

Voices from the Fire Line:

**Pikangikum Anishinaabeg Experiences as Provincial Forest
Firefighters in Northwestern Ontario.**

By
Michael R. Sanders

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Natural Resources Management (M.N.R.M.)

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ABSTRACT

This research is an account of Pikangikum First Nation people's experiences as provincial forest firefighters in the Red Lake region of northwestern Ontario with a specific emphasis on changes in their level of participation over time. As such, the research provides an in-depth representation of Pikangikum's historic and contemporary roles in firefighting in light of institutional changes that have affected the extent of their involvement. It describes relationships between Pikangikum Anishinaabeg and Euro-Canadian people within the institution of forest fire control and details how these relationships have developed and changed since the early years of forest firefighting up to recent times. Using an approach grounded in ethnographic research, this study pursued the following specific objectives:

- (1) Document the history of forest firefighting institutions in the Red Lake District from their establishment until recent times;
- (2) Determine the skills and contributions of Pikangikum people, in their own words and through those of their non-Native counterparts, as participants in firefighting over this time period;
- (3) Link changes in firefighting policy and operations with levels of Anishinaabe firefighting participation to understand the context of their interactions across time.

This story emerged through individual and collaborative analysis of documentary sources and empirical data from interview and participant observation settings. The research finds that Pikangikum community members excelled within the Ontario fire program at Red Lake from the 1930s to the 1970s by combining their pre-existing land-based knowledge and survival skills with the hands-on training of Ontario Fire Branch representatives. This study also reveals and documents a period of sharp decline in Pikangikum people's presence on seasonal fire crews that began in the mid 1970s as Ontario adopted an increasingly standardized, technocratic approach to firefighting. It offers an explanation of how Pikangikum firefighting roles have changed as the institution of fire control has changed over time. It concludes by forwarding recommendations and highlighting recent developments which may hold the potential to reinvigorate Pikangikum representation on seasonal fire crews. It is hoped that the findings of the research help to enhance areas of partnership in community-based land use planning as undertaken by Pikangikum's Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are three Anishinaabe Elder research participants who passed away before the completion of this work. The late Elder Whitehead Moose of Pikangikum made significant contributions to the research and instilled me with a deep sense of optimism for a future in which Natives and newcomers will work closely together as partners in firefighting. The late Samuel Joseph ‘Big Joe’ Keesic or Red Lake/Lac Seul Band was both a contributor and firefighting mentor. Elder Joe offered me a wealth of fire line teachings and encouraged me to develop my own personal style in firefighting by finding the way that works best for me. The late Elder Norman Quill of Pikangikum is also fondly remembered for his extensive knowledge of firefighting, his encyclopedic knowledge of the land and for his ability to embrace people of all backgrounds in fellowship. The enduring legacy and spirit of these three Elders will never be forgotten. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Pikangikum Elders Tom Quill Senior, Alec Suggashie, Tom Turtle, Matthew Strang, Oliver Hill, Charlie Peters and Peter Paishk for entrusting their firefighting experiences and voices to me. Their stories have been integral to this work. I am greatly honored to have worked with Elder Joe Paishk of Red Lake/Lac Seul Band on this study. By openly sharing his knowledge of local history and his firefighting experiences, Joe Paishk has made some significant contributions to this story. A number of non-native Ontario Fire Branch veterans have offered personal experiences and knowledge that allowed for valuable insights. In addition, the Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters has been greatly supportive and helpful in developing and completing this work. I would also like to thank the Whitefeather support staff in Pikangikum and the community of researchers at the Natural Resources Institute for all the support, help and good times. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous guidance and support I have received from Dr. Jennifer S.H. Brown, Dr. Derek Johnson, Dr. John Sinclair, Dr. Iain Davidson-Hunt and Lee Gerrish of OMNR Red Lake as members of my examining committee.

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Plate 1: Pikangikum firefighters awaiting floatplane at Forestry Point, June 1956

Original title: Forest fire fighters from Pikangikum, waiting at the Department of Lands and Forests base in Red Lake to be flown to a fire [June, 1956]
Source: Archives of Ontario (web): <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca> (June 2011)
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Plate 2: Aerial Photo of Forestry Point

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Plate 3: Anishinaabe occupation site at Forestry Point

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Plate 4: Early photo of Forestry Point Outbuildings

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Plate 5: Keesic Family Forestry workers in motorboat

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Plate 7: Isaac Keesic working on the Skookum Bay bridge

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Plate 15: Jake Siegel and his Otter floatplane

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AOU – Area of Undertaking (for forestry Class EA in Ontario)
BHE – Being Held (stage of forest fire containment)
CFO(s) – Community Fire Officer(s)
DLF – Department of Lands and Forests (Ontario)
EFF(s) – Extra Fire Fighter(s)
NBI – Northern Boreal Initiative
OMNR – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
OPAS – Ontario Provincial Air Service
PFN – Pikangikum First Nation
WFI – Whitefeather Forest Initiative
WFMC – Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation
WFPA – Whitefeather Forest Planning Area

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

No standard orthography for the Ojibwa language has found universal acceptance. In this study, the spelling of Anishinaabe words gathered during the research process follows those provided by local Anishinaabe sources from Pikangikum and the Red Lake/Lac Seul region. Paddy Peters, Whitefeather Forest Land Use Coordinator, and Murray Quill, Whitefeather Forest Information Technician, have provided spellings for Anishinaabe words and names which have been offered by Pikangikum people. This document also contains Ojibwa words and names of Lac Seul Band/Red Lake Anishinaabe provenance. In these instances, spelling follows that given by Red Lake Elders and the published work of Agger (2008), whose voices originate from the local Lac Seul Band/Red Lake community and reflect its regional distinctiveness in dialect.

Sources for spelling are identified in superscript throughout the work.

KEY:

WF – Murray Quill and Paddy Peters, Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation

JP – Red Lake/Lac Seul Band Elder Joe Paishk

A – Agger (2008)

Chapter One

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Locating the Past; Conceiving the Future

...There's a link that'll never be broken apart. The white man's way and an Indian way...I've had my dreams all these years and I've been with the white people more than I do with my own people and that's what I say. Both ways are linked together...

- Gordon Berens, Elder of Berens River [Ojibwa] First Nation, Manitoba
(Quoted in Gray 2006: 147-148).

Narratives of historic European and Indigenous contact and interaction often speak in terms of one-way processes of European arrival, domination, subordination and control of Indigenous peoples and the lands they have occupied. Whether attempting to either glorify or vilify European agendas in North America, such narratives risk overlooking the true complexities of the North American experience by rendering mute the agency and contributions of Indigenous peoples as active players in the historic processes that have emerged since initial contact. Counter to the view of Indigenous societies as diminutive 'subjects' who were merely 'acted upon' through landed colonial enterprises, a recognition of the historic role of Indigenous people as dynamic agents, whose influence is significant in its own right, is currently finding broader representation in historical and anthropological literature. While some people may see Indigenous presence and agency as a thing of the past, it is evident that Indigenous people continue to occupy a very important place within the North American landscape.

Indigenous peoples' agency and contributions can be seen within the North American political and cultural landscapes we know today. This is manifest, for example, through the many technologies, medicines, staple foods and political and philosophical contributions made by Indigenous societies since the early contact era (Smith 1992; Nies 1996; Keoke 2002). North American Indigenous people contributed to the very survival of the earliest groups of European interlopers on the continent. They served as indispensable agents in the development of fur trade economies across northern North America (Trigger 1986; Lytwyn 2002). They acted as pivotal

players in the military and diplomatic developments that have shaped the political geography of the continent (Moses 2000). In addition, the principles of social and political organization exemplified through their cultures are believed by some (see Johansen 1998) to have served an inspirational role in the founding of contemporary North American nation-states. Indigenous people have also played a crucial and longstanding role in shaping the ecological composition and productivity of the North American landscapes which have been inherited by present-day societies.

The achievements of both Indigenous and European peoples as social, cultural and national actors have been woven into the contemporary North American landscape. Through these historic processes, as Gordon Berens suggests above, the ways of European and Indigenous peoples have become linked. While not always reflected in Western consciousness, a complex cultural legacy has been inherited by North American people through the regional and historic interactions and contributions of both European and Indigenous societies.

Over the last few decades, increasing attention has been paid to realizing working relationships between Euro-Canadian resource governance institutions and the First Nations people whose traditional territories represent a significant portion of the resource base of the country (Armitage 2005; Manseau et al. 2005; M'Lot and Manseau 2003; Natcher et. al. 2005; Natcher and Davis 2007). In this context, a number of Canadian First Nations have entered into processes of community-based resource management and land use planning through collaborative partnership arrangements involving federal, provincial and territorial levels of government. While novel in their efforts to support meaningful local and regional self-determination, these arrangements also draw on the complex regional, historical and cultural legacies that have been inherited in each particular case. A deeper understanding of the past, one which fully accounts for the contributions and experiences of First Nations people, will help facilitate successful community-based resource management partnerships in the future.

1.2 Fire Management, Pikangikum First Nation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

This research presents a shared history of cross-cultural contributions in the area of forest firefighting within the Red Lake/Pikangikum area. Pikangikum First Nation (PFN) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) both have distinct backgrounds through which their relationships with forest fires have been cultivated (OMNR 2003; Davidson-Hunt 2003; Miller 2010; WFMC 2007). They also have a shared history centered specifically on forest firefighting which has developed and changed since the early 1900s. In recent years, PFN and OMNR have forged a novel working relationship centered on collaborative land use, resource and forest management planning. Forest fire protection and management has been a subject of ongoing attention and discussion in this planning context. In order to contribute to positive and successful fire management planning outcomes, it may be of great importance to bring forth a picture of the pre-existing PFN-OMNR relationships that have formed through the occupation of forest firefighting.

1.2.1 Background and Context: Whitefeather Forest Planning Area

Pikangikum First Nation is a community of approximately 2,200 Anishinaabe [Ojibwa] people located 120 kilometers north of Red Lake, Ontario. Its land use planning endeavors reflect recent trends towards First Nations-led, collaborative resource management agreements in Canada. Situated in a remote region of boreal forest in northwestern Ontario, a 1.3 million hectare area of PFN traditional territory, as delineated by the community and formally acknowledged by the Ontario Provincial Government, is now the focus of a community based land use planning process as centered on a partnership between PFN and OMNR (2006).

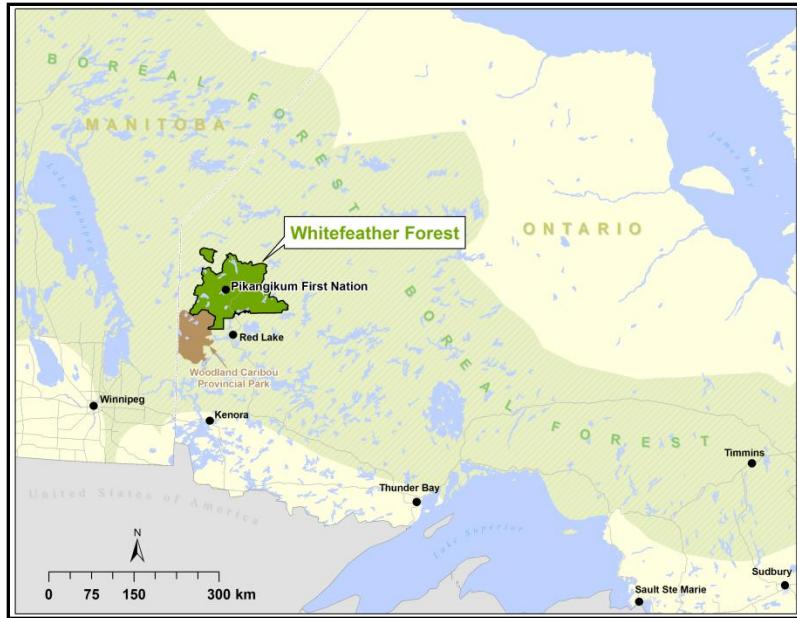


Figure 1: Location of the Whitefeather Forest in northwestern Ontario.
From Davidson-Hunt and O'Flaherty (2010: ix).

This territory, now referred to as the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area (WFPA) has been recognized as a cultural landscape, or *Ahneesheenahbay ohtahkeem* in the Pikangikum Anishinaabe language (PFN and OMNR 2006: 24). It is identified as such because it has both shaped and *been shaped by* Pikangikum people over a substantial length of time. The Whitefeather Forest contains a wealth of deeply interrelated cultural and natural features that have derived their special character through the longstanding presence of Anishinaabe people on the land. Pikangikum First Nation has stated that the land and their people have always existed as a fundamentally inseparable whole and that this relationship with the land has been in place since time immemorial. Through longstanding occupancy of their traditional territory, Pikangikum people have cultivated, refined and adapted a wealth of empirically tested knowledge, administered through their distinct customs and social systems, that have been applied to successful livelihood and stewardship. Pikangikum people have used the term “*Cheekahnahwaydahmungk Keetahkeemeenaan*” (PFN and OMNR 2006:5), roughly translated to English as “Keeping the Land”, to refer to the customary system of stewardship and care through which their land-based livelihood has persisted across their traditional territory into the modern

era. Keeping the Land is a guiding philosophy in contemporary land use planning for the Whitefeather Forest cultural landscape (PFN and OMNR 2006).

1.2.2 Emergence of the Whitefeather Forest Initiative

The emergence of Pikangikum's current planning efforts can be traced back to the formation of a new community consciousness regarding Pikangikum's position relative to modern industrial developments over the last few decades. Owing to its location beyond the extent of commercial forestry licensing in Ontario, most of Pikangikum's territory had remained untouched by this form of resource extraction throughout the modern period. When forestry companies approached PFN to develop forest harvest operations in their area during the 1970s, Pikangikum people initially refused. However, as former Chief Paddy Peters has stated, the community observed an encroachment of forestry towards the southern fringes of their traditional territory, during the 1990s. This observation triggered a new perspective regarding PFN's situation relative to forestry development:

...[S]ee all this clear cutting, it is near our community and we have to do something about this. Our people cannot just continue to say no. If we continue to say no we are going to be left out. We are going to be left out from the benefits. We have to do something about this for our community. (Paddy Peters, quoted in PFN and OMNR 2006:4)

This awareness was a catalyst for subsequent negotiations with OMNR as initiated by Pikangikum people. PFN approached OMNR with the goal of obtaining a commercial forest license in order to take the lead in forest management within their territory. By attempting to secure a primary role in forestry, Pikangikum people also sought to ensure that they would stand as both the principal directors and beneficiaries of resource management in their territory rather than allowing such determinations to be made externally by Euro-Canadian institutions.

Pikangikum's subsequent efforts in this regard, and their success in ensuring that their interests were understood and supported by OMNR, became manifest through the development of a historic article of Ontario government policy titled the Northern Boreal Initiative (NBI) (OMNR

2001). This initiative formally stated that land-use planning north of the 51st parallel, in areas beyond the current extent of commercial forest management in the province, would be led by the First Nations communities who reside in these areas, including PFN. The NBI outlined a community-based approach to land-use planning through which both the primacy of said First Nations communities in resource management direction and the sharing of provincial management structures in this goal would be made possible through good faith partnerships and dedicated, long-term collaborative endeavors.

Through the terms of the NBI, PFN formulated the Whitefeather Forest Initiative (WFI) and the Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation (WFMC) as mechanisms to facilitate community-based land-use planning in a meaningful, inclusive fashion. Members of PFN worked through these organizations and within the context of clearly defined research partnerships with government, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, to formulate a Land Use Strategy that was approved by the OMNR for WFPA lands. The Land Use Strategy identifies a robust community-based forestry enterprise as one of its key components (PFN and OMNR 2006).

1.2.3 Forestry and Fire Management in the Whitefeather

Leading up to the completion of the Land Use Strategy, processes of open dialogue, research and discussion between PFN and OMNR centered on a number of resource management and land use issues and goals felt by both parties to be pertinent to the WFPA. A community-based forestry enterprise, which is slated to begin operation in the near future, has formed a key focus of these discussions. By extension, the two parties have recognized that the role of forest fire is important to consider in the realization of community-based forest management. At present, collaborative research and dialogue have secured a mutual PFN and OMNR acknowledgement of the fact that forest fire management and protection will be an integral part of forestry operations within the WFPA (Miller 2010; WFMC 2007).

Both PFN and OMNR hold distinct sets of knowledge centered on fire that have been cultivated through their respective cultural backgrounds. These knowledge sets represent distinct visions of human relationships with fire that both intersect and diverge on different levels. Discussion centered on forest fire has led to a process of knowledge sharing and the identification of some key concepts surrounding the issue of fire management in the WFPA. For instance, Pikangikum Elders have shared some of their knowledge of Anishinaabe customary burning and its use by community members in a traditional livelihood context. OMNR have likewise offered their understandings of prescribed burning as carried out in a forest management context. PFN and OMNR have also built dialogues around the use of fire to regenerate forest areas following harvest activities in the Whitefeather Forest. Novel approaches to prescribed burning, as consistent with Pikangikum customary philosophies of Keeping the Land, have been identified by community Elders with respect to the regeneration of forest areas in the Whitefeather. Overall, Elders and community members have communicated a strong desire to develop and retain a community-based forest fire management and suppression capability within the WFPA that involves its members directly. The community has expressed its desire to take a lead role in carrying out fire-based activities within the WFPA. As the community moves closer to forest harvest operations within the Whitefeather, there has become a greater need for a comprehensive forest fire management plan that actualizes this vision (Miller 2010; WFMC 2007).



Plate 1: Pikangikum firefighters awaiting floatplane at Forestry Point. June 1956.
Taken by John Macfie. Copyright: Archives of Ontario, Reference Code: C330-14.
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1.2.4 Linking Distinct and Shared Fire Management Legacies Through Firefighting

As the Department of Lands and Forests (DLF), the precursor of the OMNR, extended their fire control regimes northward to the Red Lake/Pikangikum region, they encountered local Anishinaabe inhabitants who could serve not only as a ready source of labor but also as highly skilled firefighters, many of whom had substantial knowledge of their boreal forest landscape and the characteristics and behavior of fire upon it¹. For Pikangikum people, employment on firefighting crews brought not only a meaningful source of income but also a sense of pride in accomplishment for their skill in working on the land. Pikangikum people subsequently accumulated decades of experience working on fire crews. They applied their extensive knowledge of fire, their skills in living on the land and their hard work ethic, as cultivated through

¹ Pikangikum people's knowledge of fire was traditionally constituted through customary burning practices, observations of naturally occurring fires and cultural codes of conduct relating to fire safety and prevention (see Miller 2010). Agger (2008) has also documented an instance in which neighboring Trout Lake Anishinaabeg actively worked to extinguish an accidental fire outbreak from a campfire. However, while they held deep knowledge and ethics relating to fire and fire control, Anishinaabeg did not customarily battle large wildfires before the introduction of provincial fire suppression.

their customary institutions, to this new occupation. Euro-Canadians who served on firefighting crews took guidance and on the job training from Pikangikum people who had secured the rank of Crew Boss in the course of their successful firefighting careers. Pikangikum and Euro-Canadian people have worked side-by-side in fighting fires, bringing their respective knowledge, human and technological resources to the same table. Therefore, the enterprise of firefighting has a shared regional history linking these two cultural groups.

1.2.5 Recent Changes in Regional Fire Management

Over the last few decades, OMNR has sought to constantly refine and strengthen the technology, procedures and training that it employs in fighting fires. This has meant that, since the 1940s, firefighting methods and associated requirements have undergone some marked changes.

Pikangikum people have noted emergent challenges in maintaining community representation on firefighting crews and within the wider institutional framework of firefighting. Obtaining work in firefighting can be competitive due to its lucrative and demanding nature. In addition, OMNR training programs have also periodically changed in order to ensure their continued effectiveness according to provincial goals. Levels of qualification and training, as well as the programs through which these qualifications are obtained, have become more and more demanding over the last forty years. Moreover, as OMNR has come to assume management control with respect to fire, decisions concerning the administration of training, as well as theoretical and applied approaches to firefighting, are mainly set beyond the scope of the Pikangikum community (Miller 2010).

In the context of land use planning and research meetings, PFN people have expressed a need to meet such potential changes and challenges in order to retain employment and leadership roles as firefighters and fire crew supervisors (Miller 2010). As PFN begins to implement the land-use strategy, Pikangikum Elders feel that a renewed recognition of PFN people as historic participants in forest firefighting is needed to address future directions for fire management and firefighting participation in the Whitefeather Forest. Paddy Peters, Deputy Chief of PFN, has expressed the interest of PFN Elders in telling the story of their historic involvement in firefighting.

Community Elders have offered to extend their personal knowledge of firefighting, along with their experiences within the institution, to their OMNR partners. Pikangikum Elders feel this is important in order to ensure a strengthening of PFN participation in both employment opportunities and the implementation of fire management strategies for the WFPA (WFMC 2007).

1.3 The Current Study: Purpose and Objectives

This research presents an account of Pikangikum First Nation people's experiences as provincial forest firefighters in the Red Lake region of northwestern Ontario with a specific emphasis on changes in their level of participation over time. This study is an in-depth representation of Pikangikum's historic and contemporary roles in firefighting in light of institutional changes that have affected the extent of their involvement. It describes relationships between Pikangikum Anishinaabeg and Euro-Canadian people within the institution of Fire Control and details how these relationships have developed and changed since the early years of forest firefighting up to recent times. Using an approach grounded in ethnographic research, this study has pursued the following specific objectives:

- (1) Document the history of forest firefighting institutions in the Red Lake District from their establishment until recent times;
- (2) Determine the skills and contributions of Pikangikum people, in their own words and through those of their non-Native counterparts, as participants in firefighting over this time period;
- (3) Link changes in firefighting policy and operations with levels of Anishinaabe firefighting participation to understand the context of their interactions across time.

1.4 General Methods

This research utilizes qualitative ethnographic methods as guided by current anthropological literature and framed within community-based, collaborative research paradigms. Key components include: (1) documentary literature review of the regional, historic and cultural particularities of the case; (2) semi-structured interviews of key PFN and OMNR individuals with

firefighting backgrounds; (3) the cultivation of personal experiential knowledge through participant observation and (4) individual as well as collaborative analysis of salient themes and insights gained from the data to formulate a representative narrative.

