assisting Huwilp and local governments with the development of burn plans, capacity for Land Guardians, local fire crews and knowledge holders in implementing cultural burning.

## HISTORY

130 years of Provincial Government policies, practices and fire suppression have resulted in extensive forest fuels across the land where wildfires are becoming catastrophic.



## GITXSAN LAX YIP

- 33,000 sq km
- "Git" means "People of" & "Xsan" means "the River of Mist"
- There were thousands of hectares of an sim ma'ay (huckleberry grounds) along all the river systems and trails, some for "fast food" along trails and some for winter storage.
- An sim ma'ay along with other cultural plants were managed with fire at all elevations and aspects.



## CLIMATE CHANGE AND WILDFIRES

Climate Change is leading to larger wildfires and increased fire severity as well as longer fire seasons. Cultural fires reduces wildfire potential because they remove forest fuels.



## REASONS FOR CULTURAL BURNING

- Quality and Quantity of Cultural Foods and Medicines – Good fire increases production of fire resilient plants so that berries are larger and sweeter, medicinal plants are healthier.
- Wildlife Habitat – Good fire increases biodiversity and creates everything needed to survive, fire interrupts tree encroachment and creates better forage.
- Restore Cultural Sites – Ancestral sites were burned twice a year to keep the area clean while removing undergrowth and brush.
- Reduce the Risk of Wildfire – Managing the continuous build up of forest fuels around communities and important values.