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**Forgotten Fires, Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness,
by Omer C. Stewart**

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recognize the inevitability of change. As adults, we need to face up to these kinds of changes such as the economic impact of the completion of WIPP on the City of Carlsbad with loss of jobs.

The students in both cities exchange views, thoughts, and ideas with each other, which is one of the most reassuring expressions of hope for the future. Different cultures, different education on the Cold War, different political beliefs, different clothes, different opportunities for travel are all transcended in a common denominator of reality and the need to not just jointly survive but to thrive as well. The approach is not just a model for future projects in middle schools, but could serve as a model for high schools and universities as well.

Their views on what the future will bring for themselves, their communities, and nuclear energy are fascinating. They state that the economic success of their communities requires a strong commitment to diversification. When asked whether the future of their communities will lie with business or the individual, many expressed a belief in business. Predictions of the future of nuclear energy elicited the following from Kalin Sloughter, Richland: "The future of nuclear energy depends largely on the general population and the scientists and engineers who work with it. Whether or not nuclear energy is used depends on the opinions of the people." She also goes on to note that the waste created by reactors is the biggest problem. These are serious young people who face reality, while recognizing that many of their parent's jobs are dependent on nuclear energy.

The tenor of the children is consistently open and not that of an all-knowing teenager. When Pavlo Gubin, of Slavutych, was asked what role government will play in the future of his community, he replied, "I don't know". That remark alone gives me confidence in the future.

It would be rewarding to have a follow-up of these students ten years hence to solicit their views as young adults and see if attitudes on acceptance of decisions by the authorities and dependence on national funding would be the same or how they would evolve. What these children have said is relevant and merits a follow-up.

Robert Neill

Forgotten Fires, Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness. By Omer C. Stewart. University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. Pp. 352. \$39.95 hardcover.

Henry T. Lewis begins *Forgotten Fires* with a lengthy and provocative introduction. Lewis openly admits that had Stewart's manuscript been published in the mid-1950s, it is unlikely that it would have done much to change professional and public thinking about the importance of Indian practices in influencing North American

environments. As Lewis explains, no one recognized in the 1950s that early hunter-gatherers had any effect on natural landscapes. For example, land managers in the United States in the 1950s could not conceive of the prescribed burns that Stewart found Native Americans used. Similarly, Lewis points out that fellow anthropologists were unwilling to study, teach, or publish this subject. Anthropology at the time, explains Lewis, was preoccupied with cannibalism, witchcraft, genital mutilation, and other exotic topics of primitive customs and did not want to devote time and resources to the historical use of fire. Lewis's introduction explains why Stewart's original work, *The Effects of Burning of Grasslands and Forest by Aborigines*, was not published when he wrote it in 1955.

Lewis ends his introduction by describing the new usefulness of Stewart's work in today's world of public and private land-use policy. Fire ecologists and resource managers can adopt the technologically sophisticated fire regimes used by early Native Americans in developing land-use policy. Ecological restorationists can use Stewart's work to convince government agencies to use controlled and prescribed burns to reduce fuel loads, restore endangered species, and preserve biodiversity.

M. Kat Anderson begins her introduction by placing Stewart's work in the history of ecology and concluding that he was far ahead of that field when he wrote his original work. Theories of ecology at the time, she writes, supported a "Garden of Eden" image of hunter-gatherer relations with the environment. Most early ecologists believed that early hunter-gatherers and later Native Americans had little effect on ecosystem regimes, species distribution and diversity, and biomass production. Stewart spent much of his professional career challenging these notions in the academic world with little success. To accept the idea that humans have ingeniously and continuously shaped natural landscapes ran counter to the prevailing tenets of ecology and wilderness philosophy, and most were not ready to have them dismantled by the idea of sophisticated fire burning by early hunter-gatherers.

As one finally gets into Stewart's original work published in *Forgotten Fires*, you will find it is both a fine example of anthological writing as well as a provocative analysis of the use of fire by early Native Americans. Its impressive bibliography of 583 entries indicates Stewart's thorough research and detailed analysis. In building his theories, Stewart compiles data taken at two different times for different reasons, compares the data, and forms a hypothesis. For example, in analyzing the prairie of present-day Wyoming, Stewart compiles work done in 1900 by field biologists measuring the density of sagebrush with work published in 1924 in the same area studying the effects of grazing on

grasses. Because the scientists in the 1924 study experimented with intentional sagebrush burning as part of their work, Stewart was able to show that this work proved the idea set forth in the 1900 study: fire inhibits the spread of sagebrush. Stewart then links this scientific theory to historical land-use practices of Native Americans, in this case the Sioux Indian practice of sage-burning to increase buffalo habitat, observed and described by Lewis and Clark in their journal of Spring 1805.

Stewart then exposes a little known but widely used method historically for hunting game. Native Americans used intentional and strategic fire setting to drive out or direct game. Stewart meticulously gathered all known records of this practice, summarizing over two dozen separate accounts of the Navajo, San Ildefonso and Santa Ana Pueblos, Hopi, Cocopah, Tohono O'odham, Havasupais, and Apaches. Stewart concludes that this practice must have had its roots in early hunter-gatherer methods of hunting. Perhaps more importantly, he hypothesizes that these early Native Americans must have known of the positive ecological value of setting fires for habitat, or that practice subsequently would have been discarded.

Stewart balances the sophistication of early hunter-gatherers with examples of places where intentional fire setting destroyed an ecosystem. For example, in treating Manitoba, Canada, he compiles existing scholarship on aspen tress and their propensity to grow after being burned. In areas where no human contact was believed to have occurred, aspens died but came back due to resilient roots. In areas historically influenced by Tanina, Kutchin, and other Native Americans, aspen roots were destroyed to the extent that all that remains is desert.

Stewart's work falls short of pure scientific inquiry in a number of ways. First, when data is lacking he makes up for it by anecdotal evidence. Examples of "my friend told me" and "I remember seeing one night" are found throughout his work. Also, well-articulated arguments based on sound data in one geographical region are transferred to another part of North America without any data to complete the analogy. After concluding that the Canada prairie (mentioned above) was destroyed by the over-use of fire, Stewart suggests that this too happened in Texas, yet he is unable to give any citations or scholarship for this assertion.

Still, the genius of Stewart's work may be that he has successfully tried to reconcile those study areas with an abundance of data with those areas that have sparse or no data, in the hope of making the kind of generalizations that keep his work provocative even after 50 years. His main message, that the intentional setting of fires at regular intervals added to greater predictability of adaptations among floral and

fauna species critical to early hunter-gatherers, comes out whether he employs hard anthropological or biological data or uses personal information. Without this human-induced burning, Stewart argues that the land could not have supported the relatively large populations found in North America.

In today's world, given the devastating results of the recent Cerro Grande and Show Low fires, and given demographic trends from major urban areas to the underdeveloped forests and prairie lands, fire policy is on everyone's mind. Stewart's observations are as provocative today as they were over 50 years ago and have the potential to influence needed changes in fire policy. Regardless of whether Stewart's work will have such an influence, it offers a better appreciation for the sophistication with which early settlers of this continent interacted with their natural world.

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