1.5. Contributions to Knowledge

The main contribution of this research is to document Pikangikum people's role in the occupation of firefighting. The research outcomes are also relevant to an enhancement of OMNR and PFN partnership goals as already formed through ongoing land use and fire management planning efforts. This research provides a richer cross-cultural understanding of the past experience and potential contribution of PFN people to fire management in WFPA. Because Pikangikum people's vision is to assume a lead role in fire management and protection within the WFPA, this work stands as a resource document that can support future agreements between OMNR and the community towards this end. Accounting for Anishinaabe involvement in firefighting may also help correct the common tendency to disconnect Indigenous people from both the narratives and practice of resource management in this region during the 20th century. By attempting to draw out the firefighting experiences and knowledge held by Pikangikum people, this research aims to add a dimension of Indigenous voice to the issue of fire management that is also underrepresented in academic literature. The research can make a theoretical contribution by bringing key ethnographic, ethnohistorical and sociological concepts to bear on the case. The myriad cultural, social and institutional dimensions that relate to the process of becoming a firefighter can be understood through research in these fields.

Chapter Two

2.0 Historic Fire Regimes, Contemporary Fire Management and Native-Newcomer Relationships

2.1 Fire Regimes within Historic Boreal Algonquian Societies

European explorers, fur traders and travelers have documented the widespread usage of controlled burning by Algonquian-speaking people in the boreal forest from an early period. Champlain (in Grant 1967) documented the burning of forests by local Anishinaabeg along the Ottawa River in the early 1600s; Henry Hudson witnessed fires that he interpreted as human-caused within Cree territory along the shores of James Bay in the spring of 1611 (Bird 2005); Bigsby (1850) noted the burning of forested land by Lake Superior Ojibwa people to promote berry production within their territory; Palliser indicated that burnt-over areas in the Lake of the Woods region created meadow lands that were used for campsites by Anishinaabe people and also provided forage for game and draught animals (Spry 1968); Low (1896) described the use of signal fires by Cree people in eastern James Bay; and McKenna (1908) observed the Cree use of fire for driving and hunting caribou within the Burntwood River area of Northern Manitoba.

Lewis and Ferguson (1988) conducted ethnographic research, including interviews with contemporary members of Alberta Cree and Cree-Métis communities, concerning the use of fire within their boreal forest territories. Similarly, Davidson-Hunt (2003) discussed contemporary knowledge of controlled burning and fire among northwestern Ontario Anishinaabe people. Their research, representing firsthand Indigenous accounts and oral histories, reported the employment of fire regimes in meadows, along sloughs, streams and lakeshores for improved game forage, in dead forests for the production of firewood and in a variety of areas to improve and fireguard settlements and campsites, to maintain trails and berry patches, clear garden land, to control black fly and mosquito populations, for signal fires, and for religious/aesthetic reasons. Madeline Theriault (1992), a Bear Island Anishinaabe Elder from the Temagami region of Ontario, briefly

discussed in her autobiography the use of customary spring burning in creating berry patches and forage for a variety of fur-bearing and game animals that were crucial to the local Indigenous economy.

2.1.1 Customary Burning and Pikangikum People

Miller (2010) has documented that the practice of controlled burning constitutes an important aspect of Pikangikum people's livelihood in a customary land-based setting. Older generations of PFN people not only retain a sober regard for naturally occurring fire as a dually creative and destructive force, they also hold both a living memory and direct experience of how Anishinaabe people have applied fire to specific sites in their territory. PFN Elders state that Pikangikum people historically employed controlled burning, in a number of contexts, to enhance their livelihoods on the land. For example, Miller (2010) recounts that Pikangikum people have burned portions of land during the spring when snow, frost and temperature conditions allowed for low-intensity, more easily containable fires. Within grassy areas along lake and stream margins, PFN people set marsh grass fires in order to stimulate new growth and increase carrying capacity for muskrats and ducks. Fire has also been used elsewhere to create and maintain of travel corridors and open pathways for greater mobility in hunting, trapping and food gathering. In addition, Pikangikum people carried out pre-emptive burns to remove combustible material and to fireproof habitation sites against larger fire events (Miller 2010; WFMC 2007).

2.2 Indigenous-to-European Fire Regimes: An Overview of Transitions in North America

Pyne et al. (1996), Botkin (1996), Cronon (1983) and Dods (2002) discuss the processes through which Indigenous fire regimes in North America were supplanted by a new order of forest and fire management that emerged through colonizing processes and came into place largely through the consolidation of European-based governance systems. During the 19th century, Europeans attempted to eliminate landscape-level fire occurrences in areas of European settlement and control them at the margins of the European enterprise, including large tracts of 'frontier' or

'backcountry' forest. In both Canada and the United States, a large proportion of this forested land was circumscribed under the managerial authority of state governance by the close of the 19th century (Dods 2002; Pyne et al. 1996). Dods (2002) notes that as Western Europeans transferred their populations and economies to the New World, they similarly transferred culturally particular values that prioritized the maintenance of forests as managed woodlots and forest preserves, existing as sources of timber and enclosures for game, and administered through central authority and regulation.

While Indigenous people maintained fire-based landscapes for a plurality of subsistence-based values, Euro-Americans viewed forests largely as sources of timber and destinations for recreational or sporting activity (Cronon 1983; Botkin 1996; Dods 2002). Pyne et. al. (1996) and Dods (2002) note that as European North Americans advanced preservationist schemes in order to both maintain these areas and guarantee a steady flow of timber resources, they increasingly viewed forest fires as a threat. New vectors for fire occurrences such as railroads, factories and increased settled populations also emerged through this industrial economy, sometimes leading to the breakout of intense wildfires (Pyne 1997). Fire had come to 'menace' the landscape. Therefore, Indigenous people and other rural populations that employed controlled burning were increasingly seen by managerial authorities as a menace. Forest fires were seen as a wasteful destruction of land and represented a significant threat to person and property (Pyne et. al. 1996). As wildfires clashed with increased human populations and European-derived values in frontier areas, fire control became a priority. The birth of the modern industrial economy in North America is connected to the creation of institutions to fight wildland fires (Pyne et. al. 1996).

2.2.1 Social Implications of Western Fire Management for Pikangikum First Nation

Miller (2010) has found that Pikangikum Elders still recall the extension of Western fire suppression ethics and institutions into their territories with considerable disdain. Where Pikangikum people were once free to practice controlled burning for the enhancement of a

number of land-based socio-economic pursuits, the managerial imposition of Canadian governance structures during the 1940s superseded their fire regimes and lessened their ability to live off the land as they had before. Modern fire control thus held important implications for the maintenance of Pikangikum's customary livelihood, diminishing the community's control over land use within their territory.

However, Pikangikum people have not been passive or static in responding to these changes. They have actively adapted to emerging political and social realities by seeking novel livelihoods within the modern economy and management landscape in their region. As mentioned, Miller (2010) found that Pikangikum people's loss of their ability to practice customary fire management also came astride benefits through employment as firefighters within the context of the new managerial system. Pikangikum people thus retained an important agency in fire management through changing socio-economic circumstances within their region.

Pikangikum people not only value their roles as firefighters, they also recognize social and economic values in retaining a capacity to control wildfires in their territory. They observe, as European newcomers often have, that fire can present a differential danger or benefit to people, property and resource-based livelihood within their territory. The fire suppression aspect of forest and resource management has found increasing relevance in current dialogues concerning the future of land use planning for the Whitefeather Forest Area. Pikangikum people cite firefighting employment as an important potential source of livelihood. Fire management is also a dimension in which resource management goals can be realized for the future benefit of the community. Therefore, the changing face of firefighting training and hiring requirements in northwestern Ontario, along with the management implications inherent to this enterprise, are points of substantial concern to Pikangikum's future land use planning efforts and livelihoods (Miller 2010; WFMC 2007).

2.3 Firefighting in Contemporary Aboriginal Communities: A Brief Overview

A substantial body of literature discusses historic Indigenous fire regimes and their ecological ramifications in North America and the boreal forest (Sauer 1947, Stewart 1955, Pyne 1995; 1997; 2007 and Cronon 1983). Moreover, the management of plant and animal communities through the reapplication of Indigenous knowledge is now more broadly recognized. However, very few works have focused on how changes in the application or control of fire may involve contemporary North American Indigenous community members directly. Examples of First Nations agency, participation and voices as specifically centered on firefighting have received limited documentary treatment. Two key works (Rasmussen et. al. 2007; Natcher 2004) on Indigenous fire management and firefighting are notable. These examples may be supplemented by non-academic literature that outlines some context of involvement in firefighting by First Nations people in Canada.

Rasmussen et al. (2007) have discussed how wildland fire management may be an important dimension of economic and cultural development for Indigenous North American communities in a contemporary context. Fire management systems, as enacted in a community-based context, can provide opportunities for Indigenous communities to strengthen connections with the land, exercise an ecological stewardship role, provide for economic development and increase their capacity in mitigating fire risks and damage at the local scale. Rasmussen et al. (2007) suggest that the integration of social and ecological systems through fire management can benefit the productivity and health of both Indigenous communities and their surrounding landscapes. Depending on the circumstance, potential management scenarios could include variable combinations of controlled burning, fire suppression, and forestry. Any number of practices might be improvised. However, the key component noted by Rasmussen et. al. (2007) is the presence of a decision-making role for the Indigenous people who inhabit these areas.

Natcher (2004) examined fire policy and fire management within the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge of Alaska and discussed its bearing on local Dendu Gwich'in people. He documented the historic use of fire by the Gwich'in within their traditional territory, discussed its ecological significance and covered some key changes occurring both to the forest landscape and Indigenous livelihoods as a result of state fire controls introduced since the 1950s. While his Gwich'in research participants indicated that fire and customary burning were a valuable component in their traditional land-based livelihoods, they also indicated that the advent of modern fire suppression had resulted in a substantial avenue for employment for their community members. Natcher (2004) indicated that firefighting was among those forms of employment that provided the highest income returns for Dendu Gwich'in communities. Moreover, a large portion of the population that was seasonally employed in firefighting was able to dedicate the income gained through their employment to provisioning their land-based subsistence pursuits during other seasons of the year.

Firefighting had also become a substantial factor of cultural pride and identity in these communities as well. In Gwich'in territory, firefighting was a generational affair; several families had served in this institution from one age group to the next. Older generations of firefighters were proud of their contributions, and often enthusiastically expressed this to up-and-coming generations of Gwich'in people who had found employment in firefighting as well. Recent efforts on the part of the Alaska government to implement 'free to burn' policies were strongly juxtaposed with Gwich'in interests in retaining employment as firefighters *and* exercising a firm decision-making role in fire management overall. Although Gwich'in people were thoroughly aware of the positive role that fire held within their landscape, they were equally reluctant to surrender their own role as firefighters or relinquish their access to decision-making roles in fire management (Natcher 2004).

Peten (2005) notes that, owing to their strong historic representation on fire crews, Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis people now make up the majority of trained wildland firefighting personnel

in the province. During the 2005 fire season in Saskatchewan, firefighters from 36 First Nations and 18 Métis communities were active in various areas of the province fighting forest fires (Peten 2005). In British Columbia, First Nations people in the Port Alberni region are credited with the formation of a fire crew that has developed renowned fire suppression capabilities. Due to their extensive firefighting capacity, the British Columbia Thunderbird Crew have met the demands of fire control both at the provincial level and across Canada, offering their services and expertise as far away as Quebec (Wiwchar 2003).

Some First Nations have created band and regional level firefighting enterprises as part of economic development ventures aimed at providing much needed employment and services for their members. For example, Driftpile First Nation in Alberta has staffed 160 people as fully trained firefighters and provides forestry services within its wider region on a contract basis. Firebases and bush camps are maintained in a state of readiness throughout the fire season and, in addition to serving as experienced firefighters, Driftpile members perform other services such as brush clearing, fuel wood harvesting and tree planting in the absence of fire outbreaks (Lusty 2001). This enterprise provides meaningful income opportunities, a sense of pride and a purposeful forest management role for Driftpile First Nation within the broader regional community (Lusty 2001). Similarly, the Manitoba Association of Native Firefighters (www.manff.ca) actively advocates the training, staffing and equipping of a network of community-based firefighters across First Nations communities in Manitoba aimed at building a capacity for fire prevention and suppression at the community level.

In some areas of Canada, First Nations roles in fire management and suppression have not developed to a similarly strong degree. For example, in 2002, a conglomeration of First Nations communities comprising the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation in northwestern Ontario submitted a formal proposal to government outlining the need for trained firefighters in their communities. However, the Ontario government did not support the implementation of the proposal, causing First Nations in the region to cite a double standard in fire prevention coverage across their region. Nishnawbe-

Aski representatives stated that Ontario did not hold the same values for human life and property in the ‘north’ as in the ‘south’. They noted that their communities represented the best line of defense against forest fires, and were critical of the apparent lack on the part of Ontario to use this knowledgeable, well-situated human resource. Following the proposal, Nishnawbe-Aski representatives were able to point to a number of damaging fire events that occurred during the 2003 fire season that they felt would have been mitigated had their strategy been implemented (Kenora Daily Miner and News 2003).

2.4 Firefighting and Organizational Culture

The small collection of literature cited above offers some perspective on the diversity of First Nations roles, positions and stake relative to contemporary fire management. But a more central question should be asked with respect to how these different relationships with the institution and practice of firefighting have developed historically and proceeded into contemporary times. How may we understand the dynamics and pathways through which Pikangikum people have historically participated in forest firefighting? How have they historically achieved and maintained social capital and currency in this occupation?

Ethnographic research has taken a novel focus on various occupational settings in order to understand how the culture of a particular workplace both constitutes itself and defines terms of competence and ability among its personnel. Studies focused on concepts of safe conduct on construction sites (Gherardi and Nicolini 2002); the demonstration of occupational skills by employees on a fishing vessel (Palsson 1994) and the occupational culture of urban firefighters (McCarl 1985) exemplify this line of ethnographic inquiry. In such studies, general theories of social organization and social action, as developed by Bourdieu (1990; 1997; 2000), are often discussed to conceptualize the processes inherent to workplace socialization and the cultivation/perceptions of personal ability within a certain occupation.

Matthew Desmond (2006; 2007), whose work stands as perhaps the only ethnographic study of the organizational culture of forest firefighting, has used Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as a central feature of his research on wildland firefighting crews in Arizona. Desmond (2006; 2007) engaged in firefighting through participant observation in order to view the organizational culture of this occupation firsthand, and interpret the underlying values and capabilities, the *general habitus*, that predisposes firefighters to their job. Desmond followed Bourdieu (1997) by defining *general habitus* as the collective dispositions, dimensions of thought and ways of acting in the world that are acquired and embodied by an individual through early development, identity-building and life experiences (Bourdieu 1997). Desmond's work aimed to uncover the *general habitus* of his Arizona crewmates, as developed prior to their entrance into the occupation, and understand how it fit into the *field* of rules, norms, practices and competencies that were specific to acting as a firefighter. His work discusses how some Arizona firefighters were especially suited to the occupation through their *general habitus* as rural, country-reared individuals who had built up a deep familiarity with the tools of the trade and the surrounding forest landscape from an early age. Desmond's use of Bourdieu's habitus concept is greatly instructive in its focus on the personal qualities that generate competency as a forest firefighter. Moreover, Desmond shows how the general habitus of an individual interacts with the *field* of firefighting, as structured by state institutions, in order to underpin a *specific habitus* of firefighting.

Desmond's ethnography informs the analytical approach taken in this work because it provides a framework to understand the special skills and abilities, the unique *general habitus*, that Pikangikum Anishinaabeg have brought to the occupation of firefighting over several decades of involvement. It provides a way of thinking about how Pikangikum Anishinaabe cultural and social capital has been built up and articulated in relation to forest fire management institutions in northwestern Ontario. Thus, it helps us understand the people's contributions and experiences within the field of forest firefighting.

2.5 Understanding History through the Middle Ground

While Desmond's ethnographic research helps us reconstruct a unique Anishinaabe firefighting habitus, Richard White's (1991) work is useful to understanding the historical story of Anishinaabe firefighting participation as a negotiation between two cultural groups. White's (1991) theory of the *Middle Ground* sheds light on aspects of Native-newcomer interaction through which Euro-Canadian and First Nations people have historically structured their positions and relationships with one another. White concentrates on dynamics of cross-cultural negotiation through which social and political arrangements have been forged between Europeans and First Nations with varying outcomes. His work highlights historical circumstances that are highly analogous to the story of Pikangikum people's involvement in firefighting.

In his ethnohistoric work entitled *The Middle Ground*, White (1991) describes how French traders and colonizers and the Algonquian Nations of the southern Great Lakes engaged in processes of trade, warfare and philosophical exchange that were derived from the distinct cultural backgrounds of both populations respectively. White specifically focused on a period (early to mid-1700s) in which the French were working to gain effective control of territory in North America by forging alliances with Great Lakes Algonquian people. Because Indian alliances were instrumental to French survival in the region, French representatives took great pains to appeal to Great Lakes Nations in order to secure military and political agreements that would cement their place. In doing so, the French attempted to appeal to Great Lakes Nations according to their understanding of Algonquian culture and governance. In turn, Great Lakes Nations attempted to apprehend and employ the logic of French culture and governance, as they understood it, in order to shore up their own territorial and economic interests in the region. Because neither party could assert perfect control over the other, each was strongly compelled to undertake complex, cross-cultural negotiations in order to secure crucial alliances. The interdependence that existed between the French and Great Lakes Algonquians during this period necessitated a novel cultural

milieu in which each party sought to employ the values of the other to produce new and unique social arrangements.

White (1991; 2006) highlights a period in French-Algonquian relations in which neither party was able to assert effective control or dominance over the other. Because each party had a high degree of investment in appealing to the cultural logic of the other, it reveals especially rich and unique facets of historic Native-newcomer cultural exchange. However, White (1991; 2006) underscores that the Middle Ground was not a space in which Europeans and Indigenous people always arrived at a state of cross-cultural harmony through appeals to each other's cultural and political logic. Rather, Native-newcomer agreements forged on the Middle Ground were often built on partial, imperfect understandings and creative misunderstandings that were sometimes quite tenuous. While the Middle Ground was maintained towards certain mutual efficiencies, it was easily placed under stress by changing social and political circumstances.

White (1991; 2006) maintains that the Middle Ground persisted only while a balance of power that was sufficient enough to preclude the domination of one cultural group by the other. His work highlights how relationships between Natives and newcomers have often progressed from arrangements of mutual benefit to those of domination and subordination of Indigenous people by Euro-North Americans as power is increasingly acquired by the latter. As the British eventually secured political power in the Great Lakes, British authorities dispensed with the Indian alliances that they had inherited from the French because they were seen as unnecessary to maintaining power. As a result, Algonquian people lost their bargaining positions as Nations and gradually came to exist as subjects of European powers rather than partners. A vibrant Middle Ground of cross-cultural exchange, in which Europeans and Natives sought to actively compromise with one another, was dismantled.

It is important to note that Bohaker (2006), Deloria (2006), Sleeper-Smith (2006) and White (2006) have examined the concept of the Middle Ground and debated its cohesiveness, as well

as its applicability to historical situations and contexts beyond the scope of his original study. However, there are strong correlations between White's analysis and the story of Pikangikum Anishinaabeg involvement in firefighting that underscore the applicability of the Middle Ground concept in this case. The story of Pikangikum Anishinaabe involvement in firefighting is one in which the improvisation, maintenance and eventual breakdown of a Middle Ground of cross-cultural exchange is evident over time. The concept of the Middle Ground provides a way to link changes in the institution of fire management with levels of Anishinaabe participation.

2.6 Summary

Algonquian-speaking people of the boreal forest, including Pikangikum Anishinaabeg, have acted as fire managers, to use a Western term², through their employment of fire on the land for various purposes. As Euro-North American fire control systems have been put into place in North America, Indigenous people have faced challenges in practicing their customary fire management roles. They have been compelled to change the ways in which they work with fire as Euro-Canadian fire control has come into their areas. Nonetheless, First Nations stake in fire management has often remained salient in spite of a deep transition between Indigenous and Euro-Canadian fire management regimes. In instances where First Nation communities have successfully engaged contemporary fire institutions, they have also secured novel roles in forest fire management and firefighting.

Desmond's (2007) work allows us to analyze Anishinaabe involvement in firefighting in light of the special land-based survival skills and experiences that they put into practice during their careers. He helps us reconstruct an Anishinaabe firefighting habitus, as formed through the unique cultural background and upbringing of Anishinaabe people in encounter with the Fire Program. Following

² Although Anishinaabeg are bearers of sophisticated fire-based practices, Pikangikum Elders would probably be uncomfortable using the term 'manager' to describe their customary roles. This is because it implies a level of control that they are not at all comfortable assuming. The term 'manager' contains overtones of human *dominion* over the land that go against customary tenets of Keeping the Land and working with it (PFN and OMNR 2006). Nonetheless, it is important to show that Anishinaabeg have refined an agency in fire which is cognate to contemporary fire management institutions.

this, Richard White's (1991) ethnohistory of the Middle Ground provides a way of understanding the historical and cultural backdrop that has impinged upon an Anishinaabe firefighting habitus over time. As the cross-cultural Middle Ground of firefighting has developed and changed over many decades, so has the level of Anishinaabe social and cultural capital within the institution. These matters are unpacked in detail in the discussion and conclusion section of this work (see Chapter Seven).

Chapter Three

3.0 Research Methods

3.1. Review of Documentary and Photographic Materials

While the statements offered by a number of individuals during interviews form a central part of this story, an effort was also made to locate and use documentary materials that could supplement and add context to the research. In an attempt to find key documents that could provide useful information, I visited institutions in the Red Lake area including the Red Lake Public Library, the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre and the Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters. I went to the Library Stacks at University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg in the hopes of locating published anthropological, social and natural history works that could prove relevant. I also extended my search to the internet in the hopes that web resources and other repositories could be found.

