

The Evolution of Fire Managers: From Keeper of the Flame to Fire-fighter to Fire-warrior ¹

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Abstract

Across societies and across ecosystems we are being challenged to re-think our relationship with fire and how we organize ourselves to manage fire across various landscapes. Fire suppression costs are spiraling out of control, ecosystems are suffering, and safety is jeopardized. A sustainable future will require actions that are ecologically possible, economically feasible, and socially acceptable. This paper will draw on ancient stories (the parable of the poison tree, the ubiquitous myths of the theft of fire from mountain gods, and the Bhagavad-Gita) as well as modern theories (Ken Wilber's integral theory) to explore past, present, and future relationships between fire and society. In pre-modern societies fire was widely spread across landscapes. Fire managers, often women, were "keepers of the flame." Where modern industrial cultures arose, fire needed to be suppressed, and fire managers became fire-fighters, usually men. The post-modern men and women "fire warriors" of today and tomorrow transcend and include these past roles. In some landscapes there is not enough fire and so it must be added. In other landscapes, there is too much fire and so it must be restricted. Managing fire safely, cost-efficiently, and for a variety of of ecological and social purposes during times of global climate change requires the development of fire warriors – the next evolution of fire managers and leaders. This paper will focus on the characteristics and development of the post-modern fire warrior of the future.

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