



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 15, 2025

Government Spent Millions on “Indigenous Knowledge” to Fight California Wildfires

In another example of the all-consuming fires of wokeness, it has been revealed that authorities spent millions of dollars the last two years incorporating “indigenous knowledge” into California’s wildfire-mitigation policies. What could possibly go wrong?

What already has, apparently.

Mentioning that what’s in question is also known as “traditional ecological knowledge,” the *Washington Examiner* reports on the story, [writing](#):



AP Images

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the National Science Foundation [NSF] have collectively spent millions on projects intended to extract ancient knowledge from Native Americans to then be applied to mitigate the risk and damages of wildfires. [Apparently, just *asking* an Indian for free is now passé.] The grants, disbursed between 2023 and 2024, preceded the recent widespread fires in the Los Angeles area. As the fires continue to burn, officials serving California and Los Angeles have faced criticism online for allegedly prioritizing diversity initiatives and other left-of-center agenda items over competency.

... The NSF has approved roughly half a million dollars in grant funding tailored toward implementing indigenous knowledge into wildfire preparedness plans in California. One such [grant](#) sought to create a “fire plan” by “interconnecting knowledge systems to advance the science and application of fire in ways that respect



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tribal sovereignty.”

Not the Left’s First Woke Powwow

In reality, though, this just reflects a government-wide [agenda](#) the Joe Biden administration announced via a [press release](#) in 2022. Federal agencies would, it read, begin “recognizing and including Indigenous Knowledge in Federal research, policy, and decision making.” The rationale?

“As the original stewards of the natural environment,” explained a government official cited in the release, “Tribes and Indigenous communities have expertise critical to finding solutions to the climate crisis and protecting our nation’s ecosystems.”

This, of course, is now a very old idea. That is, this “indigenous knowledge” obsession’s predicate is that American Indians lived in perfect harmony with their environment. As the White House [puts it](#), “indigenous knowledge” promotes “environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources....” My, sounds wonderful.

It’s also mythical.

Now, relevant here is a Ralph Waldo Emerson observation. “Every man I meet is my master in some point,” he wrote, “and in that I learn of him.” American Indian cultures *are* like all others, too, in that they do have something to offer. Yet there’s also another commonality: Contrary to the comic-book version of history, Indians were real people with real flaws. Causing environmental destruction was among them, too.

For example, reporting on new research, Smithsonian Insider [wrote](#) in 2011 that small Indian

agricultural settlements up and down the Delaware River Valley caused a 50-percent increase in sediment runoff into the Delaware River. This was done primarily by burn-clearing of as much as half of the forest-cover along the Delaware’s banks.

Ironically, though, the Smithsonian Institution was partially responsible for the noble-savage myth-making in the first place. To wit: It published a 1991 book [claiming](#) that “pre-Columbian America was still the First Eden ... a world of barely perceptible human disturbance.” Live and learn, I guess.

Not Unusual

The Delaware River Indians weren’t outliers, either. “Among other things,” [wrote](#) the Mises Institute in 2007, Indians

engaged in slash-and-burn agriculture, destroyed forests and grasslands, and wiped out entire animal populations (on the assumption that animals felled in a hunt would be reanimated in even larger numbers).

This brings us to wildfire management and the idea Indians used “controlled burns,” just as fire mitigation experts may today. They sure did — and those burns sometimes raged out of control and wreaked havoc. This is because, apparently, fire mitigation wasn’t the goal. Rather, the Indians embraced the practice for cultural reasons or to “divert game into small unburned areas in order to make it easier to hunt the animals,” the *New York Post* [related](#) in 2015.

“Other hunting methods included the ‘buffalo jump,’” the paper added. This was “where a man would



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drive an entire herd over a cliff.” So much for living “in harmony with nature.”

In conclusion, the Indians were very human. When “resources were scarce, Native Americans worked to conserve them,” the *Post* summed up. “When they weren’t, they didn’t.”

So the reality is that the White House’s statement is woke babble. For instance, American Indians are not “the original stewards of the natural environment.” They are today modern people who, like the rest of us, enjoy Western civilization’s technological wonders.

Oh, the White House meant the Indians have ancestors who were those stewards?

So does everyone!

We all have forebears who were “indigenous” (to somewhere) and the natural world’s “original stewards.” This status is meaningless.

What’s Meaningful

In reality, among other downsides, the focus on wokeness — Indian or cowboy — distracts us from what really matters. And what matters is the precise opposite of something the White House was stressing in its indigenous-knowledge directive. As the liberal *Los Angeles Times* [pointed out](#) itself this past weekend, paraphrasing wildfire expert Jack Cohen:

For Cohen, shifting the conversation away from climate change is important because it gives us more control over our fire environment and will ultimately make us less vulnerable to these disasters.

“We don’t have to solve climate change in order to solve our community wildfire risk problem,” he said.

Elaborating, the paper then quoted fire historian Stephen Pyne, a professor emeritus at Arizona State University:

“We don’t necessarily need a trillion-dollar program and a fire czar to get control of the fire problem,” Pyne said. “What we need are a thousand things that tweak the environment in favorable ways such that we can prevent these eruptions.”

For example, municipal and fire prevention agencies must give property owners advance — and continual — warnings to clear dead vegetation and to wet dry brush within 10 feet of the house with periodic, prolonged sprinklings.

In other words, take care of the little things, and the big things will take care of themselves.

As for the “indigenous knowledge” wokesters, what can be said about them? Well, they’re much like the young white guy in the comedic *Malcolm in the Middle* video below. They ought to heed the Indian reprimanding him, too.

Now that, my friends, is some “indigenous” wisdom right there.



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