Through this process of discovery, I was hoping to find written works that could shed light on aspects of Pikangikum/Red Lake local history, the establishment of Fire Control operations in the Red Lake area, the history of Ontario fire management institutions and the involvement of northwestern Ontario Anishinaabeg within them. While I anticipated that certain qualities of information dealing with Anishinaabe firefighting could be gained in interviews, (e.g., personal experiences or specific fire line tactics), I knew that it could be important to locate materials that provided other qualities of information. For example, I was interested in gaining knowledge with respect to specific Ontario Fire operations and policies; I was hoping to find reference documents that would help me understand and track any critical occurrences and changes in the Ontario Fire Program over time. I was also interested in building knowledge of Red Lake regional history in order to understand Native and newcomer people and interactions in the area. In addition, I hoped to find anything that related directly to Anishinaabe participation in firefighting within the Red Lake or surrounding regions.

Lee Gerrish, OMNR Red Lake, first notified me of a commemorative document published by the Ministry of Natural Resources entitled *The Forestry: Red Lake, Ontario 1926-1986* (OMNR 1986). This tabloid contains textual and photographic information that deals with the formation of forest fire protection services in the Red Lake region in substantial detail. It outlines how the fire base was built, how firefighting was carried out and how institutional and policy shifts contributed to evolution and change within the program. Moreover, it provides evidence regarding the involvement of Anishinaabe people from the Red Lake and Pikangikum areas since the early days of Forestry Point, ca. 1930s, onward to the 1950s and 1960s.

Other materials of more recent and secondhand provenance were useful in understanding local history in the Red Lake/Pikangikum area and the development of the fire program itself. Lambert's (1967) volume dealing with the history of the DLF provides an understanding of how this institution has functioned in northwestern Ontario in various capacities over time. It also describes an early interaction between the Ontario government and Pikangikum centered on Ontario Land Survey activities. Pyne's (2007) treatment of Ontario provincial firefighting from an environmental history perspective has been important to interpreting the topic and providing some additional context. Namegosibiing Trout Lake Elder Sarah Keesick Olsen and Helen Agger (2008) have also co-authored a life history narrative that details a number of aspects of the Native-newcomer experience following the gold rush in Red Lake. This work offers an understanding of encounters between Natives and newcomers during the Red Lake Gold rush, 1925. Provincial fire strategies, previously published research pertaining to PFN and the WFI, interview transcripts and other relevant resources have also been located and employed to supplement a historical narrative of this topic.

A wealth of photographic material dealing with Anishinaabe firefighting participation in the Red Lake region also surfaced from a variety of sources. These sources include the Ontario Archives, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Red Lake Public Library, Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre, Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters, Elder Joe Paishk of the Red Lake/Lac Seul

Band Anishinaabeg, Helen K. Yutzy of Red Lake and Elder Tom Quill Senior of Pikangikum. Following Pink (2007) these photographs provide an illustrative context for the subject matter. Photos were also used as prompts in an interview setting to spur dialogues with research participants.

These documentary and photographic materials were used to supplement the firsthand interview accounts which form a central part of this work. They fill out certain parts of the narrative by providing supportive chronological, cultural and historical information and highlighting key people and events.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviewing

Through the participation of DLF/OMNR personnel and PFN people who have been involved in firefighting, I recorded a series of interviews from July 2008 to January 2009 and transcribed them in the following year. A chief goal of the interviews was to elicit the experiences of Pikangikum Elders and members as centered on the occupation of firefighting. The material generated through interviews forms a central part in understanding how Pikangikum people have encountered and acted in the institution of firefighting as it has evolved over time. Euro-Canadian OMNR personnel who have fought fires alongside PFN people, or who have otherwise been exposed to this occupation, were also interviewed in order to provide an additional cross-cultural perspective on the working roles and relationships established in this field. Semi-structured interview techniques were employed in order to allow a flow of communication approaching everyday conversation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). These techniques preserved, as much as possible, the culturally and individually distinct voices of interview participants in a narrative oral history format, as told within their own terms of reference and logic.

Twenty-two interview transcripts were compiled through the research. Ten Pikangikum participants, two Red Lake Anishinaabe participants and eight non-Native participants were interviewed. Selection of the interview participants was mainly done through an iterative

snowballing technique. A first list of potential Pikangikum Anishinaabe participants was initially generated with the help of university students and researchers who had already studied in Pikangikum at the beginning of my fieldwork in 2008. During my visits to the community, people within Pikangikum also informed me as to who could provide the kind of firefighting stories I was looking for. They recommended both Anishinaabe and non-Native people who could potentially provide important perspectives. Branching out, I spoke with different non-Native veterans of the Fire Program and present Red Lake Fire Management Staff to identify past Ontario personnel who had direct experience working with Anishinaabe firefighters. Non-Native participants also identified different Anishinaabe people who they felt would be good interview candidates. As I embedded myself within these research communities, key participants somewhat organically emerged. At times, key liaisons within Pikangikum were helpful in facilitating my encounters with certain community Elders. To an extent, I did not always select Pikangikum participants. Rather, as word circulated throughout the community about my research, they selected me.

At the outset of the research, I had not grasped the importance of Red Lake/Lac Seul Anishinaabe people in forest firefighting at Red Lake. In fact, because I was focused on Pikangikum people, I initially paid little attention to Anishinaabe firefighters from other communities. However, a number of people within my research community began to stress how the voices of Anishinaabe people from Red Lake/Lac Seul Band would be important to my work. I followed this up by speaking to key members of the Red Lake Anishinaabe community in interview settings. I quickly found that Red Lake Anishinaabe voices could contribute a wealth of relevant information to my work on Pikangikum participation in firefighting and Anishinaabe involvement in general. Two highly-experienced Anishinaabe firefighters from Red Lake offered very valuable perspectives on local forest firefighting history. In many ways, their voices have contributed substantially to this narrative.

In recent years, First Nations oral tradition and oral history has increasingly been used by Westerners to generate historical and ethnographic research. Information derived from oral

history is extant in several historical and anthropological works and its use has been discussed by a number of scholars (Cruikshank 2005; Lagrand 1997; Rosaldo 1980; Cohen 1989). Social scientists have increasingly incorporated these customary methods of knowledge transmission into their research results in order to allow the voices of Indigenous people an adequate place in their studies, and to provide unique insights into their investigations. The use of oral history and oral tradition by Westerners has expanded beyond a mere supplementary role, in which the voices of Indigenous peoples are treated as secondary or stand to be substantiated by 'hard', Western-based evidence (Cruikshank 1990). Oral history has become increasingly central to certain works as a valid and appropriate medium to represent Indigenous people and cultures (i.e., Bird 2005; 2007). A greater emphasis on showcasing Indigenous voices has added new dimensions to a scholarly landscape in which Indigenous people have historically been mute; and one in which the need for greater accuracy, sensitivity and plurality has been dramatically felt (Smith 1999; Deloria 1991; Mihesuah 1993).

Researchers in Indigenous communities have stressed a mindfulness of the culturally particular methods of knowledge transmission that are put into practice when Indigenous Elders and other knowledgeable people are asked to speak about their culture, their lives and their personal experiences. This mindfulness includes sensitivity to the linguistic differences sometimes encountered through the process, to the appropriateness of certain lines of questioning or methods of inquiry, to the differing concepts of meaning as vested in certain stories and dialogues and to the willingness to share or disseminate certain stories or information in the context of academic research (Cruikshank 1990; Cruikshank 2005; Lagrand 1997; Smith 1999; Mihesuah 1993).

The majority of interviews conducted with Pikangikum Elders included working through a translator to ask questions and elicit responses. The differences in language and culture that are embodied in this transaction have been most important to consider. Firstly, the fact that specific concepts are implicitly embedded in language has meant that the translator, participants and I

moved through a constant process of negotiation and philosophical musing in order to secure lines of communication and interpret questions and answers correctly. When I asked a question, it often had to be modulated according to the Anishinaabe language and interpreted in this context by the participant. In precisely the same sense, the answer that was offered in return was again modulated back into the English language by the translators themselves. It was a game of cross-cultural ‘telephone’ underscored by a careful consideration of how qualities of information and their subsequent usage in a narrative context, have been affected and altered through this process.

Whether engaging Pikangikum or Euro-Canadian people through interviews, I have concentrated on capturing the personal and cultural distinctiveness of the speakers, their ways of speaking and the sensibilities through which they choose to impart and share knowledge. However, because my level of intervention in guiding the flow of the oral narrative is quite noticeable, the material cannot be easily lent to the kind of unbroken narrative life history that can be seen in works such as Cruikshank (1990, 2005) and Bird (2005; 2007). While these works preserve the narrative structure of the story according each the speaker, this historical story is much more a product of my own *re-storying*, following Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) and Mankowski (2000), in which I centrally assume my own role and agency as the storyteller, through my own synthesis of the voices and materials, according to my own reconstructive processes.

3.3 Participant Observation

Goulet (1998) Bernard (2006) Hammersly and Atkinson (2007) and Dewalt et. al. (1998) have discussed different qualities of participant observation gravitating from third person observation, in which the observer role is more passive, to radical participation, in which efforts are geared towards full inclusion and experiential learning within a specific cultural setting. This study has taken the latter approach (Goulet 1998), as grounded in active and experiential participation, through which I have, as much as is possible, served as a member and agent within the context of the research setting, generated my own experiences in this setting, and attempts to embody its

terms, functions and contexts of identity through personal association. An experiential association with the practice of firefighting means that I have undergone the same processes of becoming a firefighter which lay at the heart of this work. Moreover, participant observation in the Pikangikum community has been significant in the community's acceptance of my research goals and conduct.

As part of an endeavor to gain a personal familiarity with the institution, practice and organizational culture of firefighting in the Red Lake District, I embarked on a three-year long involvement in the Ontario Fire Crew system as an Initial Attack Crewmember and Crew Boss. I have satisfied the necessary training and hiring requirements, I have secured a firsthand familiarity with the day-to-day operations of the firebase and I have cultivated a firsthand knowledge of current fire suppression and management techniques through actual practice. These experiences, as gained through training, hiring and employment, have greatly reinforced my ability to understand and speak about the institution of firefighting, as well as the topic at hand. By serving on a fire crew, I became intimately aware of procedures, protocols and practices in firefighting that are currently in use. As I entered the writing phase, I was able to speak about certain matters of history and practice with the benefit of heightened exposure and firsthand experience in this field.

My learning journey within the community of Pikangikum also involved a participant observation component. As an outsider, I had to quickly learn how to act within local social settings in order to generate positive affiliations within the community. I had to earn friendships and cement relationships with Pikangikum Band members, leaders, gatekeepers and Elders by cultivating a social presence. During my five months of research in the community (July to December 2008), ninety percent of my time was spent outside of an interview context simply 'hanging out' in the community and getting to know people. A few weeks after I came to the community, Elders slowly became aware of my work and started to find a level of comfort with it. Then, a few Elders began to step forward to teach me about firefighting. Once they were convinced that I was able to

engage them in a respectful way, for the right reasons, they started to open up with their firefighting stories. Participant observation helped secure my presence as a respectful and trustworthy individual; thus it aided in the data collection process.

Participant observation was not used as a data collection method in the conventional sense of field-notes and journal entries. In fact, my experiences are not reproduced as data within this work. Rather, they have helped me frame, interpret and present information as gained in other data collection and analysis contexts. Participant observation enhanced my experiential understandings. It raised my level of intimacy with respect to key perspectives issuing from Anishinaabe and OMNR/non-Native circles of firefighting knowledge and practice. It contributed to a deep familiarity with the subject and the parties involved, and it has helped me more efficiently engage in processes of data collection, analysis and writing.

Speaking in reflexive terms, my position relative to two distinct epistemologies of firefighting, both Euro-Canadian and Anishinaabe, is both enriched and challenged by my own participant observation experiences. My firsthand experience encircles the contemporary firefighting language of both the OMNR and Anishinaabe veterans who offered firefighting teachings and histories. Writing this work has sometimes been a struggle. At times, I have engaged in extensive reflection to decide whose language of firefighting I might be privileging and what bearing this would have on my work. In some ways, experiential learning through participant observation has built me up as a creature of internal conflict. Some peers have remarked that I have internalized an identity as an 'OMNR' worker to a noticeable degree, perhaps to the diminishment of Anishinaabe perspectives. Anishinaabe Elders have also complimented me on my knowledge of Anishinaabe ways of firefighting, as thoroughly distinct from, and sometimes at odds with, current OMNR approaches. Participant observation has provided a basis from which to better engage and conduct the research. However, the reader should be aware of my identity struggle. My position as both an apprentice of Anishinaabe Elders and an OMNR firefighter holds the potential to bias and confound the work.

3.4 Individual and Collaborative Analysis in the Study

3.4.1 Individual Analysis

Throughout the information-gathering and writing processes, it has become apparent that I have assumed the role of a storyteller in my own right through an encountering with and synthesizing of various voices, concepts and historical materials dealing with firefighting. This study is grounded in a level of experience, knowledge and qualification which gives me the authority to faithfully reconstruct the topic in my own words and arrange various quotes and passages according to my own understanding. Therefore, this is not a life history narrative document. It is a representative narrative based on subjective re-storying processes that I have used to restructure the material (Ollerenshaw and Creswell 2002).

A re-storying approach provides for a more central acknowledgement of the fact that the researchers, through their intellectual and interpretive biases, cannot truly claim to represent the complete voice of a research participants. They can only claim to represent a research participant's voice by proxy through their own voices. Once the final research product is tabled, the distance from the original speaker, as meted out through the perspective of the researcher, can be substantial. A re-storying approach acknowledges these circumstances. With it, I make a claim to rendering an approximate, representative account by explicitly adapting narrative/research data to my own ways of telling and understanding.

I have created a representative narrative that amalgamates and approximates testimony and evidence from a variety of sources into one single artifact. My approach in doing so encompasses what Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) refer to as a *three-dimensional* re-storying narrative approach. It is geared towards re-constructing a story by organizing data loosely according to lenses of *interaction, continuity and situation/place* that can be used to examine oral accounts. The lens of interaction includes attention to *personal* and *social* frames of analysis that firstly

identify the thoughts, feelings and values of an interview participant and, secondly, look outward to the operational contexts that illustrate how an individual has encountered and acted in the world. The lens of continuity embodies analysis of contexts of past, present and future through which participants frame their narrative and express their values and feelings. Continuity, at a basic level, substantiates participants testimony as a story that has a beginning, middle and end, as reflective of their own values and sensibilities. Finally, the lenses of situation and place deal with dimensions of the physical spaces and sites of exchange through which personal and social interactions are understood across time. This fills in the actual backdrop through which an individual's experiences and stories are constructed.

Mankowski (2000) has provided a basis through which the various testimonies of individuals can be compounded into a re-storying that scales up the focus to the level of a particular group. Mankowski's research, as centered on constructing narratives of grassroots organizations, looks at convergences in time, space and subject that tie a number of individual accounts into a combined narrative. By teasing out and grouping similar themes that emerge from different testimonies within a particular social or cultural group, we can begin to reconstruct a group identity. Because my re-storying process is fundamentally connected to understanding certain discrete groups within the field of firefighting, discovering the convergences within and distinctiveness between individuals from these two backgrounds has been a key analytical consideration. Mankowski's frame of re-storying analysis is useful in probing individual voices for concepts and terms of membership in certain collective settings. This lens can be used to understand Anishinaabe-newcomer relationships in forest firefighting as they emerge from the data.

Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) indicate that the level of reworking and recasting of source materials can vary in terms of how rigidly and systematically re-storying imposes a certain structure on the data set. In the present case, my own interpretations of the data have emerged in an organic, ad-hoc, improvisational manner without a conscious, systematic effort adhered to

from the very beginning. Several hours of data entry and reading and re-reading of the twenty-two interview transcripts generated through this research have allowed me to synthesize my own understanding of the data through a deep familiarization and personal reflection process. My understanding of Pikangikum people's historic participation in firefighting has emerged organically by combing through the transcripts at substantial length and reflecting on the themes and stories that tie the various testimonies together. Once I read over all the transcripts, pored through the photographs and reviewed certain published documents a number of times over, I then took the next step to physically cut and paste the various materials together on a thematic basis. Themes were improvised, refined and sometimes dropped altogether, as I attempted to 'line up' and encompass the story content as I understood it. For example, I manually grouped interview data to combine various statements with respect to smudge fires, roaring crown fires, early Anishinaabe firefighting involvement and understandings of institutional change within the program, etc. Through this process, a story slowly began to take shape.

3.4.2 Collaborative Analysis and Verification

While I feel I have cultivated enough of a grasp of the topic to serve as a historical storyteller in my own right, an important question must be asked with regard to the processes through which other concerned parties have qualified my level of authority in this regard. In using my own words and understandings, have I faithfully represented the feelings, thoughts and intentions of the people with which my research is concerned? Have I generated the proper qualifications to speak regarding these matters according to my research collaborators? Have I told the story correctly? Following Creswell (1998), this research can make a claim to validity vis-a-vis avenues of thick, rich description, prolonged engagement and triangulation. However, these avenues of verification have been much less meaningful to me in qualifying the work as compared to assessments offered through member-checking by my research community.

My research proceeded according to the terms and frameworks of a formal research cooperative agreement involving the PFN, the Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation, the University

of Manitoba Natural Resources Institute (NRI) and OMNR (WFMC 2004). The study has aimed to be reflexive by accepting direction in data collection and synthesis from PFN, OMNR and NRI, through workshops and meetings, as per the structure of this research partnership. Explicit to the research is the identification of PFN as the primary research partner and beneficiary of the study. Thus, data collection via documentary, interview and field sources, and data synthesis, as geared towards a representative narrative of firefighting in this region, has proceeded through an accordingly iterative, transparent process of full disclosure for the Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation. Whitefeather Elders in particular, as well as PFN community members, have been allowed advance review and comment on the work through a verification workshop conducted in March 2011. During this workshop they were given a one-hour presentation on my results. They then had the opportunity to comment on my level of accuracy, make changes to the research and direct the finished product as they saw fit.

Research verification was conducted mainly through member-checking and peer review (Creswell 1998). Member-checking was undertaken in a workshop setting with Pikangikum people and also through follow-up interviews with individuals external to the Whitefeather who have contributed information to the research. Three important groups include: 1) present staff at the Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters, 2) key Anishinaabe Elders from communities other than Pikangikum and 3) non-Native firefighting veterans who have moved on to other pursuits and careers. Through follow-up interviews, these various parties have been briefed on areas of my work that include their voices. They have been offered a chance to give their opinions and input on the content and conclusions of my historical story. This work has also been submitted to rigorous peer review by my committee members, whose expertise spans the fields of resource management, ethnohistory, anthropology and social and community-based research.

My authority to act as a storyteller with regard to Pikangikum Anishinaabe historical participation in firefighting is underpinned by a number of agencies. Among Anishinaabe Elders, I am claiming a status as a Beekuhcheekuhmeeng suhkeetayweeneenee deepuhcheemooweeeneeneeh^(WF). In

English, this means I am a Pikangikum Anishinaabe forest firefighting historical storytelling man. By extension, I am honored to note that a few Elders from Red Lake and Pikangikum have told me that I am a man who knows how to fight fires like Anishinaabeg have done. In the context of contemporary provincial firefighting knowledge, I am qualified to speak about firefighting because I have secured the necessary certification to practice it. Moreover, my results have been shared with and commented on by Fire Management personnel who have been a great help in refining the accuracy of the work with respect to policies, protocols and guidelines of fire management. I've also contacted non-Native participants to share some of my results and conclusions and gain clarification on certain statements. My academic committee has also reviewed the work at length in order to test its rigor. The resulting story has been formed and adapted on the basis of input from these various communities and groups.

3.5 Organization of the Results

Chapter Four deals specifically with the establishment of the fire base at Forestry Point. It also describes how Anishinaabe from Red Lake and Pikangikum came to be involved in the establishment of the institution and practice of firefighting. It also details a rich ground of cross-cultural interaction that was formed through a solid marriage between the strong firefighting competencies held by Pikangikum people and the institutional underpinnings of the Department of Lands and Forests (DLF). For roughly forty years (1930-1970), local Anishinaabeg, Pikangikum people and the DLF cultivated a deep, mutually respectful bond that helped them work together as part of the same 'fire family' within this field of practice. Chapter Five focuses on the specific knowledge of how to fight fires as was taught to me by Pikangikum Elders. These practices were learned through teachings offered by the Elders and senior non-Native Fire Rangers that came before them. This chapter showcases a number of relevant tactics with respect to forest firefighting that were taught by Native and non-Native Fire Bosses and passed down within Anishinaabe circles of practice. Chapter Six concentrates on a period in which the institutional restructuring of the field of firefighting (ca. 1970-present) resulted in a veritable extinguishment of Anishinaabe knowledge, agency and capital in firefighting. This section focuses on important

issues with respect to the alignment of culture, power and agency in shaping the field of firefighting in Ontario. Chapter Six also underscores the fact that Anishinaabe participation in firefighting is not easily cultivated and supported through an environment in which English-speaking, Euro-Canadian norms, rules and logic are held as a sole standard. Following this, Chapter Seven brings in an ethnographic, sociological and ethnohistorical analysis of the topic. It aims to distill the story and forward key recommendations to increase Anishinaabe firefighting participation.

Chapter Four

4.0 Anishinaabeg and the DLF at Forestry Point

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the first four decades of forest fire fighting in the Red Lake region (ca. 1930s-1970s). It begins by offering a description of the creation and development of firefighting institutions, continues with an illustration of the practical and logistical aspects of fire protection and ends with a representation of the unique relationships forged between Anishinaabe people and the Department of Lands and Forests. The chapter describes aspects of the cultural and economic landscape in existence around the time of the Gold rush in 1925-26 and highlights some of the rich and longstanding partnerships that were forged by newcomers and local Anishinaabe people within the early fire program. Forestry Point, which currently continues to serve as the seat of forest fire protection services in the Red Lake District, became a site of significant cross-cultural exchange between a pre-existing Anishinaabe population and a new breed of provincial workers charged with the protection of natural resources in the area.

