Handout M22. Sharing Knowledge Orally

Food

Sustenance is food or drink that provides strength and nourishment. Tribes relied on roots, berries, nuts, bulbs, grains, fish, and wildlife to provide sustenance for survival; these foods are called “first foods”. Many studies have shown that these first foods provide a rich source of nutrition for human health. In today’s native communities of Southern Oregon, there is a significant push to restore and incorporate traditional foods, allowing tribes to regain food sovereignty.

Tribes of the Rogue Valley harvest specific foods seasonally:

- In the spring, they gather foods including wild celery, yampah, wild onion, and camas, and hunt bear, elk, deer, salmon, steelhead, trout, and eel.
- In the summer, they gather foods such as manzanita berries, manzanita leaves, wild native blackberry, serviceberry, gooseberries, chokecherries, elderberries, huckleberries, tarweed seeds, and grass seeds, and hunt antelope, squirrels, grasshoppers, and other game.
- In the fall, harvested resources include black and white oak acorns, ponderosa pine-nuts, hazelnuts, salmon, steelhead, and trout.
- Throughout the winter, they eat all the food they dried and stored for the cold months—such as fish, jerky, berries, roots, and seeds.

Tribes didn’t just collect plants. They actively burned, pruned, and planted to ensure the availability of sustenance. Indigenous peoples burned areas such as oak woodlands, forests, prairies, meadows, and valleys with low-intensity fire to help maintain healthy, productive ecosystems. They also pruned by cutting branches of dead and overgrown trees and shrubs, to stimulate fast-growing branches and stems. Tribes replanted roots and bulbs in places such as meadows or prairies to increase production of foods. Together, these land-tending practices provided healthy and diverse ecosystems, supporting plentiful harvests in a continuous cycle.

Review & Reflect:

What sorts of foods do the southern Oregon tribes gather, harvest, or hunt? Describe the relationship between food availability and seasons, and the ways tribes help the land provide a continuous harvest.

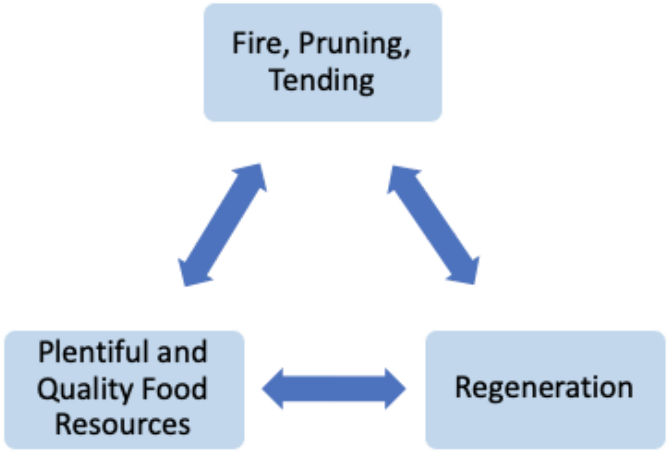
Fire and Land Management

Land management is the process of managing the use and development of natural resources, such as plants and animals. Fire management refers to how people interact with fire on the landscape—including the intentional use of fire as a tool for meeting ecological or cultural objectives. Fire management also includes preventing or suppressing fires to protect natural resources and communities.

Before the arrival of settlers, native people regularly used fire as a tool to keep the ecosystem healthy and in balance, physically and spiritually. Native people set low to moderate intensity (surface) fires at different places and different times. This created a patchwork of burned land in different stages of growth that provided habitat for fire-dependent species and species that benefit from periodic fire. A traditional method of applying fire is lighting pinecones and rolling them down a hillside.

These fires killed small trees and shrubs and consumed surface fuels like litter and grasses. This helped keep forests and woodlands open, provided good habitat for animals, and stimulated growth of plants that were valuable for food, culture, and ceremonies. For example, fires prevent trees from growing into grasslands and meadows, and keep them open for collecting yampah and camas. Fires also keep the forest understory from getting clogged up with small trees. This helps grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs grow and produce flowers and fruits.

Fire was also used to reduce fuels around shelters and seasonal camps. In addition, these frequent, low-intensity fires reduced pests and disease that could infect the forest. In return, the land produced quality, bountiful harvests for food and other uses, and wildfires usually stayed small and not too intense.



Review & Reflect:

Why is fire important to these tribes? How did tribes use fire on the land? Describe the relationship between fire and the availability of food and other important plant and animal resources.

Basketry

Basketry provides a great example of how integral fire is to indigenous cultural practices. Some of the plants used in basketry require fire to grow and flourish. For example, fire kills the aboveground parts of some of the grasses, shrubs, and small trees that are used in basketry. After fire, these plants regenerate (grow back) with new branches that grow straighter and are more bendable. In addition to using fires, people cut away dead and overgrown branches to increase growth and quality for the next time they gather.

Baskets are made of plant materials, which make them lightweight and durable. Each basket's size, shape, and tightness depends on its intended use; some are ornamental, while others are used daily. All baskets are a form of art. If cared for well, these baskets could last for generations. Examples of basket types and uses include:

- Carrying babies
- Cooking food
- Storing items
- Very tightly woven baskets are used for eating soup or carrying water.
- Burden baskets: large baskets with a strap that you could wear on your head to keep the hands free while gathering.
- Solid straight basket: best for picking berries because the shape ensures that the berries don't end up getting mashed. It is also helpful when picking Ponderosa pinenuts or acorns. With a straight basket, once you gather your nuts you can use the basket to toss them in the air and catch them again, which helps get twigs, bugs, or dirt out of your pickings.

Basket materials are gathered during different seasons, and some materials have to be stored for a year before they are ready for use. Some of the materials used include willow branches, hazel sticks, cedar roots, spruce roots, tule, milkweed, beargrass, and rushes. Natural dyes from plants can add color and designs.

People who construct baskets are called basket weavers and are highly valued in tribes and communities. In addition to knowing which plants to use, when to collect them, and how to prune or burn them to ensure straight and strong branches, basket weavers know the steps for making baskets such as keeping the material wet in order to keep it pliable. Basket makers also have their own individual design or style.

The shape, design, and materials used can indicate which tribe the basket comes from.

Review & Reflect:

Why are baskets important to the tribes? Why do you think basket weavers are highly valued in tribes and communities? Describe the relationship between tribes' land management practices and the resources they need to make baskets.