The historical story offered here shows a considerable degree of collaboration and partnership involving Fire program workers and Anishinaabeg of the Lac Seul/Red Lake and Pikangikum communities. It highlights the work and contributions of key historical figures from a variety of backgrounds in developing and maintaining these partnerships. It also shows that Pikangikum Anishinaabeg came to develop a high level of representation in the Fire program which was maintained into the early 1970s by way of their work as Extra Fire Fighters and, most importantly, through seasonal-recurring positions on Unit Crews. The chapter concludes with the years immediately prior to changes brought about when the Department of Lands and Forests was reorganized into the Ministry of Natural Resources, ca. early 1970s.

4.2 Historical Context: The Red Lake Gold Rush

Beginning in 1925, rapid social and economic changes occurred in the Red Lake area of northwestern Ontario. These changes were triggered by the discovery of significant gold deposits there during that year. An in-migration of prospectors and entrepreneurs signaled the birth of an entirely new economy in the region. As miners and settlers moved in, new industrial pursuits quickly overshadowed the established network of trading posts, forts, summer gathering places and winter trap lines of the fur trade era. Goods, supplies and equipment were moved north en masse to fuel the gold enterprise. New travel routes and supply networks were carved into the landscape. Settlements, small villages and hamlets, populated by a collection of eager souls from the south, sprang up over a few months. A new pattern of land use established as mines began production by the mid 1930s. While not entirely overnight, the Red Lake gold rush was surely the closest thing to an overnight change that the region's Anishinaabe occupants had seen in their lifetimes.

Prior to the outset of the gold rush, a number of Anishinaabeg families occupied the Red Lake and surrounding region. At that time, most Anishinaabeg continued to organize themselves into customary family or extended family units that occupied and 'worked', i.e., hunted, fished, trapped and harvested in particular expanses of territory. The Red Lake region's Anishinaabeg were a highly mobile people who were linked together by a broad set of kin associations and family ties that spanned the waterways of northwestern Ontario. Genealogical information reveals the complexity of movements and family ties in the region. For example, families that held Band membership, winter trap lines and hunting areas close to Pikangikum, and in reserves downstream on the Berens River, also gathered at summer fishing and meeting sites near Lac Seul, Grassy Narrows and Cat Lake (Gary Butikofer, personal communication, February 18, 2010; Agger 2008; WFMC 2006).

Under Treaties 3 and 5, signed in 1873 and 1875, Ojibwa Indian Bands had retained the right to continue their pre-existing subsistence activities within any portion of land they had originally ceded to the Crown. Although Anishinaabeg were encouraged to settle down on Indian reserves for the whole year, several families continued to operate according to their treaty rights well into the early 20th century. Band members collected summertime treaty annuity payments at their assigned reserve communities; visiting with relatives, setting fishing nets and holding public functions at these sites. During the fall and winter, many family groups fanned out across the land to trap and harvest from their own respective family territories (Agger 2008).

The movement of southerners into the Red Lake area brought some acute changes to these pre-existing Anishinaabe land use patterns. This influx was a special matter of concern for various Band members whose family harvest areas were located along the gold rush trail (Agger 2008). During this era, Anishinaabeg also came to grips with the fact that Treaty 3 and 5 subsistence rights were in fact conditional rather than inalienable. Anishinaabeg could hunt and trap where they wanted within the Treaty area to which their Band belonged. However, the Crown was also authorized to take up these areas of land for other uses as it deemed fit. If areas used for moose hunting, fishing or trapping happened to be claimed for forestry, mining or hydroelectric activities, Anishinaabeg had no other recourse but to adapt in response to these new uses. A large influx of people into Red Lake created a concern that pre-existing ways of life could be squeezed out as other land uses took effect (Agger 2008).

Anishinaabeg proved able to improvise in the face of these regional changes. Prior to 1925, Red Lake region Anishinaabeg were longstanding partners in the commercial fur trade and participated in a variety of associated economic pursuits alongside white newcomers. During the early 1900s, the Hudson's Bay trading house at Post Narrows, Red Lake, was one of many outlets that had facilitated Anishinaabeg participation in a market economy for furs. Some Anishinaabeg had also worked in the Red Lake region providing traders, religious and government representatives with a variety of services such as freighting, food harvesting, guiding,

manufacturing and translating. By 1926, independent trading houses, white villages and mines established along the gold rush trail became new loci for commerce and exchange. As a new monetary economy grew, it opened up new possibilities for employment that were of interest to some local Anishinaabeg (Agger 2008). The Department of Lands and Forests represented one such opportunity.

4.3 The Early Fire Program

The Ontario Department of Lands and Forests (DLF) was the agency in charge of natural resources in this province. Agency personnel speculated that rapid increases in mining, prospecting and other activities in the Red Lake area would be accompanied by a higher frequency of human-caused fires (OMNR 1986). As more people moved north, there was an increased risk of wildfires sparked from production facilities, heavy machinery, campfires and even discarded cigarettes. Ontario was becoming well aware that settlement, industrial expansion and forest fire outbreaks went hand-in-hand, as well as head-to-head. By the time of the Red Lake gold rush, Ontario's northern hinterlands had already played host to a series of accidental, catastrophic fire outbreaks that had burned out entire towns, consuming human lives, property and infrastructure, along with several thousand acres of valuable timber (Pyne 2007). One important fact, pointed out by Red Lake OMNR Far North Planner Lee Gerrish, is that early prospectors sometimes brazenly set fire to the bush to more quickly clear off their claim areas. This potential source of fire outbreak was a special concern in the wake of a mining boom at Red Lake.

At the very outset of the gold rush, the DLF had dedicated fire protection resources under its Forestry Branch to cover a huge expanse of territory encompassing the Red Lake area. Sioux Lookout Forestry District Headquarters, seated to the southeast of Red Lake, was responsible for suppressing fires within a large area extending roughly northwards from Dryden to Pikangikum and westwards from the present Wabakimi Provincial Park/Nipigon region to the Manitoba border (Lambert 1967). The area was further broken down into three Chief Ranger Divisions that were

each assigned a third of the District. The Red Lake Division covered the westernmost area bordering Manitoba (Lambert 1967). Its Headquarters was first situated at the hamlet of Goldpines, near Ear Falls, Ontario, with a Deputy Headquarters at Howey Bay on the present town site of Red Lake. Red Lake Division fire rangers almost immediately encountered a landscape riddled with wildfires. In 1928, 43 fires were recorded. In 1929, the number shot up to 121. In 1930, there were another 60 fires handled in the division. Half of the 63 fires recorded in the 1932 division records were attributed to human causes (OMNR 1986).

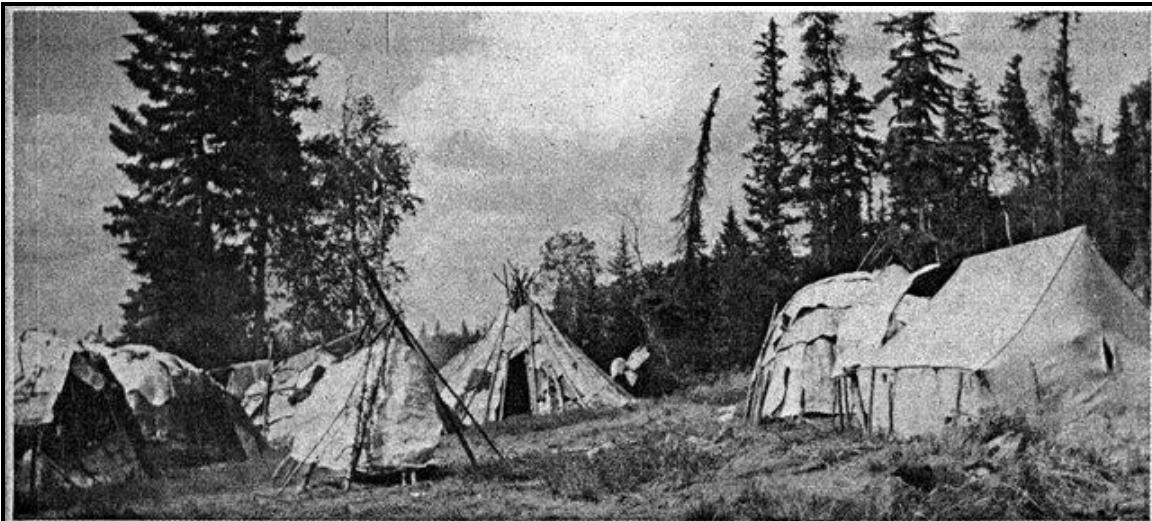
4.4 Anishinaabeg and the Formation of Forestry Point Under the DLF

As forest fires held the potential to burn through areas of settlement and infrastructure in and around the fledgling town of Red Lake, Fire Branch personnel understandably welcomed any additional resources or infrastructure that could support the growth of Forestry Branch services throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Early DLF Ranger staff, made up of a small number of dedicated personnel, could quickly find that they had their hands full when multiple fires started over the course of a few days or weeks (OMNR 1986). The Ontario Provincial Air Service (OPAS), with its modest fleet of bush planes, served a key role in fire protection by transporting equipment, supplies and people, and providing patrols for fire detection. Bush planes, combined with a ready supply of able bodies, gave the Forestry Branch a fighting chance to control wildfires on a priority basis (Lambert 1967). But the small Deputy Headquarters located at Howey Bay, in the bustling core of Red Lake, didn't have adequate space to dock OPAS float planes, cache equipment or stage firefighting personnel. Red Lake needed more staff, more equipment and more capabilities. In order to increase the effectiveness of forest fire services, a new site of operations was required (OMNR 1986).



Plate 2: Aerial photo of Forestry Point taken by Forestry pilot Jake Siegel, ca. 1950s. Taken from OMNR (1986).
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On the southern shore of Red Lake, a few kilometers west of the present town site, lies a spit of land jutting out into the lake which has come to be known as Forestry Point. The site retains this name due to its eight decades of use as a DLF – OMNR forest and fire management headquarters. Archaeological excavations conducted at Forestry Point have also confirmed its use by a variety of pre-contact First Nations people over several hundred years. The finds included pottery, tools and even burials associated with a wide range of cultural traditions and periods reaching back to the Shield Archaic Period. Artifacts found at the site have also hinted at occupation during the historic fur trade period (OMNR 1986). Forestry Point had been a highly attractive location for people throughout the ages. Unsurprisingly, photographic evidence kept by the family of one of the early Red Lake Division Fire Rangers suggests that Anishinaabe people continued to use the site in the years immediately following the gold discovery.

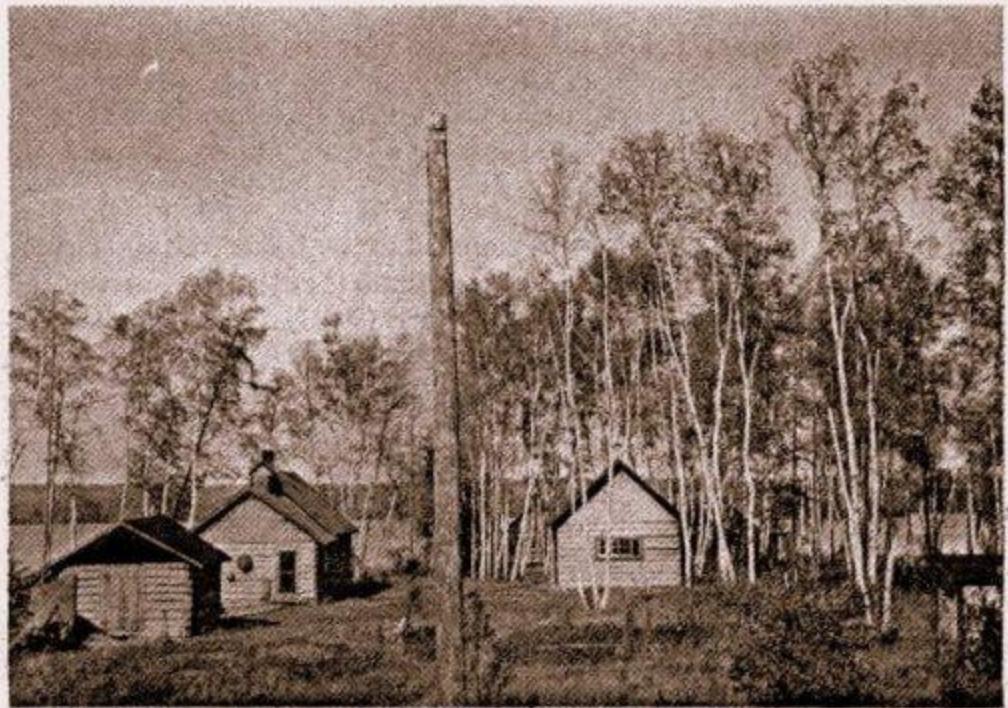


OJIBWAY CAMP SITE at Forestry Point on the east shore. This site has been used by a variety of Indian cultures for approximately 2,500 years. During the late twenties and into the thirties people camped here in order to obtain jobs firefighting.

Photo Courtesy of Jessie Taylor

Plate 3: Anishinaabe occupation site at Forestry Point. Taken from OMNR (1986).
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In the eyes of Forestry Branch personnel, the physical characteristics of 'The Point' made it a highly advantageous site for Red Lake's Deputy Headquarters. It had adequate space to place buildings, facilities and equipment, as well as shorelines on the east and west that offered a perfect approach and docking area for aircraft and boats. By 1928, Forestry Branch resources were fully dedicated to the development of this site (OMNR 1986).



ONTARIO FORESTRY BRANCH Deputy Chief Headquarters at Forestry Point, Red Lake. Built during the 1928 and '29 fire season by Deputy Ben Perrigo and his Forest Rangers. Buildings include icehouse, cookery and bunkhouse. An office, warehouse, gashouse, root cellar and radio shack were also completed by 1931.

Photo Courtesy of Jessie Taylor

Plate 4: Early photo of Forestry Point outbuildings. Taken from OMNR (1986).

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The specific names of Forestry Point's Anishinaabe inhabitants during the 1920s are not well recorded. However, as people moved in and out of the Red Lake area from many surrounding points, it is plausible that Pikangikum and Lac Seul Band members visited the site at various points over time. Western portions of Red Lake, towards the upper reaches of the Bloodvein River, were most recently occupied by descendants of a principal Anishinaabe man known as Paishk (Nighthawk)^(JP). In addition, the many descendants of the late Gizhik (Sky)^(A) Sam Keesic (1829-1929) of Trout Lake, to the immediate northeast, also used the Red Lake area during the early 1900s (Gary Butikofer, personal communication, February 18, 2010). Certain Pikangikum families were also close to these Lac Seul Band groups. At Kirkness, Stormer and Little Vermillion Lakes to the north of Red Lake, the King family headed by the late Neekeekooneeneeh

(Otter Man)^(WF) (1867-1963) maintained ties with some of the Keesics and Paishks during the early 1900s as well (Gary Butikofer, personal communication, February 18, 2010). Red Lake was positioned as a sort of mid-point between these families, and likely others as well.

Forestry Point itself was remembered through oral tradition as a very significant site for local families who moved through and used the area immediately prior to the gold rush. Joe Paishk, a Lac Seul/Red Lake Elder whose ancestors include both Paishk and Gizhik Sam Keesic, shared a story of Forestry Point that provokes a deep consideration of its cultural significance:

And right here on this side, around here, were the small crosses. Used to be an Indian, uh...burial, old Indian burial by the building there. But they never told them about the graveyard there. 'Cause they didn't want to say anything. And their ceremonies were right there. And there used to be a flag there. And that's where all the people were living on the other side. I know. Because I walked there and I'd see these little crosses here and there. [We] didn't tell the white people that; there's no such thing in there.

(Lac Seul Band Elder Joe Paishk of Red Lake to M. Sanders, Oct. 17, 2008.)

Joe Paishk indicated that before the establishment of the firebase, Anishinaabeg had most recently used Forestry Point as a locale for ceremonies and as a place where loved ones could be laid to rest. His oral tradition was inherited directly from Anishinaabe family members who lived in the Red Lake area into the early 20th century. Joe discussed some of the family affiliations of Anishinaabeg who occupied 'The Point' and also conveyed a sense of the gravity of changes that occurred when the Forestry Branch came into their midst:

Well, according to what I hear, the story was when the Keesics were....some Keesics were living there. And then one day the pilot was flying by and he sees this point. 'Cause the pilot used to be over there across the lake on the island someplace. I was told, and what my uncles told me, they, the white man, came; kicked all the Indians out of there. Yeah. That's where they kicked everybody out and started building. They just kick 'em out of there. And they moved to along the bay there; that's where the Keesics used to live. When my uncle told me, he said, it was a very sad moment after they threw everybody out of there. And that Kinsmen Beach, that used to be all Anishinaabeg living in there too on the side of the hill. That's what he was told. He told me that too and he just passed it on to us...To this day, after the new building was up and Uncle George was paddling over here someplace and he stopped there. He remembered how people lived there. He was telling me that. It was 20 years, 15 years ago, when he was still in health, he said he'd seen a vision; people standing along here; where the new building was

there. Well, he was still, and he had tears in his eyes and....just a short vision of it; and it came clear. He'd seen...he said he could see graveyards in behind the buildings.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Oct. 17, 2008.)

Joe's uncle, the late George Nadoway^(A) Keesic, told him that the Anishinaabeg who came before them were still there, in spirit, at Forestry Point. While the matter was not openly discussed with Forestry Branch representatives, family members were buried there. The establishment of fire operations at Forestry Point was also remembered as a solemn matter; the immediate site was removed from its pre-existing sphere of Anishinaabeg use. Joe accordingly related the feeling that Anishinaabeg had been 'kicked out' of the site in the wake of these developments. This was the story he had heard.

4.4.1 Keesic Bay

While some hard feelings are associated with Forestry Point's past, it is also notable that relationships between Fire Branch staff and a key extended family of Lac Seul Band Anishinaabeg became very tight in the years following its establishment. To the east of Forestry Point, the shoreline curves into a small bay where Anishinaabeg continued to live after the construction of the fire base. Red Lake locals and fire personnel variously referred to this location as Keesic Bay, or Keesicville. Today, when proceeding down the road to the firebase, one can still find a driveway leading to a house on the shore that has remained the home of an elderly Keesic family member and is marked with a sign reading 'Keesic Bay'.

Red Lake Anishinaabeg continued to live near Forestry Point at Keesic Bay in decades following the gold rush. The 1928 establishment of the firebase spelled an end to Anishinaabeg use of the immediate area at Forestry Point. However, Anishinaabeg continued to live just down the shore. Also, in what could be seen as a sort of trade-off for their apparent removal from the site, many Keesic family members secured employment with the Deputy Ranger Headquarters quite soon after its establishment (OMNR 1986).

These events were also spoken about among the Keesic's Anishinaabe neighbors to the north. Pikangikum Elders, for instance, retain a living memory of when the DLF came to Forestry Point. With the help of Charlie Pascal as an interpreter, I was able to ask one of the most senior Elders, Whitehead Moose, who recently passed away at the age of around 96, if he remembered whether any of his nearby Anishinaabeg neighbors lived at Forestry Point before the firebase was built:

Charlie: Just a little. Just a few. Yeah, what he heard is that the Anishinaabeg were first there and then, when they found...like the mine started there. They started like, you know, telling them to move somewhere else. But Anishinaabeg were there. Even though they were told to leave that area, but eventually they stayed for that Fire Centre there.

Whitehead: ...Isaac Keesic...Jiimis[...]

Mike: Did he fight fire with Isaac Keesic too?

Charlie: Yeah he knows how to fight fires, he says.

(The late Pikangikum Elder Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)

4.4.2 Isaac Keesic and the Anishinaabeg of Forestry Point

When asked about the establishment of Forestry Point, the first names that came to Whitehead's mind were Isaac and Jiimis^(A) James Keesic. A number of research participants involved in the project offered stories that illustrated longstanding associations between the Forestry Point site, members of the Keesic family and the Fire Branch. Who were these Keesic family members? As mentioned before, it's unclear who was using Forestry Point close to the time the firebase was established there. However, as early as the mid to late 1930s, the name Isaac Nadoway Keesic became synonymous both with Forestry Point and with early Anishinaabeg participation in fire fighting.



Plate 5: Keesic Family Forestry workers, sometime after 1938. Along the railing of the truck, left to right: Leo, Jiimis James, Sandy, Tom, Murray and either Jimmy Sam or Johnny Sam. In the box of the truck: George Sam Keesic. Photo provided by Helen Keesic Yutzy of Red Lake.
Used by Permission.

In the eyes of current Pikangikum Elders, Nishki'aa^(A) Isaac Keesic was the “Big Boss” (Norman Quill, Nov. 5, 2008). When it came to fire fighting, Nishki'aa “knew everything” (Matthew Strang, Sept. 12, 2008). His name quite frequently enters into Anishinaabe narratives of fire fighting laid out further in this work. The late Isaac Keesic’s Anishinaabe name was Nishki'aa (1901-1977), which translates roughly in English as Make You Mad, or, To Make Mad (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008). His father, the late Robert Nadoway Keesic, was a Lac Seul Band member and a son of the prominent Gzhik Sam Keesic who maintained winter trapping territories in the region immediately to the north and east of Red Lake at Nungessor and Trout Lakes. Nishki'aa also trapped with his father Robert Nadoway Keesic and their family friend, Neekeekoooneeneeh Otter man Henry King Sr. of Pikangikum. Nishki'aa was known to frequent Lac Seul and Red Lake at various points in his young life (Gary Butikofer, personal communication, February 18, 2010). Along with the Paishk family, Isaac and other Keesics were known to have associations with the Pipestone Bay area at the west end of Red Lake (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008).

Nishki'aa Isaac also worked a variety of jobs over the summer in the Lac Seul area prior to his marriage to Neekeekooneeneeh's daughter, Annie King of Pikangikum, in 1932. The Forestry Branch at Goldpines, Ear Falls hired Nishki'aa after his marriage, presumably to fight fires and likely also carry out other Forestry-related tasks. According to his son the late Tom Keesic, Isaac moved permanently to Red Lake in 1936, where he began to work at the Red Lake firebase at Forestry Point. He was accompanied by his older brother Sam Nadoway Keesic. Isaac Keesic's three brothers, Jiimis James, Alec and George Nadoway Keesic, as well as some of his sons and nephews, also eventually joined Isaac at Keesic Bay (Gary Butikofer, personal communication, February 18, 2010). This group also came to include a branch of Keesic relatives known as 'the Sams', including Jimmy Sam, George Sam and Johnny Sam Keesic (Joe Paishk, Nov. 27, 2008). Like Isaac, Jiimis and other Keesic relatives had seen some work as fire fighters at Goldpines, Ear Falls during the late twenties and early thirties (Butikofer, G., personal communication, February 18, 2010; Jake Siegel, Nov. 28, 2008).

Interestingly, Isaac's 1936 move to Red Lake happened in the same year that Forestry Point was rededicated from a Deputy Ranger base to a Chief Ranger Headquarters. This change meant that Red Lake became the Headquarters for the entire Division with Goldpines then geared down to a secondary base (OMNR 1986). It is possible that the increased centralization of fire fighting resources at Forestry Point after 1936 resulted in better hiring opportunities. Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic excelled in the Red Lake fire program in the years following. John Macfie (2010) visited Forestry Point during the 1960s as a Fish and Wildlife Officer and identifies Mr. Isaac Keesic as holding a Deputy Ranger position immediately below the Chief Ranger at Forestry Point. As a Deputy Ranger, Nishki'aa was responsible for securing workers and equipment, arranging for their delivery to the fire and overseeing suppression activities in the field.



FORESTRY GARDENERS heading west on Red Lake to tend a forestry garden on an island. Pictured are, from left, James Keesic, Tom Keesic, George Keesic, Roy Keesic.

Photo by Isaac Keesic

Plate 6: Keesic Family Forestry workers in motorboat. Date Unknown Taken from OMNR (1986).
© Queens Printer for Ontario, 1986. Reproduced by permission.

The relationship between the Keesic family and the Forestry Branch representatives at Red Lake came to run deep. In fact, there was evidence of a working partnership, perhaps even a sense of kinship, which developed between the Anishinaabeg and the newcomers in charge of fire protection. This was exemplified by special arrangements between the Keesic family, headed by Nishki'aa, Isaac Keesic, and a Chief Ranger, name unknown, who presided at the firebase at some point prior to 1955:

But when my uncle came to...when the boss came over to my uncle's house and they came and shook his hand; just by word of mouth they said any relative that lived at that Forestry Point, you're welcome to work as long as you live, or they live. There was no...there was an agreement just shaking his hands. I don't know his name. That was before Ross Williams showed up.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Oct. 17, 2008)

It may have been Chief Ranger Frank Dodds, who immediately preceded Ross Williams, prior to 1955 (OMNR 1986), or perhaps even an earlier manager, who first struck a special verbal agreement with Isaac Keesic regarding his family's employment with the Forestry Branch. According to Joe Paishk, it was an agreement that was meant to last over time; and for a considerable time, it did. Joe Paishk related that as Isaac and Jiimis approached retirement, they were called upon to select sons and nephews who showed adequate skills, initiative and interest to hire on at the firebase (Joe Paishk, Oct. 17, 2008). As records suggest, Chief Rangers came and went rather quickly within a five to ten-year period (OMNR 1986). But Keesic family participation lasted for almost 50 years. The late Samuel 'Big Joe' Keesic, whom I spoke with on a few occasions, was the last Keesic family member to retire in 1999 after a career of over 30 years.

4.4.3 A Special 'Fire Family'

Early Forestry Branch personnel were sometimes remembered to hold a great measure of respect for Red Lake Anishinaabeg workers, as evidenced through the experience of Joe Paishk. Joe, who was raised by Isaac for part of his early life, noted that when he joined on in 1956 he was initially skeptical of working with white people because of his prior experience in residential schools. However, he vividly recalled that the management staff at Red Lake went out of their way to communicate the fact that those kinds of negative relationships would not be part of the way DLF did business:

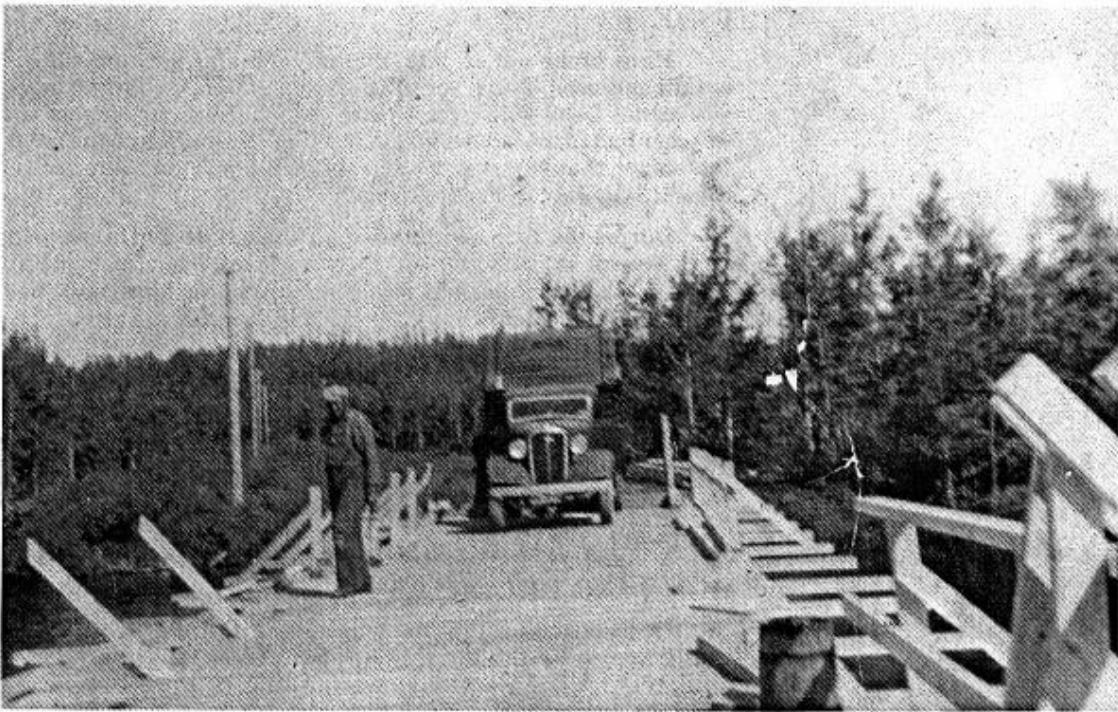
It was Ross Williams [who] was my boss. Yeah. And then he talked to me, he called me in his office. And he said: "I want you to sit down." He said: "I know the situation." He said: "Cause your uncle talked to me. But, let's just get over it and we'll do something right." He was not the only one. There was Art Larson and Jack Legace came and talked to me about it too. And they said: "We're not like them guys back then" [in residential school] eh? So much problems...And then [May] Yakiwchuk said to me "You know, let's just work together. Be a family, close together." ...And then, after all the meetings, they got up and shook my hand. That's the first time somebody *really* shook my hand. That was really shocking to me. Nobody ever shook my hand in school like they had now...Then I work with them every year ever since.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Oct. 17, 2009)

While discrimination at the hands of newcomers has been cited as a limiting factor in Anishinaabeg employment mobility in the Red Lake area in the 1940s and 1950s (Agger 2008), Joe Paishk characterized early Fire Branch managers such as Ross Williams, Art Larsen and Jack Legace as being much more forward-thinking than white people he had known previously during his residential school experience. In his recollection, the Forestry Branch managers proved that they were working beyond some of the discriminatory paradigms that existed in other institutions and social contexts. Fire representatives valued the Keesic family enough to extend a special measure of consideration to some of its members. As Joe Paishk notes, this consideration marked his own membership in a 'fire family' which lasted for twenty years until his retirement in the mid-1970s.

4.4.4 Building the Fire Base, Building Relationships

Because the improvement of Forestry Point facilities was a constant concern during the 1930s and 1940s (OMNR 1986), special partnerships with the Keesics were likely forged for practical reasons. In early years, there was a lot of work to be done around the base. In addition to working as fire fighters, the Keesic family was employed on Forestry Branch infrastructure projects in the initial years of the firebase's establishment. This included the linking of Forestry Point with the town site of Red Lake through road and bridge building, as well as the construction of outbuildings and docks and the operation of a lumber mill near the Point. Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic served as foreman during the construction of the Skookum Bay Bridge, just east of Forestry Point, in 1944 and '45. His sons and nephews, interestingly enough, worked alongside a team of men from Pikangikum to complete this project (OMNR 1986).



LANDS AND FORESTS' FIRST TRUCK in Red lake. This 1938 Ford two-ton with its hand-crank dump was first used to construct a road from Forestry Point to the Town of Red lake. Here Isaac Keesic, foreman for the Skookum Bay bridge, heads a crew including son Roy and men from Pikangikum.

Photo by Roy Keesic.

Plate 7: Isaac Keesic working on the Skookum Bay bridge. Taken from OMNR (1986).
© Queens Printer for Ontario, 1986. Reproduced by permission.

Isaac's standing in the program likely gave him the clout to pick workers for specific jobs from time to time. Also, both Isaac Keesic and his brother Alec had married daughters of Neekeekooneeneeh Henry King Sr. from Pikangikum (Gary Butikofer, personal communication, February 18, 2010) Thus, it is not surprising that early working relationships at the firebase involved members of the Red Lake/Lac Seul and Pikangikum Anishinaabe communities, who were maintaining associations with one another from an early period. Issac's endorsement of Pikangikum people was also reinforced through the fact that Pikangikum people had already built up their own solid reputation as reliable bush workers by the late 1940s.

4.5 Beginnings of Pikangikum Involvement



Plate 8: Aerial photo of Pikangikum taken in 1947.
Photo by floatplane pilot Jake Siegel. Courtesy of WFMC.

Retired OPAS/OMNR pilot Jake Siegel, who came to Red Lake in 1947, explained his understanding of Pikangikum's early firefighting contributions, as well as their exemplary record of service with the Ontario Land Survey, to Lee Gerrish, Red Lake District OMNR, and I:

Lee: So when would they have started going into Pikangikum to pick up crews for fire?

Jake: Oh right from the start! I guess they used them before I got here. Because they had a Stinson [floatplane] here before I got here. So they must have had them...I really don't know just how far back it goes. But they were a good bunch of guys...[T]he baseline goes through a part of Pikangikum and just a little bit to the west it stops. There was a guy; I think the guy's name was Harding. He was there in 1895 or so. So when I got this, umm, these guys from Toronto - I forgot the guy's name now – well, he was going to find the spot, the pin where the guy [Harding] had stopped. I don't know how many miles it was to the Manitoba border. And he was going to complete the survey line to the border. So he told me where to take him, I landed and he walked away a bit. And he found the pin and from then on, he had the line cut right to the Manitoba border. And he had the Pikangikum guys to help him. And they were so good, he was so impressed with them, that he came back year after year after year! He ignored other places just so he could come back...and of course...they cut these base lines, and then there were these survey lines to the north...

Lee: Well the one through Pikangikum would have been called the eleventh baseline I guess. What were the north baselines going up?

Jake: Yeah. We went up as far as umm, what was the reserve? I can't remember the name...North Spirit. And we went up as far as that. Maybe a little bit farther. Yeah he kept on coming back year after year; he was so impressed with them!

(Jake Siegel to M. Sanders and L. Gerrish, Nov. 28, 2008)

According to Lambert (1967), a government land surveyor by the name of K.G. Ross visited the Pikangikum Reserve in the early 1900s after the reserve boundaries had been laid out. Ross was in charge of cutting the 11th baseline, which actually passes right through the very middle of the Pikangikum Reserve. As he approached Pikangikum, Ross unsurprisingly found that his work aroused the concern of Pikangikum band members, including the Chief. His solution was to arrange for Pikangikum people to accompany him as workers on the survey line in order to allay their concerns about his intentions and conduct. Through their efforts, and that of subsequent survey parties, the 11th baseline was completed from Pikangikum to the Manitoba border in 1952. Other northward and eastward survey lines in the region were also completed by 1955 (Lambert 1967). Jake Siegel recalled that Pikangikum workers were used extensively in these undertakings. Pikangikum Elder Charlie Peters, currently in his early-mid eighties, spoke on a number of occasions about working on these same survey parties. His son Alex recalled that Charlie was specifically requested to supervise the Pikangikum workers who joined survey crews (Alex Peters, Nov. 9, 2008). Jake Siegel indicated that Pikangikum people had already built up a number of years of involvement in fighting fires by this time as well (Jake Siegel, Nov. 28, 2008).

The need for ready labor that could be relied upon for heavy and remote 'bush' work was important to early fire protection operations. During the 1930s and 1940, Red Lake Headquarters retained anywhere from five to ten people on the payroll for the fire season, roughly the months of April through October, and perhaps as few as three or four staff for the entire year. When needed, Red Lake Division could hire additional workers during times in which their small complement of personnel had more fires than it could deal with, Chief and Deputy Rangers were extended the authority to employ any individuals who were readily available to work. These additional hires were referred to as Extra Fire Fighters (EFFs) and remained in the employ of the DLF on a

temporary basis for the duration of a given fire incident or level of need. Sometimes, if a forest fire burned close to town, locals would be rounded up in trucks and hired as EFFs to battle the blaze. If a fire burning in the required additional resources, an appointed Deputy Ranger would sometimes hop on a plane to the closest reserve, perhaps either Lac Seul or Pikangikum, any men available in the community, dispatching them by air or boat to contain it. Any able-bodied man who was within shouting distance when the call for fire fighters came could participate in fire fighting. EFF Hiring was totally informal, conducted on the spot as per the basis of need, and training took place on the job in an equally informal manner. There was little in the way of strictly formalized DLF standards that governed which individuals were deemed competent in carrying out these tasks.



Plate 9: The late Elder Whitehead Moose (Photo by M. R. Sanders).

The oldest Pikangikum community member I spoke with, the late Elder Wuhbeequay^(WF) Whitehead Moose, provided me with insight on the earliest times of Pikangikum's participation in firefighting from his own personal experience. Whitehead recalled that he had first fought fires at around the age of 27, which would have been approximately between 1939 and 1942. He worked most actively as a fire fighter for a period of about ten years. There was no special work wear required, and the wage was one dollar per day. Whitehead was hired on directly from the

community and would travel to the site of the fire either by floatplane or canoe (Whitehead Moose, Sept. 4, 2008).

Mike: I'd like to ask [Whitehead] about when he first started fighting fires. How was it that he was hired?

Charlie Pascal: He says here in Pikangikum, I think it was here in Pikangikum. There was no selection or anything for the firefighters he says. You just have to go with them...I guess in those days it was good pay. Like pay; that was the reason. And he was really active. I guess the Fire Boss³ knew that there were people who were active here, like working, and they get to...the reason they hired Pikangikum...Yeah they used all these communities up north. And this was mainly the place where they used to get firefighters. Because they knew we'd do a good job. And that's the truth. I never stopped for once...one minute firefighting in my days. And we try to put it out so we can go home early [laughs]...And if we were lazy we would have stayed there all summer! Fighting the same fire [laughter]! And that was the reason we done that; work hard to put out the fire so we can come home early! [laughter]

(Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)

Pikangikum Anishinaabeg like Whitehead were hired an on 'as-needed' basis for temporary EFF work directly from the community. During this period, it is not clear that Pikangikum Chief and Council were necessarily involved in the negotiation. Largely, it was as simple as being the first one at the dock to hop on an approaching plane. Pikangikum Elder Ooweehcheh^(WF) Alec Suggashie recalls this type of hiring taking place into the early 1960s:

Alec – Yeah that's what happened in those days, where MNR didn't really let people know in advance, like call that he's picking up workers or firefighters and that's what usually happened, like you know, you see a plane landing and just had to go check it out what the reason the plane was landing for and I guess MNR coming to pick up firefighters and I guess anybody could just hop on planes for firefighting.

(Elder Alec Suggashie in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, July 22, 2008)

For DLF Rangers, Pikangikum held a wealth of readily accessible workers who could be quickly deployed depending on the location and size of a fire. Quite early on, there was also a consensus

³ The title Fire Boss was used historically by the DLF and OMNR to identify the senior field supervisor of a specific fire incident. Anishinaabe people have also used the word Suhkeetayweekeemuh^(WF), or Fire Boss, to refer more broadly to individuals holding a position of authority in firefighting, be it either ascribed by the institution or embodied by virtue of their experience. My use of the title throughout this work is derived from Anishinaabe sources. For further reading on the Anishinaabe use of the term Weekeemuh^(WF), or Boss, see Hallowell (1992), PFN and OMNR (2006) and Nikischer (2008).

that Pikangikum people were competent at doing this as well as a variety of ‘bush’ jobs (Jake Siegel, Nov. 28, 2008).

From a Pikangikum perspective, fire fighting was a valued pursuit because there were very few other avenues to engage in a wage economy directly from the community (Elder Ohweeghan^(WF) Matthew Strang, Sept. 12, 2008). As Whitehead Moose (Nov. 12, 2008) recalled, there was also nothing in the way of ‘support’, or social assistance, during his early fire career. Most people were still mostly engaged in a kind of ‘bush’ economy, including subsistence harvest, fur production, and commercial fishing. When it came around, summer fire fighting work fit well with the seasonal round of 1940s Anishinaabeg who were engaged in trapping and fishing (commercial and subsistence) over the fall, winter and spring. As Whitehead noted, pay was the main reason Anishinaabeg started working on fires. The bigger the fire, the more people from the community would be hired. As opposed to present day, fire fighting was much more dependent on human labor due to the absence of technology such as water bombers and helicopters. Therefore it was possible to find anywhere from 20 to 40 EFFs on even a moderate sized fire. As Elder Whitehead Moose notes, Pikangikum people were known to do a good job. They worked hard, sometimes for long periods, to put the fire out. Their efforts were also recognized by key individuals involved in the early development of the Fire program in Red Lake.

4.5.1 Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach Art Larsen



Plate 10: Photo of Art Larsen as a Ranger. Art is visible at far right.
Courtesy of the Red Lake Public Library.

During the 1930s and 1940s very few white people aside from a handful of Rangers were involved in fire fighting at the ground level. In fact, Elders such as Ooweeguhn Matthew Strang (Sept. 12, 2008) recalled that the teams of fire fighters he worked with (ca. 1950s) were almost exclusively Anishinaabeg. White people's presence in the program only increased as pay increased during later years because, as Ooweeguhn joked, white people 'didn't like to get their hands dirty'. Nevertheless, it is true that newcomers were present on crews and often held a supervisory role in a number of instances. From an organizational perspective, Deputy and Chief Rangers were in fact central to the task of recruiting and organizing Pikangikum EFF workers for specific fires.

Many veteran fire fighters in Pikangikum were familiar with a white man named Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach^(WF) ('Round Ass Man', 'Round Bum Man') who worked closely with Pikangikum people on fires for many years (Whitehead Moose, Nov. 12, 2008). Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach was Art Larsen (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008), who was involved in fire fighting at Forestry Point

for roughly three decades, serving as a Deputy Ranger, as well as a Deputy Chief in the later stages of his career (OMNR 1986). Oliver Hill and Matthew Strang both recreated the side-to-side, rocking or waddling gait that led Art to be called ‘Round Ass’. Art Larsen was often cited as the Fire Boss who first recruited individuals from the current cohort of Elders for seasonal positions at the Red Lake base. In addition, former Red Lake Fire Ranger Jim Moorley (Dec. 23, 2008) recalled that Art lived right near Forestry Point into the early 1970s and maintained friendships and working relationships with local Anishinaabeg fire fighters at Keesic Bay. In Jim’s words, Art ‘took care’ of folks like the Keesics who lived near the base. Among the various non-Native supervisors that worked at Forestry Point over the years, Art also particularly stood out in the minds of Red Lake Anishinaabeg as well. A high regard for Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach was expressed because he was said to understand and respect the way Anishinaabeg fought fires. As Red Lake Joe Paishk (Jan. 27, 2009) stated, he “knew the wind”; he knew which direction the fire was going to go. In short, Art was remembered to hold a measure of appreciation for the fire fighting skills of Anishinaabe people.

4.5.2 Anishinaabe and White Fire Bosses Working Together

Early Fire Rangers often conducted patrols and suppression activities on an individual basis, or in groups of no more than two or three individuals. When a fire broke out, Rangers were then individually responsible for securing its attack using any means at their immediate disposal. Preventing a large forest fire demanded action as early as possible; and there was not always a ready supply of equipment and people. When caught at under a hectare in size, a fire could be short work for a small team of workers. However, to contain a fire, folks like Art Larsen sometimes needed additional manpower. In such cases, he would have been granted the authority to action the fire using any readily available resources. Depending on the location of the fire, sometimes the quickest thing to do was to bring in a plane and round up a bunch of Pikangikum men to put it out. Accordingly, his success as a supervisor became dependent on establishing effective lines of communication amidst a group of people holding a distinct linguistic and cultural makeup.

Back in the 1940s, as Whitehead Moose remembered, Anishinaabeg and newcomers worked together fighting fires and taught each other different aspects of fire fighting. Whitehead recalled learning about fire fighting both from White Fire Bosses, such as Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach, Art Larson, and Anishinaabe Fire Bosses such as Isaac Keesic who were both present on the fire line during specific incidents (Whitehead Moose, Nov. 12, 2008). Some parts of fire fighting, perhaps things like equipment use, food orders, incident reporting and time directives, came under the purview of Fire Bosses like Art, who were delegated the task of coordinating these matters with the group sent out. In addition, Whitehead mentioned that there were times, for example, when fire activity became very intense, in which the Fire Boss would ask them to withdraw from their attack:

But what he's saying is that when there's a big fire, we weren't allowed to get close to it because at times there's cones that are flying all over. Yeah if we were to fight the fire coming towards us we would not do it eh? Yeah. We were told not to try and stop something like that. When there's a fire that's out of control, we were told to step aside.

(Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders Nov. 12, 2008)

Fire Bosses defined some important rules of engagement on the fire line; setting standards of protection and daily fire line targets to be fulfilled, keeping track of hours worked and looking out for the safety of the group. Other teachings in fire fighting, such as techniques to battle fire 'hotspots' or 'smudges' burning in deep soil, were attributed by Whitehead Moose to senior fire fighters such as Nishki'aa. As he noted, Fire Bosses like Art were also actively absorbing knowledge of certain suppression techniques at the fire site through knowledgeable individuals like Isaac. In so doing, they developed a confidence in Anishinaabe knowledge regarding the heavy work at the fire site.

He says he...the...these Bosses, the White Fire Bosses, taught us a bit about how to fight fires he says. Yeah he was with Isaac when there was a fire one time, like with lightning strike, you know. He knows what to do, he says. Yeah that's how he knew like when he was watching Nishki'aa. Like especially in deep soil he would feel the hotspots with this...and that's how he learned, by watching him; how to completely put out the hotspots...And that's what our Fire Boss began to do. He'd watch what Isaac did. That's how he would tell us to do. Yeah that's what Isaac told us to do; like to feel the soil or ground. See where there's any hotspots. Yeah [Isaac] lived where the Fire Centre is, he said. Yeah. They really liked working with them, he said.

(Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)

In working with teams comprised of several Anishinaabe workers, Art was exposed to the leadership style of key Anishinaabe individuals who helped coordinate specific actions with the crews. Nishki'aa, Jiimis and other Keesics embodied linguistic and cultural backgrounds that were much closer to Pikangikum people to the newcomers. They were well-liked and trusted by Pikangikum fire fighters of their day. Their role on the fire line was recognizable and respected by Anishinaabeg. Additionally, the Keesics had also become more directly versed in the goals, objectives and operations of the Forestry Branch. Early fire fighting actions involving Euro-Canadians and Natives likely relied on amalgamating these two spheres of Anishinaabe and DLF competency and communication together. Senior Anishinaabeg firefighters, respected amongst the group, were great at organizing a team of Anishinaabe workers and teaching them the skills of firefighting. They also stood as key diplomats in harmonizing these actions with DLF Rangers.

The more he worked with Anishinaabeg, the more Art Larsen likely developed acumen in engaging and successfully deploying Anishinaabe crews. Since deployment to some fires lasted a month or more (Whitehead Moose, Sept. 4, 2008) Anishinaabeg and White Fire Bosses often had a lot of time to interpret and coordinate each other's sensibilities and fire fighting approaches. The longer they worked together, the more men such as Nishki'aa and Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach probably ironed out ways of communicating, negotiating and agreeing on certain courses of action across different contexts of language and culture. Art evidently found ways to communicate certain objectives and responsibilities in a way that satisfied Anishinaabe sensibilities. At the same time, he gained the confidence of groups of Anishinaabeg within their own sphere of communication and practice.

4.6 Early Fire Fighting Logistics

The first Ontario Provincial Air Service floatplanes that were used for fire protection around Red Lake, such as the Curtiss HS-2L Flying Boat and the DeHavilland Moth, ca. 1930s, could carry three or four passengers along with a scanty supply of equipment. These machines were fairly limited in their power capabilities as compared to Norseman, Beaver and Otter floatplanes that came into wide use by the postwar period. The greater power and payload capacity of these latter types of aircraft made them the true workhorses of the fire program. In fact, the immense utility of planes such as the Beaver and Otter is undeniable considering that some of the *very same* planes that flew to fires decades ago remain in use by outfitters and charter services today.

Charlie Peters and Whitehead Moose were also both old enough to have witnessed the ungainly appearance of an H2-SL Curtiss Flying Boat coursing through the air over their homeland. The 'H-Boat', as it was called (OMNR 1986), had a unique design in that the fuselage itself was shaped like the underbelly of a boat, providing the surface on which the craft was able to land. Its double wing structure included two small pontoons on either end, so that the wingtips were supported out of the water, and its pilot and passengers were seated in the open cockpit below its single engine. Whitehead Moose recalled how government Treaty agents made their appearance in the community by way of this kind of airplane, possibly sometime during the late 1920s or early 1930s (Whitehead Moose, Nov.12, 2008).

With limited power, cargo space and payload capacity, these kinds of aircraft imposed substantial limitations on the deployment of fire fighters. This meant that canoes and boats were a main means of travel on some early fire dispatches.

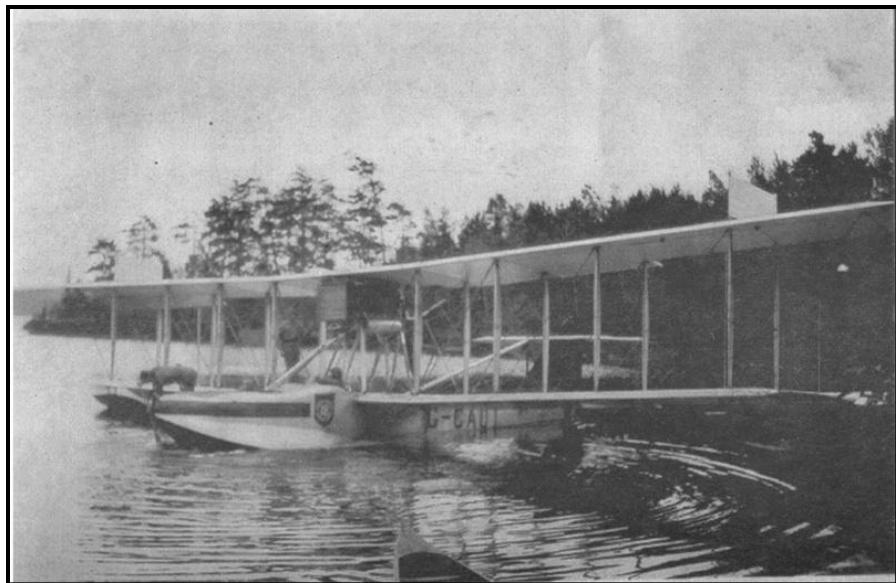


Plate 11: Curtiss HS2L 'Flying Boat' ca. 1930s. From *Sioux Lookout Bulletin* (2007).

From the late 1930s, the Forestry Branch maintained a fleet of canoes at Red Lake and oversaw the cutting of access trails to other lakes in the area (OMNR 1986). Like other fire protection jurisdictions with similar geography, Red Lake relied on canoe patrolmen who were assigned to cover strategic positions across lakes and waterways during peak fire periods. When supported by aircraft, canoe patrolmen could be maintained in the field for extended periods of time, setting up equipment caches and travel routes that rounded out a network of coverage in anticipation of future fire outbreaks. Canoe Rangers were also pre-positioned to catch fires while they were still small and easily controllable with a few workers.



Plate 12: Jimmy Sam Keesic and Jake Kejick paddling a canoe. Jimmy is in the front and Jake in the rear, ca. early 1970s. Photo provided with permission by Joe Paishk.

Often, Pikangikum people would use their own boats if traveling to a fire close to the community.

In his earlier years, when canoes were used to access a fire, Whitehead stated that firefighting equipment was limited to hand tools, such as shovels, axes and backpack water-spraying canisters, known as ‘pisspacs’, that could be more easily carried along (Whitehead Moose, Sept. 4, 2008). In some cases, technological tricks were used to make travel easier. Charlie Peters spoke about a type of canoe that was bolted down the middle and could be taken apart and transported in two pieces over portages. Charlie Pascal interpreted what Keechee Chuhnee^(WF) had to share about this type of collapsible canoe:

Yeah. Yesterday I told you I was paddling. Talking about the boats that they used...But you took those canoes or boats apart in his [Charlie Peters'] day. But these guys [Matthew Strang and Oliver Hill] don't remember that he used to use those. And when you go portage somewhere, you take it apart, put the pieces over and then put it together again. Those were the kind of boats he used. Have you seen those kinds of boats in pictures?

(Pikangikum Elder Charlie Peters, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept 12, 2008)



Plate 13: Elder Charlie Peters and me. Charlie worked on Ontario Land Survey Crews and also worked as an Extra Fire Fighter at various times throughout a 43-year period beginning in his youth (photo courtesy of J.M. Shearer).

With respect to traveling by canoe, an important fact was that early equipment was much heavier than it is today. Joe Paishk, whose fire fighting benefactors included Isaac Keesic and Wuhbeequay Whitehead Moose, mentioned that the fire pumps of the 1950s weighed around 120 pounds and were very clumsy to carry, meaning that their use on more remote fires was always considered carefully (Joe Paishk, Oct. 17, 2008). In addition, the generation of fire fighters who came before him did not carry a lot in the way of creature comforts when they worked on remote fires. This was one of the facts about early fire fighting that Joe Paishk stressed in our interviews:

Even Pikangikum talked about it too. Like they'd say I wish I knew how to write, put it in a book. Like the older generation, Wuhbeequay [Whitehead Moose] and all those guys, they talked to me on the fire what they used to do back then, Mr. [Isaac] Keesic and [Jiimis] James and all those guys. What they used to do: they'd carry blankets, they used to carry those blankets together and all that. Carry two of them. And they helped the cooks along the way. Just take what you need and that's it, you're on your way. There was lots of heavy work in those days, lots of heavy work.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Nov. 27, 2008)

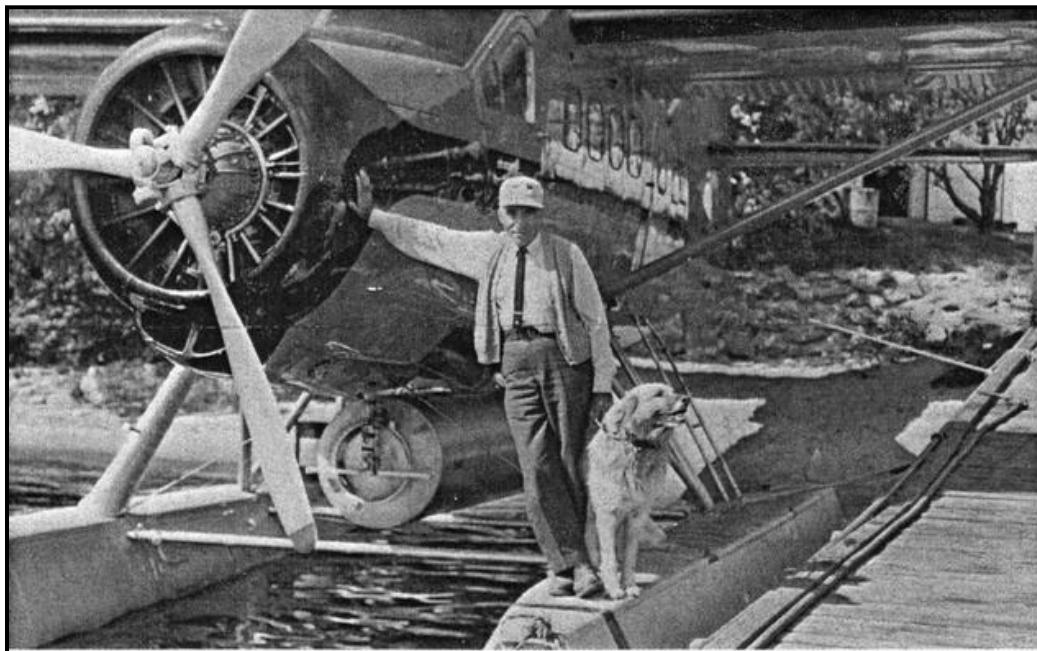
The late Joe Keesic, of Red Lake/Lac Seul, remembered cutting canoe trails in the 1960s for the Forestry Branch and spoke about how early chainsaws, tools, gas cans, camping equipment and canoes weighed a lot more than they do today, making the work very strenuous. The use of canoes to access fires was common in his day as well, requiring a significant level of fitness:

Ohh. That was hard work. Only two of us. The big heavy canoes they used. [Laughs] Like these prospector tents; we didn't have any lightweights eh?...Yeah. Sometimes you'd have to carry a canoe eh? Just a little lake in there. You had to portage in there. Carry...all the equipment goes in the canoe eh? Yeah. And like when they do the portages, they go across the lake and then all the fire crews they just have to walk on the shoreline eh? Yeah. And some guys just go full across! [laughter]...I remember when they used to carry a canoe and then carry it over there. I don't care how far it is. You got to carry a canoe over there, to the lake where the fire is. You know? That plane can't land in there eh? Have to carry a canoe. And then these guys that carried the canoe, they had to go and pick up a bunch of groceries where they land. They never used to have these little fridges, coolers and all that eh? But they still gotta eat in there eh? [laughs]. All they used was the canned stuff. Carry gas over there. Now everything's rubber!...Back in the old days you had to pack up everything and go in the bush. Old chainsaw. Or we had an old Swede saw; that was it. Axe and shovel, tents and tarps, whole bunch of pails, that's your cookery in there...I'd have to walk down there to the main lake and get some groceries there where the plane's going to land. Sometimes we'd paddle across the lake and go across to another lake a little bit, walk by in there. Wait for the plane in there. Carry all that stuff back again. Sometimes make two trips eh? That was hard. And back in the day we used to run out of gas all the time. We used to take canoes in the bush and fill up with water eh? That's what we used. Backpack pumps. If we didn't have to, we wouldn't use gas, just water eh? That's what they'd have to do to save gas eh?

(The late Elder Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

Whitehead's and Charlie Peters' earliest days as firefighters came before the introduction and wide use of fire pumps or chainsaws that needed gasoline. But the level of physical work involved in travel to early fires, as described by Joe Keesic, was quite similar. During the fixed-wing era that lasted until the advent of helicopters in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Fire Headquarters needed to secure men who could freight and portage equipment to the area of a forest fire by canoe and over land, sometimes over long distances. Getting to the fire was heavy, hard work. Largely, it was a 'bare bones' operation. More powerful planes with bigger payloads could offer a much faster means for fire response when available. Aerial patrols and deployment were more centrally relied upon after these technologies were developed after World War II (Pyne 2007; Lambert 1967). However, because of the landscape qualities of the Canadian Shield, which is dotted with lakes and rivers of various sizes, even the most high performance floatplane could be

limited in its ability to land in close proximity to the edge of a fire. Pilots needed a big enough lake or river. Therefore, canoes remained essential equipment from the 1940s to 1970s to freight in people and equipment.



JAKE SIEGEL, a former pilot with Starratt Airways and Canadian Pacific Airways, came to the Ontario Provincial Air Service in 1944. CF-ODL, a 1953 Single Otter is shown here in 1967 with a centre-mounted water dropping tank. Capacity was 200 gallons. Jake retired at Red Lake in 1978 and is still an active pilot.

Plate 14: Jake Siegel and his Otter floatplane. Taken from OMNR (1986).

© Queens Printer for Ontario, 1986. Reproduced by permission.

4.6.1 Koo-koo-koo-oo-wee-koo-chee-kuhn Jake Siegel

I guess that guy's been around for so many years, everybody; all the Elders in our community know him. I saw him too.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 22, 2008)

Few past fire fighters talked with me without mentioning the name of the late Jake Siegel who, as a floatplane pilot for the OPAS and OMNR, was a fixture of the Red Lake fire program for over 30 years (1947-78). Elder Tom Turtle was the first to mention Jake's Anishinaabe name to me: Koo-koo-koo-oo-wee-koo-chee-kuhn^(WF), translated as Carved Owl. Tom Turtle was unsure who exactly gave him this name, but knew that it was Elders of the preceding generation that had

begun to call him this, for reasons that seem to remain unknown to the current group of Elders (Tom Turtle, Sept. 11, 2008). The image of a float plane coursing through the air in the early morning, which is when Jake often made an appearance in Pikangikum, could surely bring to mind a carved owl-like figure flying close to the night. Lee Gerrish also speculated that the image of a wise old owl came to mind when thinking about old Jake, who had built up several years of experience by the time Lee joined the Fire program. In Euro-Canadian culture, owls can be seen as bearers of both wisdom and bad news. Likewise, reminiscences of the owl offered by Anishinaabeg around Red Lake reveal its association with mysterious and negative forces (Agger 2008). Judging from what Elder Anishinaabeg have said about Koo-koo-koo-oo-wee-koo-chee-kuhn, and his sometimes cantankerous nature, it's possible that the name Carved Owl invoked some of these connotations, albeit in a more humorous spirit.

Pikangikum Anishinaabeg Elders have shown a spirit of competitiveness with their peers in asserting that they, ahead of anyone else, had once sat in the front cockpit with Jake on trips to and from fires. Matthew Strang and Norman Quill both noted that Jake was aware of their strong fire fighting ability and chose them specifically when dispatching Pikangikum men to fires. In the days before a formalized crew system was created, Jake was known to place an emphasis on Pikangikum people when called upon to deliver EFFs to the field. Some of the core Keesic Anishinaabeg group that held seasonal positions at Forestry Point had a great respect for Jake. As Joe Paishk explained, in the event that EFFs were needed, Jake was often quick to elect for a trip to Pikangikum. Because Joe worked so well with Pikangikum EFFs of the 1950s, he respected Jake's emphasis on this community:

There would be more like uhh, you used to have just any crew among their selves there at that time. Three men would go out on the fire, and then we'd call Pikangikum and those...any reserves. Jake likes to go to Pikangikum because they're the best fire crew they ever had...Yeah. He never went to Sandy Lake unless it was a big fire. Call Green airlines to go and pick up the guys up north. But Jake liked Pikangikum. The best crew. Yeah.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Nov. 27, 2008)

Anishinaabe and non-Native fire fighters alike remember the many times when Jake flew into Pikangikum to pick up Extra Fire Fighters. Tom Turtle recalled that when Jake was flying over Pikangikum Lake, they would immediately get in their boats and race out to meet the plane (Tom Turtle, Sept. 11, 2008). Jake himself recalled how Pikangikum people were exceptionally eager to get on to fight fires:

...I know whenever I had to go to Pikangikum to pick up firefighters, well they knew I was coming in for fire because I would come in real fast and land, and they would be at the dock, and I'd come in, I'd shut the motor off, and I'd come in right beside the dock, they'd be all lined up like that, and as soon as I'd come in these guys would just start jumping on the floats, and I'd say okay, enough, boys, and I didn't even tie up, I'd start up the engine and away we'd go. They were that anxious to go. I don't know if they'd be that way now.... Oh they were good in those days.

(Jake Siegel to Michelle Alderton, Mar. 6, 1996)

A few people, including veteran Red lake fire fighter Jim Moorley, described the level of enthusiasm demonstrated by Pikangikum EFF's during one of Jake's pick-ups in the early 1970s. Again, summer employment of this nature was so highly valued that Anishinaabeg wasted no time reaching Jake's plane:

Like I said I remember going up there with Jake to get EFF's and we'd land on Pikangikum Lake and they were jumping off their frickin' boats! Jumping off their boats and I had to fight 'em off eh? Fight them off and get them all lined up at a time or whatever. They wanted to work so bad. They wanted to get on a plane and fly, and then work. Make money. And they'd leave their boats whatever just floating in the lake to get in on that plane!

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)

Ohweeghan Matthew Strang and Ahneebuhn^(WF) Oliver Hill further illustrated how Jake's appearance overhead was received in the community:

Mike: He treated you guys pretty good or...

Matthew: Yeah. He do; always.

Mike: When he come and bring his plane in you recognize that plane coming in or...

Matthew: Oh yeah.

Oliver: Oh yeah. Yeah. Right away! 'Cause everybody running to go to work eh?

Mike: Yeah, excited to get the work eh?

Oliver: Yeah. Sometimes early in the morning.

Matthew: Five, Six o' clock in the morning. Five o' clock in the morning.

(Oliver Hill and Matthew Strang to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

Anishinaabeg fire fighters often considered Jake Siegel a good friend, although some also remembered that he had rough edges as well. Joe Keesic mentioned that Jake could be especially grumpy if novice fire fighters did not know how to conduct themselves around his plane. Similarly, Joe Paishk recalled that the younger generation that came after Nishki'aa and Jiimis sometimes had to go further to prove themselves and gain Jake's respect (Joe Paishk, Jan. 27, 2009). It was sometimes quite easy to get on his bad side. For instance, during my stay in Pikangikum, I heard a story from a community member regarding Jake's impatience with a group of Pikangikum firefighters, who apparently weren't quick enough in getting on the plane to return to the fire base. In this case, Jake began taxiing and powering up to take off while someone was still standing on the floats and trying to get into the cockpit! Similarly, Joe Paishk recalled an incident where Jake was very bothered by a fire fighter's insistence that he make a trip to deliver them a frying pan in the field:

So he took off and came back about an hour later and here comes the frying pan, just dropped [from the plane in the air] eh? [laughter] We could see the frying pan coming towards us! [laughter] And over the radio, we got the portable radio then, he said: 'and there's your frying pan.' I don't know if he'd remember it. Maybe Jake would remember it. We just seen that frying pan coming straight toward us, right in the fire, right dead center! [laughter] All smashed up! I said to the other guys: 'you asked for it!'

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

Tom Turtle (Sept. 11, 2008) also remembered a story in which Anishinaabe fire fighters were flying with Jake and one individual was asked to hold the wheel while he took a picture out the window. Jake was an avid aerial photographer who took a number of pictures. At the time, however, Tom was understandably apprehensive when Jake rolled the plane on its side and asked his companion to hold it steady while he leaned out the window to snap a photo.

Jake was also remembered as an excellent pilot by Keesic family Anishinaabe fire veterans. He was trusted and proven in his ability to execute certain take-off and landing procedures, including the use of rivers to unload and pick up fire fighters, a move which may have shortened the distance involved in reaching a fire from the ground:

Jake Siegel would fly low, make sure the river's wide enough he can go zigzag there. 'Cause the river's straight enough, wide enough. He'd do a zigzag, have a look at it and then he'd get close, and he'd land and...coming out he would do the same thing. Yeah. He was a good pilot. They said; my uncles told me don't be surprised what Jake does. If it's a lake that's big enough, open pond that's big enough, trees on the far end, either side. And he said all you have to do is tie the rope up to one of those floats and cut the rope and take off. It was amazing how he could fly sometimes. Not always, but if it is wide enough he can land, no strong wind, he can land and take off. But he said: 'Be sure the fire is out!'

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Nov. 27, 2008)

4.7 Anishinaabe Firefighting from the 1950s to 1970s

....It was all Pikangikum . There were pretty much all Pik. guys when I got there with the exception of maybe Joe there and Jimmy James and Randy Keesic [Anishinaabeg from Red Lake]. But there was a pretty good representation of the Pik. guys there. And I think prior to that, it was all Pik. guys with Art Larson, like the Deputy guy, running it right?

(Jim Moorley to Mike Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)

When Jim Moorley came to Red Lake in 1973, he entered a working environment comprised of several Anishinaabeg from Pikangikum in addition to members of the Keesic family who had worked at the base for a number of years. As he noted, this level of representation had been cultivated prior to his entrance in the program and was an important part of how business was conducted at 'The Point' over past decades. Again, Art Larsen, now a Deputy Ranger, was mentioned by Jim as a key orchestrator in this regard. Jim stressed that Art got along really well with a lot of the Keesic and Pikangikum fire fighters whom he had worked with over the years. As evident in Elders' testimonies, Ross Williams, who was the Chief Ranger from 1955-1969 (OMNR 1986) was an important figure for Anishinaabe recruitment over this period as well.



Plate 15: Pikangikum/Red Lake Anishinaabe crew at lunch. Photo taken around the early 1970s. From left: Tom Quill Sr., Joe Paishk and Charlie Turtle. Joe Paishk remembered that the one sitting on the right-hand end was also a Turtle but could not remember his first name. Land Use Coordinator Paddy Peters thought it was J.J. Turtle. Photo provided by Joe Paishk.
Used by Permission.

Younger generations of the Red Lake Keesic family, Joe Paishk, Jimmy Sam and 'Big' Joe Keesic also served an important intermediary function between Fire Management and Pikangikum EFF workers from the 1950s onward, as Jiimis and Isaac reached the ends of their careers. Pikangikum and the next generation of Keesic family firefighters quite often worked on "all-Indian" Crews from the 1950s to the early 1970s (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008). For Anishinaabeg from both Pikangikum and Red Lake, this combining of workers so similar in language and culture was a natural fit because it allowed a strong mutual understanding of how the job was to be carried out. As Joe Paishk remembered, sons and nephews of Isaac and Jiimis Keesic who worked as seasonal fire fighters also served as intermediaries and interpreters for some of those from the Pikangikum community who did not speak English. Thus, there were instances in which younger Keesic family workers continued to maintain important links between Fire managers and Pikangikum Anishinaabeg. Pikangikum and Keesic Anishinaabeg also had similar understandings of leadership and training. They respected one another and recognized the same firefighting styles and training techniques that were handed down by older generations:

Joe: Yeah. Pikangikum were the best crew I ever had, though. I really enjoyed working with them. And they were telling me “Hey Joe! Just relax” eh? “We know what to do. You don’t have to tell us what to do.” [laughter] I said “Okay”, now just relax and I was walking around, checking them, they were doing the right things that I taught ‘em what to do and relaxing.

Mike: So a lot of guys from Pikangikum eh? Like Tom Quill and...

Joe: Yeah. Tom Quill and all the those, uh, Turtles, Quills, Strangs. People from Poplar... Poplar Hill⁴ had a crew that I enjoyed. Definitely.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, October 17, 2008)

Yeah. Pikangikum were just an EFF. But they listened and they observed. That’s how they...because we have to respect whoever’s going to be the boss. Not everyone was the boss eh? Like they’d take maybe one day somebody experienced like Isaac Keesic would be one day, the next day it would be James or Jimmy. They’re taking turns. And this is how they trained these guys. And then they take me, one day, and say okay Joe, tell us what to do, what not to do...and they’d instruct what you did wrong...They were all experienced fire crews; the Keepers, all of them, and, uhh, the most experienced I’ve ever seen and I was happy with them. ‘Cause here I am being one of the crew and I have to be with them all the time. And we’d talk in our native tongue. And very seldom did some of them speak English at that time. They only time they’d speak English if someone, uhh, called them to go in the office, and I would interpret for some of them, but not all of them. Some of them just barely speak English.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

By the mid-late 1950s, as the working relationships progressed, Pikangikum people’s recruitment began to evolve from a system of temporary EFF hires used on an ‘as-needed’ basis to one in which a substantial number of Pikangikum fire fighters were stationed at the fire base for the duration of the fire season. By the early 1960s, Red Lake Forestry Headquarters expanded its modus operandi to include a standing contingent of seasonal Pikangikum firefighters who were housed and dispatched directly from Forestry Point. Fire Bosses like Art Larsen and Ross Williams were presumably aware of program’s investment in Pikangikum workers under the past EFF system and recognized the community as a source of seasonal workers with fire experience. Ooweechcheh Alec Suggashie was among those who came to hold a recurring position at the Red Lake Firebase. Alec worked with a group of ten seasonal hires from Pikangikum that were used in addition to EFFs:

⁴ Poplar Hill First Nation is an Ontario Anishinaabe community located downstream on the Berens River from Pikangikum . Pikangikum and Poplar Hill Anishinaabeg are closely related in dialect and through intermarriage between the two Bands.

Charlie Pascal: There would be, like for all summer workers there would be ten of us here working all summer for the MNR. There were ten of us that usually stayed at the firebase. And when the fire's high like in the summertime, he says they would pick up uh, they call them EFF's, just regular firefighters or that just go from here and sometimes they would stay overnight at the base there and they would leave in the morning. There was, like you know there was a big fire there would be many of us sometimes if there's many forest fires.

Mike: So I guess he says they would have their permanent people they hired and then when the fires got a lot of like heavy fires they would come also bring extra people from Pik. eh? That's what he says eh?

Charlie Pascal: Yup.

(Ooweehcheh Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 22, 2008)



Plate 16: Pikangikum Elder Ooweehcheh Alec Suggashie
(Photo by M. R. Sanders, 2008).

Alec wasn't sure of the exact date of his first season. On one occasion he recalled that it was 1962 (Alec Suggashie, Jul. 22, 2008). On another, he indicated it was closer to 1966 (Alec Suggashie, Jul. 10, 2006). Elder Ooweehcheh also remembered that he had worked around eight summers at the Red Lake fire base (Alec Suggashie, Jul. 22, 2008); meaning that his employment took place from the early-mid 1960s through to the early-mid 1970s. While first starting as an EFF, Elder Ooweehcheh was eventually employed on a seasonal basis under the management of Ross Williams and Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach Art Larsen:

Paddy Peters: So starting off with the summer of 1966. That's when [Alec] began to work for the Forest Fire Boss [I] call it in Ojibwa. The Forest Fire Bosses fighting fires heh? As an EFF, that's an extra fire fighter they were called back then and from there they moved into, began to work in a Unit Crew. So that's when I began working for the forest Fire Bosses. We would be picked up when there was still ice on the lake. In the month of April, that's when we would be picked up in the community. On April the 20th of every spring. And we would be up in Red Lake, Red Lake working out of the fire base all summer and our jobs would end around September the 15th is when we came back to the community. And we would be fighting forest fires all summer. I moved my entire family to Red Lake so that my family would be with me out there. And some of the people that I worked for, the forest Fire Boss, his name was Ross, I don't know what his last name was, but I remember his name being Ross. And there was another man called Round. I'll just give you the round. The exact words that we used Round Ass Man. Round Bum Man was his name. That's what they called him hey?

(Elder Alec Suggashie, in translation by Paddy Peters, to Heather Nikischer Jul. 10, 2006)

The *Unit Crew* form of fire fighting organization mentioned by Alec Suggashie represents the early beginnings of a standardized system under which firefighters are now assembled and deployed to control forest fires. Four-person Unit Crews now comprise the backbone of *Initial Attack* operations under which Fire Rangers are deployed as the first line of defense to contain and extinguish fires. In Alec's early years, the DLF had just begun to move from a system of firefighting made up of 'as-needed' hiring to one with a greater amount of dedicated equipment and personnel. Simply put, the DLF was interested in ensuring that it had adequate resources to control forest fires *in advance* of their outbreak rather than *after the fact*. Pikangikum offered a significant pool of qualified human resources according to the standards and requirements of the day.

For the same reasons that Whitehead Moose was attracted to firefighting, the next generations of fire fighters were attracted to seasonal fire fighting because it offered a measure of independence and adventure along with steady pay. Some were also family men concerned with ensuring a solid livelihood. Ooweechcheh Alec Suggashie, a young family man at the time, was one of a few firefighters who moved his family to Red Lake for the summer. This coincided with his acceptance of a leadership position on a Unit Crew. Under the purview of Fire Bosses such as Art Larson and Ross Williams, Alec became a Crew Boss. As such, he was put in charge of guiding and coordinating the fire fighting conduct of his four teammates and reported with the 'higher ups', the

Fire Bosses, along the chain of command. During the 1960s, several Pikangikum men worked as Crew Bosses at the Red Lake Fire Headquarters during the summer:

So, my role, my job was a Crew Boss. I worked as a Crew Boss in one of the Units, there were five men to one crew, and I was the boss of that four. Four others that worked with me...how we were hired, it was during the time when they were in Red Lake fighting fires, there were about eight of [us] that were asked to work in the position as a Crew Boss and that's where it started from, some of the men that I worked with were from this community. James O. Turtle, Samuel Quill, Oliver Hill, Josef King, Alec Keeper, Jake Keeper, Tom Quill Senior. These were all the Crew Bosses; they all had a crew, so this is how it began. [We] were given training, in how to fight fires and use equipment and all that... So I guess out of that they were good, they passed the training. This is how we were selected, to take on the position as Crew Bosses...There was one individual that I forgot. Josef Peters was also with our group.

(Elder Alec Suggashie, in translation by Paddy Peters, to Heather Nikischer, Jul. 10, 2008)

Ross Williams and Art Larsen took an interest in securing a group of Pikangikum people, often drawn from the pool of EFFs, who could be ‘whipped into shape’ so to speak, as full-time firefighters. Many of the men chosen had garnered some prior firefighting experience by this time. These individuals were also given basic training to familiarize them with firefighting practices and tools of the trade. Basic training included things such as First Aid, fire pump setup and aircraft safety (Alec Suggashie, Jul. 10, 2008). In the absence of fire incidents, training was ongoing and involved rehearsal in fire line tasks in a hands-on fashion.



Plate 17: Anishinaabe firefighters carrying hose packs at Forestry Point. Tom Quill Senior, who provided the photo, remembered that this was done as part of the daily fitness routine on base. From left: Thomas Peters, Joe Paishk and Oliver Hill. Date Unknown.
Used with permission

Pikangikum firefighters often started as EFFs before accepting seasonal positions at Forestry Point. Tom Quill Senior was active as a firefighter for 16 years beginning in the early 1960s. At first, Tom was picked up as an EFF from the community and designated by Art Larsen as a Crew Boss overseeing a team of other EFF's. Then, the following summer, he was promptly selected to work in a seasonal position:

Charlie Pascal: I remember when I started out, but I'm not exactly sure how old I was or how young I was when I started out. Probably 16 years old he says. First time I left Pikangikum that time when I was firefighting he says...Yeah for the first when I was out firefighting, they picked us up in Pikangikum and took us directly to the fire and once the fire was out they would bring us back to the community. That's how I started he says....My first fire it was a big one and there were a lot of other crews there on that fire...My first, when I went out at that time, I went out with experienced firefighters, sometimes the white man. There was this person - I guess he was more like the person in charge of everything - made me the Crew Boss and right away I was assigned to a Crew Boss he says....[It was my first experience he says. On his first fire fighting...There was me, the Crew Boss, and four other EFF's. Right away he said, on his first fire...There used to be a guy by the name of Art at the firebase at Red Lake, 'cause I knew him he said; that's the person who made me the Crew Boss, he said...On my first fire then after that we would stay at the Red Lake base that next year the following year. Leave in the springtime, stay the whole summer. For the first time when we started firefighting, there used to be twelve of us and one of them was Alec Suggashie and he was there too at the same time when I was there he says.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 22, 2008)

Art Larsen and Ross Williams were closely watching Pikangikum EFF workers with an interest in identifying skilled workers and leaders for the fire program. Tom Quill Senior was one such worker who quickly advanced from the ranks of temporary EFFs to retain a Unit Crew position. At first, he worked seasonally with Keesic Crew Bosses such as Isaac, Jiimis James, Jimmy Sam and Joe Paishk (Tom Quill Senior, Dec. 4th, 2008). In his later years as a seasonal worker, Tom also fulfilled a role as Crew Boss or Crew Leader alongside other men from Pikangikum.



Plate 18: Pikangikum Elder Tom Quill Senior (Photo by M. R. Sanders. 2008).

A highlight in Tom's career was the crew competitions carried out on base in association with some of the training. Sometimes, Anishinaabeg made a sport out of some of the daily hands-on training. At other times, the Fire Bosses would also organize competitions involving the whole base. The various crews would show their skills in a variety of tasks such as hose-laying and power pump setup (Tom Quill Senior, Dec. 4th, 2008).



Plate 19: The late Jake Kejick in a training exercise. He is seen at far right. Jimmy Sam Keesic probably the one right next to him. Photo used with permission from Tom Quill Senior.

The hiring that was conducted during the 1960s was intermediate between the primarily 'ad hoc' system of past decades and the formalized Fire Crew system of today. As Joe Paishk and Joe

Keesic (Jan. 27, 2009) remembered, it was not until the mid-1970s that firefighters were required to sign a seasonal contract; and the standardized Fire Crew system proper, in which Fire managers created a roster of pre-set crews for the whole summer, was not yet in effect. By the time Jim Moorley arrived in 1973, Anishinaabeg from Red Lake and Pikangikum comprised four standing Unit Crews that were loosely organized under the Crew Bosses (Jim Moorley, Dec. 23, 2008). The use of EFF's and seasonal firefighters was intermixed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As Alec Suggashie and Joe Paishk indicated, there were cases in which three seasonal Crew Members would work alongside two EFF's on a five-person crew. During escalated fire situations, this arrangement would accordingly expand to include the use of all-EFF crews as was already a standard practice from decades prior (Alec Suggashie, Jul. 22, 2008).

Joe Paishk, Alec Suggashie and Tom Quill often spoke of the different Pikangikum families of Turtles, Quills, Strangs, Keepers and Kings that made up different Crew Bosses and crews in the fire program. Because family is so important to Anishinaabeg, at times, brothers, cousins and other extended family members from the community probably worked on crews together in both an EFF and seasonal context. Also, Pikangikum seasonal Crew Bosses often chose crews made up of people from a variety of different families in the community. Whatever the arrangement, just as fire crews do today, Pikangikum crews in the past formed a solid bond and crew morale among their specific members. For instance, the Turtle crew headed by the late Peter Turtle had its own crew mascot.



Plate 20: The Turtle crew, 1973. Standing From Right to Left: Joe Moose, Peter Turtle, George King Jr. and Joe King. Holding the Turtle mascot: Willie Quill.
Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.

Jim Moorley (Dec. 23, 2008) also recalled that particular Crew Bosses amongst the Pikangikum group especially stood out in the Fire program as go-betweens or ambassadors from the community. For example, Jim explained that Sam Quill, now a Pikangikum community Elder, held a Crew Boss/Crew Leader position during the early 1970s and acted somewhat as 'The Godfather' of Pikangikum people. Sam had assumed a special seniority and responsibility in the program. By the time Jim joined Red Lake Fire in the mid-1970s, Sam had been refining this role for close to a decade. Red Lake Division DLF Fire Reports stored at Forestry Point show an instance during the 1960s in which Sam Quill is listed as the Fire Boss on one particular fire. As such, he presided over the fire at the field level and oversaw the necessary paperwork and reporting on this incident.

As Jim recalled, Sam's position of seniority among Pikangikum fire fighters came as a result of that fact that he was well-connected to Chief and Council and thus assumed something of a

special responsibility in representing Pikangikum workers and looking after the group that came down for the summer. As Jim Moorley remembers, Sam was also more acclimated to the English language and gravitated more than others towards fulfilling some of the administrative and organizational requirements of the fire program. Sam Quill was also active in training EFFs and seasonal recruits from Pikangikum. Tom Turtle (Sept. 11, 2008) credited Sam Quill with teaching him several important firefighting techniques, such as smudging and hot-spotting, during his early work as a firefighter.



Plate 21: A group of Pikangikum firefighters boarding Jake Siegel's floatplane, June 1973. Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.

During the 1960s Pikangikum and the DLF both benefited from a dedicated partnership in fire fighting that involved the extensive participation of community members in both seasonal Crew Member and supervisory roles. Pikangikum people found a solid source of employment and a respected place within the Fire institution of Forestry Point. Additionally, Chief and Deputy Rangers found an able and ready source of workers who demonstrated skill in fighting fires, supervising workers and training new community recruits to seasonal and EFF positions.

Pikangikum people excelled in the fire program through the 1960s and, as Jake Siegel recalled, their good reputation reached into other jurisdictions as well:

Mike: I definitely get a sense for you that these guys were pretty good firefighters and they were fairly well respected I guess around...

Jake: Yeah. They were...like I say there was other airlines or other bases that would come in and we never heard about it 'till later on that they would hire the Pikangikum boys because they had a good reputation. I don't know how far in the province they went, but they were good firefighters.

(Jake Siegel, Nov. 28, 2008)



Plate 22: Jimmy Sam Keesic's crew, 1973. Back row from left: Joe Paishk, Jim Moorley and the late Jimmy Sam Keesic. Front left: Thomas Peters Jr. and the late Peter Turtle.
Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.

4.8 Newcomers and ‘Mixed Crews’ in the 1970s

4.8.1 Learning from the Anishinaabeg

For reasons elaborated upon in later chapters (see Chapter Six), Forestry Point became more active in hiring a younger cohort of southerners to work alongside their existing seasonal staff, including a number of Red Lake and Pikangikum Anishinaabeg, during the early-mid 1970s. Many of these were college students who had taken a formal education in disciplines such as forestry and natural resources and were looking for positions in a related field. This new cohort included people like Jim Moorley, Lee Gerrish and Paul Fazekas, who hired on between 1973 and 1975 at Forestry Point. All three fondly recalled working with the Anishinaabeg who were

involved in seasonal fire fighting. All three also remembered gaining a valuable level of instruction and knowledge from these fire fighters.

Paul: In 1974 I came up...and I actually came up for a two-week job in Lands, with offer, just getting out of college. And, uhh, didn't know where Red Lake was, jumped on a bus for a horrendous ride, you know from Toronto way, and arrived for a two week job. And 1974 was a real bad fire season. So I just knew I had to get out there and get into it. I'd been bugging the fire officers at the time and, anyway, I think due to injury I got on a crew. No training; just jumped on a crew and then got on a plane and left. I learned, as a lot of us did back then, with not a lot of training. Because we actually learned a lot, like I was telling you before, from the Natives who were fighting fires in years and years before us. When they wanted to be helpful, they really were and, you know, sometimes they didn't want to tell us everything. You had to kind of get on their good side. And, uhhh, if you didn't, they just let you feel your own way. Because even when I started, the crew system was starting to get more formalized and so like I was made a Crew Leader in my second season and I had only been on three fires the first season I came on. Mind you, one of mine was long, but even still I didn't have a lot of experience. So yeah. We relied on them a lot. And a lot of us back then we did learn a lot from them. For sure.

Mike: Interesting eh? I guess I could ask you too like if there's any specific guys that you recall from Pik. like, uhh, hear Tom Quill a lot around or Norman Quill or...

Paul: Those were the guys that were part of that crew system when I started. Yeah. I got to know them. We stayed at the same bunkhouse down at Forestry Point. You know, they were there for the summer, even though they were from Pik., along with a few locals like Joe Keesic. Yeah I got to know them pretty good and now they're respected Elders in the community.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

Lee Gerrish came in the following year and served for three years as a Crew Member under both Jimmy Sam Keesic and Joe Paishk. In addition to working with other newcomers, Lee was placed on a crew with Tom Quill for a couple of seasons and remembers a number of Pikangikum and Red Lake Anishinaabeg who were also stationed at Forestry Point:

I came to Red Lake in the spring of '75. I started in my first [or last] year of college at Sault Ste. Marie. And I was looking for a job. They had a job board there looking for firefighters in Red Lake. Yeah it was the spring of '75 I came here. I was assigned to a crew. I had, it was Joe Paishk and he always referred to himself as Joe Nighthawk. It was Joe Paishk was the Crew Boss and there was Tom Quill...They had five-man crews back then. Then on the base, I don't know how many crews they had here, but, I remember individuals like Norman Quill and his brother Steven Quill and then Jimmy Turtle. And there was another local fellow named Robert Kejick. And there was actually Johnny and John Keesick...They both live in Pikangikum now...Norman, Steve, Jake Turtle, Tom Quill. There were those folks [from Pikangikum]. And then when the fire situation escalated we had to bring in EFF's, started to see people like Harry Quill[...]

(Lee Gerrish to M. Sanders, Sept. 29, 2008)

Tom Quill and other Anishinaabeg Lee worked with as a rookie both impressed him with their abilities and taught him valuable aspects of fire fighting in the field:

But yeah. Like it was just little things eh? Like just the way [Tom] did stuff, he was just so efficient. He just didn't waste energy doing things that didn't matter eh? You know I mean like the pump setups, depending on how...you know it may have been part of the training program, but you got a pump and you need water for a pump and if you're stuck with not much water and he would show you how to dam it up or you could just shove the...you don't really need the foot valve. Just different ways of getting water flowing through the pump, into the hose line. If there was water, they could make it work. They could make anything work. Yeah. They just...just seemed like second nature to them. Like if you broke something they could fix it. They were never in a pinch. Like a crew of just white guys out there if we break something it was "oh shit"...and they would find a way...And so they learned that. Like they never really spoke English but they learned that over time... Yeah. They wouldn't let you get in too much trouble out there. And they were all strong. Like to look at Tom Quill, you wouldn't think, but he really was a barrel-chested guy and tough...tough as nails, yeah.

(Lee Gerrish to M. Sanders, Sept. 29, 2008)

Jim Moorley hired on at Forestry Point in 1973 and recounted working with a large number of Anishinaabeg from Pikangikum and Keesic Bay who taught him a wide range of firefighting techniques. Jim also attributed his successful and ongoing career in firefighting to the teachings he had learned in his early years working alongside Anishinaabe fire fighters. Jim highlighted Tom Quill, Jimmy Keeper and Jake Kejick as some of the Pikangikum firefighters who stood out in his early training as a Fire Ranger. As Jim moved up the ranks in later years, he notes that his success in working on fires at the supervisory level hinged on his ability to work with Anishinaabeg who were active in the program:

Another one that sticks in my mind is Tom Quill. You sent me pictures of him. He looks pretty much the way he did! He was very excellent in the bush and knew how to walk and track around in the bush. He knew how to find his way around in the bush. And he knew what to do on fires. But there was a huge language barrier there. We never really did converse that much with the Native crews. Like we did...very quiet guy. Very athletic, very strong big guy and his frickin' chest was huge right? [...]

[...]Jimmy Keeper? I don't know if you ever ran into him? We used to call him fire cracker. He was on my crew and him and I got along very well eh? Good worker. He taught me a lot, you know, using the chainsaw and stuff like that; also, survival techniques [and] orientation. Jimmy I think had a pretty good education for those days. He might have even had grade 8 at the time back in the '70s. So he was familiar with keeping numbers and stuff like that. He fit in fairly well with the rest of the boys right? [...]

[...]In the old days there were no coolers right? Like then food came out in a paper bag or a cardboard box. There was lots of times we'd have a big block of hamburger and the guys – like it may sound silly but – the first night, a lot of meat was cooked so it wouldn't

go bad. And I remember a lot of times seeing Tom Quill do this; we'll have a bunch of hamburger covered in maggots and he cut the bad part off and cook the meat. Like I wouldn't do that. I'd throw it away right? But he just cut it off, cooked it up and it was good right? [...]

[...]How to set up camp. We had prospectors for tents in those days and, umm, those guys could set up one of those tents in five seconds flat because they used them all the time! Our guys would bumble around for ten hours before they got a tent set up you know? [laughter] Like I said, you had Coleman stoves. They were very seldom used. Lots of fires we cooked on open fires. Nowadays, you have more frickin' injuries with guys lighting propane stoves and things like that; stoves in the tent and...well those guys knew all that stuff right? They knew. We didn't have sleeping bags. We didn't have air mattresses. All we had was two wool blankets, like when we set up camp for a place for the night, we'd look for high ground or chicots [dead standing hazard trees] or yada yada, right? Nowadays the guys they got air mattresses and sleeping bags and one-man tents and wherever they find a spot big enough they prop them up, you know. And then they call me tomorrow and they say: 'hey it rained last night, we're soaked!' You know? And these Native guys, even in the rain we'd get camp set up and be comfortable. Even in the weather. They just knew the way[...]

[...]There's another fella that comes to mind. Jake Kejick. Bush extraordinaire, great guy...he lived in the bush all his life right? And when he came to Red Lake it was like....it would be like going to Toronto right? Walking down the street in Toronto! [laughter] Jake; you want him to build docks for the airplane – like we didn't have helicopters like we do now eh? Take a plane and...but Jake could build a dock out of two nails and a piece of Frickin' paper clip right? That's what he did right? Yeah. They were good guys [...] I know Charlie [Peters]. Well when I was there, Charlie was a moose. I was maybe 20 and Charlie was forty or fifty then. And he'd just walk through the bush like a moose. And again, that's the lifestyle they lived eh?

[...]I wouldn't have got as good as I did without the help of those guys, right? How to make things work with nothing right? That's what I do right? Go to a fire and give me a bunch of frickin' Native guys and very little equipment and make it work. That's what I do. And that's all...it comes from the training that I learned from those guys. And I try to pass that on to my daughter. I got a daughter in the fire program and I think she saw you in Pikangikum in the spring...And she doesn't even want to listen to those things eh? Those techniques. For someone to put out a fire with a shovel, they think you're frickin' nuts [laughs]!

[...]It's always been practical work; you learn from your mistakes. And that's the difference between a Native and a white guy. A Native will make a mistake but he'll learn from it and he won't do it again. [laughs] A white guy will do it over and over and over until he kills himself right? Honest to God! That's the truth right? If he goes to put up a tent one day and he doesn't have the knots right, well he learns from it. But a white guy will go on making the same shitty knots and if it falls down well, holy [*&\$#!] What Happened? Why'd that happen, right?

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)

Jim, Lee and Paul all illustrated various aspects of working with Anishinaabe people which contributed positively to their development in the program. People like Lee and Jim were recalled in a similar light by Tom Quill Senior. Tom also shared some of the subtle ways that newcomers

took in Anishinaabe knowledge on the fire line and explained some of the Native-newcomer relationships that were significant in the program:

Yeah I was working with Lee for four summers as a firefighter. And there was another person, the name he mentioned [Jim Moorley] he also taught that person. He didn't really know anything about the bush he says. So they taught him to how to survive or fight fires like in the bush. He didn't know anything about that and one thing he was most afraid of was the Black Bear! We had a person - but he no longer is around - he passed on - named Peter Turtle. One of his best companions, as in a partner, he [Jim Moorley] had. That's probably the person that taught him most of these survival skills in the bush.

[...]By that time there were many Wemtigooshi firefighting who would see us do a lot of things, like for example, when we were washing dishes in the bush we would use moss to clean pans like greased pans and whatever you use and that's the best thing you can use in the bush is moss. Cleaning greased pans or dishes and cleans pretty well. And I guess these people watched us how we do things in the bush and they would begin to do the same things he says.

(Tom Quill Sr., in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, July 22, 2008)

The first time they were pulled out then at first they [non-Natives] didn't know anything about firefighting. They used to observe it. Observe from what, you know, from our actions. And we used to go down by the lake where we were setting up camp. We'd be setting up the camp and they'd be sitting there! [laughter] At that time it was like they didn't even know anything at all. And they learned their fire experience on what we taught them. 'Cause when we're living in the bush, like further up in the woods, and they used to...I guess they were teaching them by what they did.

(Tom Quill Sr., in translation by Kevin Suggashie, to M. Sanders, Dec. 4, 2008)

Younger newcomers received mentorship from Anishinaabeg who had a few years of experience under their belt⁵. Interestingly, this mentorship was somewhat effective despite English-Ojibwa language barriers that hindered fire line communications. As Lee and Tom both discussed, newcomers were often learning by observation about the finer details of the job. A lot of the knowledge sharing was carried out between disparate language speakers in a 'watch and learn' fashion, with fire fighters like Tom Quill demonstrating certain techniques in action.

⁵ Anishinaabe veterans such as Joe Paishk (Oct. 17, 2008) recalled that non-Native women also started to be involved in firefighting during the early 1970s. According to him, they were actively embraced and trained just as anyone else would be. Anishinaabe women were not traditionally involved in firefighting. However, there does not appear to be a cultural or social proscription that would currently prevent their involvement.



Plate 23: Tim Bush and Tom Quill Senior handling hose, ca. 1970s.
Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.

4.8.2 Working Across a Language Divide

Certain Anishinaabeg from Pikangikum and Red Lake who were more actively speaking the English language could facilitate exchanges between newcomer and Anishinaabe fire fighters, especially in situations where the language divide proved difficult. Joe Paishk, for example, took on a central role in coordinating newcomer and Anishinaabe workers to help them work together. Joe wanted to ensure that the white folks would pay close attention to Ojibwa-speaking firefighting veterans like Tom Quill:

I had, uh, Tom Quill was in my crew. And, uh, Tom Quill doesn't understand English anyway. We just have to interpret for him, in so many ways. Tom Quill I never bother him. I said "Tom, you know what to do, you worked before as an EFF and you know exactly what to do." We gotta train them too. We were trained by them - by our people - and we've got to train these guys". And he did. But he didn't understand them. That's the problem. And he'll come to me and he'll be all Native language and, you know, he was upset. And I said "What's wrong?" and he explained. Come over and talk to them. I said "If you guys don't listen to him...he try to tell you something. Even though it's a Native language, if he points, just do it." And make him, that's the only way he can make them understand. Another thing is, if he wants you to just go ahead, brush, if he goes like this, that's brushing. You can brush that part. Or goes like this with a match; burn that part.

Exactly. Just do what he does! In the meantime I come on the other side anyway, 'cause I spoke English, and then...and then they did! They catch on!

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, October 17, 2008)

Tom Quill also remembered that individuals like Joe Paishk and Joe Keesic were directing new workers in how to fight fires. In the days of mixed crews, Tom also recalled that someone was usually around to translate and converse with the white people:

Yeah. That's how Joe Paishk was he said. He took over these Wemtigooshiwag. Looked after them. Give them directions. There was an interpreter that was there too; Kotash [Joe Keesic ^(JP)] and Joe Paishk.

(Tom Quill Sr., in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 21, 2008)

As was likely the case in the earlier days of Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic and Art Larsen, younger generations of Natives and newcomers found a mutual benefit in retaining individuals from First Nations communities who would serve as liaisons with upper management and non-Native field staff in order to coordinate and organize large teams of workers. Paul Fazekas, for example, felt there was continuity between the traditional leadership roles assumed by community members and the fire fighting leadership roles that these men assumed:

Well they still had, like you said, maybe you're getting at like a spokesperson that they had who would go over and talk to one of us. And you know, like even today, the Elders are an important part of the society and respected. And I think back then in firefighting, it was the same thing. They relied on that person to do the negotiations sort of thing... Ohh. For sure. For sure. I mean, I know that we would seek those people out kinda thing. Definitely that was our communication link for sure. Like we say, at times we'd have just the EFF's coming and we would have about 50 or 100 firefighters down from northern communities to the Red Lake base, to mobilize and use for dispatch. And for some period of time over a number of years we were using them as an Initial Attack force. Sometimes with a Fire Boss going with them to get them, break them in...

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

During large fire incidents involving several crews, sometimes seasonal workers alongside a number of EFF's from different communities, key individuals such as the late Elder Joe Keesic were seen to be a great help in facilitating the organization of workers across language divides and sometimes divides between different communities as well. Current Fire Management Supervisor Randy Crampton explained Joe's contribution in this regard:

Mike: And for a guy like Joe [Keesic] who spoke Ojibwa and, uh, may have been able to relate to some of the guys that were coming from more northern, remote areas, would you say it was fair that he was able to kinda connect people like from the south and from the north a little bit more than...

Randy: Oh absolutely! We relied on him tremendously to sort of, you know, play the role of a liaison between ourselves and, you know, the EFF firefighters from the north at the time...Joe, and I'm not sure if it... it's hard to describe like...it seemed like he was respected, and I don't...I'm not...I can't pinpoint the reason why. But umm, he had the ability to, uhh, to go and talk to, uhhh, you know, anybody within that working environment, wherever they came from, and, like I said, be a conduit between the MNR fire program and the First Nations firefighters. And he was very successful like, you know, if there was...like I said, it's something...it's hard to describe, but I know I saw it happen numerous, numerous times where, you know, I know if we'd have just randomly picked someone from Pikangikum to go and give direction to somebody from Deer Lake, chances are it probably wouldn't have succeeded very well. And for some reason Joe could do that. And I think it had some degree to do with the level of respect that he somehow had earned.

(Randy Crampton, Fire Management Supervisor, Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters, to M. Sanders, Oct. 2, 2008)

The high regard for Joe Keesic among various northern communities fits well with Randy's observation and understanding. Although Joe himself stated that he never went out of his way to be a 'Boss', he was nonetheless identified as an important and central Boss among Deer Lake, Sandy Lake and Pikangikum Band members during a career that extended from the late 1960s to the late 1990s (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008).

4.8.3 Camaraderie on Mixed Crews

Apart from certain practical aspects of knowledge-sharing and cooperation on the fire line, Anishinaabeg and newcomers cemented relationships based on friendships that were often underpinned by a healthy sense of humor. Teasing, ribbing, joking and small pranks were part of what made the job more enjoyable, resulting in a sense of camaraderie on mixed crews. For example, adding to some of the recollections which Jim Moorley offered about Sam Quill, Jim recalled that Sam was also a bit of a joker as well:

Yeah. And he's a well-educated guy. He ended up getting a job at the MTO. He was the Supervisor of the MTO in Pikangikum. Sam was a big man. He carried a lot of respect with the Pikangikum guys because he was linked to the Chief. So Yeah. That's how I kind befriended a lot of Pikangikum guys. I remember the first time we were having supper

and we were having steaks and we were passing the plate along. I was the only white guy really in the kitchen because the other crews, Henry Cornelius and Steve Anderson; they always went into town or went up to the Point and ate up there. So they passed the steaks around and I picked my steak and put it on the plate and he's sitting there with a pair of glasses on with no lenses in them. He was quite a joker. That's how he was. Sitting there with a plate of steak and they'd pass the steak on and he had two and I sit there. And I didn't really know what to say or do. So I asked for the steaks to come back. And I take one and put it on my plate again and he reaches over...so he's got three steaks now! Sitting there with a straight face eh? [laughter] Testing me eh? Testing me. That's how he did it... And he was their boss here. He was like the godfather of Pikangikum in Red Lake watching the boys, you know? Keeping an eye on him. And after a couple of years, he went back to Pikangikum and got into the MTO business. He did well there. Anytime I went up to after that, first I hooked up with Sam. Like if I needed a truck, or a phone, a radio or a place to stay I'd always run back to town and he would help me out. He'd always be good for it. That's a good man to have. Well connected with the Chief and Council and a good friend to me.

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)

One of the ways that Jim became friendly with Sam Quill was through the initiatory context of a steak-snatching 'test'. On a certain level, good-hearted jokes and ribbing opened the door to a bond which, as Jim recalled, spanned a number of years of fire-related work and extended even beyond the context of Sam's seasonal employment in the program. By snatching Jim's steaks, Sam was both defining a kind of pecking order while at the same time demonstrating a measure of acceptance within the group for this young newcomer.

Teasing and sharing a laugh together was one way to both lighten the mood and cement a team atmosphere. Paul Fazekas also noted this as one of the highlights of working with First Nations firefighters. Many Anishinaabeg, such as Joe Keesic, had a sense of humor that stemmed from a unique cultural background and sensibility which Paul came to appreciate in his years at Forestry Point:

What I really enjoyed; a lot of the Natives I used to work with had a really great sense of humor. It's a different, off sense of humor, umm. It's funny, sometimes the smallest things could get the whole bunch of them giggling away and I just remember - ask Joe Keesic - one of the greatest tricks that he had; if you weren't looking then your sort of...crews were being lined up for Initial Attack and I was getting ready to walk away and my pack was full of rocks [laughter]!...actually that happened to me more than once! The siren goes off and you go to pick up your bag and it weighed a hundred and fifty pounds [laughter]! And you kinda look around and see a whole gaggle of them looking away. You know, it was kinda good. They did had a lot of...you have to kind of find it and go with it. And a lot of times they're speaking in Ojibwa, Cree. Okay, something's going on and

you're not sure if you're the brunt of it or not and you just have to go with it. Go with the flow. Yeah it was a lot of fun back then.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

The Late Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk both gleefully remembered a lot of the various pranks that were played at Forestry Point over their careers. They recalled that Pikangikum folks like Tom Quill pulled a few stunts as well:

Joe K.: Tom Quill tried that. He would put heavy things in there. I remember I picked up my pack. I heard other people saying whoa man! What's in there eh? I'm sure my clothes are not overweight! [laughter]

Joe P.: The other thing they'd do is they'd nail it against the wall. Like they'd nail it to there. You'd just grab it. What's going on here!? The boss is just yelling: [laughter] 'You gotta go right away!' You just have to get a hammer and pull it out of there!

Joe K.: Sometimes you'd put your gloves in there and they'd put staples in there!

Mike: Staple the fingers shut eh?

Joe P.: Another thing they used to when you'd roll hose in the hanger, put the grease in it. He didn't know; he'd just grab it...[laughter]! You know those things the ladies use for the pins? Thimble? Well Tom put one of those in the pump and I remember standing there with a half inch hose and there was no water coming. Got lots of pressure, just no water! We would just laugh and...What's wrong with that thing eh?!

Joe K.: Or a lot of times they'd put coins in there eh? They'd throw it in there and put the coupling there and...[laughter] 'Cause when you're nozzleing and you got a lot of pressure and then all of a sudden it stops and you just go like this, fall forward eh? [laughter] Then you're looking at it and just see that coin stick out!

Joe P.: Yeah. We'd tease one another

Joe K.: There was a lot of joking then!

(Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, January 27, 2009)

Joe Keesic also remembered a few other tricks along this line. Sometimes, they would bring a rookie Crew Member to the docks and ask him to look over the edge and see what's in the water; coaxing him to get close to the edge of the dock and have a good look while they waited for the chance to tip him into the lake. Other times, they might tell a Crew Member that he was wanted upstairs in the boss' office, although the boss was a bit confused when he showed up unannounced. Another trick was to send a Crew Member to find a tool or piece of equipment that didn't exist in the first place. Joe Keesic remembers sending a crewmate to look for a metal hose

patch for a garden hose. Sometimes, a classic trick was also to ask a rookie to check the end of a garden hose to see if it was plugged; the inevitable result being that the rookie would end up getting a bit of a shower (Joe Keesic, Nov. 27, 2008). Good natured pranks and ribbing, within the bounds of reason and respect, continue to be a part in cementing a tight crew dynamic among Ontario Fire Rangers to this day.

4.9 Summary

Following the early years of Forestry Point's establishment, the incursion of provincial Forestry Branch workers into Anishinaabe homelands around Red Lake was eventually recognized and embraced by both DLF and Anishinaabeg together as offering mutual opportunities. Forestry Point quickly became a site of exchange and partnership that bonded local Anishinaabeg and newcomers as part of the same firefighting team or family. The large extended family of local Keesics, including Isaac and James Keesic, worked closely with Deputy Rangers such as Art Larson from an early period and established a common logic of practice in firefighting, as well as some good friendships. Both Art and Isaac also mutually placed their trust in individuals from the nearby community of Pikangikum to carry out a variety of tasks pertinent to Forestry goals.

Pikangikum's involvement was supported by these key individuals and also reinforced by the good reputation they had gained in their own right by work with other provincial agencies, such as Ontario Land Survey. Pikangikum also thrived under the tutelage of Keesic family fire fighters and key supervisors such as Art Larson who mentored them in firefighting and kept the door open for them to develop this work experience. During the early decades of the Fire Program, Pikangikum people were often employed as Extra Fire Fighters who were hired during expanded fire situations. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, they graduated into seasonal positions as Crew Members and Crew Bosses, often with eight to twelve community members stationed at the Red Lake Fire base over the season. As a younger generation of newcomers joined the Fire program in the early 1970s, they were teamed up with a number of pre-established Pikangikum

and Red Lake Anishinaabe career fire fighters who gave them valuable instruction on the job. In the years immediately prior to an institutional shift from DLF to OMNR, these 'rookie' newcomers gained valuable instruction from these Anishinaabe veterans and also enjoyed a number of friendships.

Chapter Five

5.0 Fighting Fire the Anishinaabe Way

Like those guys, Pikangikum people, could have played a bigger part in some of that training, like fire behavior stuff. But it was never; I don't think they were ever asked to. I mean it was tough because of the language barrier but...But you know they could have. You know like, what were the points that they would bring up if they were teaching it, how would they teach it?

(Lee Gerrish to M. Sanders, Sept. 29, 2008)

The other question I heard about: was there any thing that came from the Anishinaabe when they made that book? Yeah, we should make our own; the Anishinaabe SP-100 manual. He [Oliver Hill] says that is going to be *your job* pretty soon. Work for us. Do a manual he says.

(Charlie Pascal to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

The interview transcripts generated through this research contain a substantial amount of material centering on forest fire knowledge and firefighting tactics as explained by Anishinaabe Elders who were active in the Fire program from the 1940s to the 1970s. Veteran Anishinaabeg, as well as the newcomers they worked with, provided a wealth of detailed stories, anecdotes and teachings that illustrate how Native fire crews of this era carried out their work. The various fire line testimonies pulled from the transcripts can be combined into a substantial body of fire fighting training material. This body of knowledge ranges in focus from the initial location and assessment of forest fires, to specific attack methods that were used to both contain and extinguish them. Although a lot of these lessons were shared informally on the fire line over many decades, Lee Gerrish noted that they did not necessarily enter into the formal realm of fire training as much as they were practiced in the field. So far, these teachings have not been captured in documentary form.

This chapter is an attempt to answer Lee Gerrish's question with regard to what a distinctly Anishinaabe style of formal firefighting training might entail. In the same spirit, Charlie Pascal and Oliver Hill expressed interest in the creation of a special 'Anishinaabe SP-100'; an equivalent to current OMNR (2008) Fire Ranger training that would place Anishinaabe knowledge, perhaps also the Anishinaabe language, at the fore. Accordingly, this chapter presents teachings

Anishinaabe veterans shared about the methods of firefighting they used during their careers. It approximates an Anishinaabe SP-100.

My own learning journey in firefighter training has involved the synthesis of teachings from both present-day OMNR leaders and Anishinaabe veterans. This has allowed me an appreciation for firefighting knowledge that stems from both sources. Anishinaabe Elders taught me the importance of developing common sense, intuition and deep faculties of situational awareness in order to become a better firefighter. Moreover, Elders' teachings with regard to specific techniques, such as using hand tools to carry out 'hot-spotting' or 'smudging', has greatly enhanced my success as a firefighter and my appreciation for the job. Concomitantly, OMNR training has offered me extensive knowledge of how to safely and effectively work with various pieces of equipment involved in firefighting, such as helicopters, chainsaws, compass and GPS. It has also led me to develop a sense of appreciation for elements of fire line organization and chain of command which are designed to increase fire fighter safety and success. These personal perspectives are significant to how I've reasoned through and represented this material.

While the central focus is to showcase Anishinaabe Elders' firefighting knowledge, some sections juxtapose this knowledge to recent OMNR training I have received to develop comparisons. For example, explanations of power pump and hose-lay operations given by Anishinaabe Elders are presented alongside descriptions of current OMNR pump technology and hose lay practices. Because each set of practices is distinctive in a number of ways, it is important to make these comparisons. This comparative approach can demonstrate how veteran Anishinaabe and OMNR tactics stand in relation to one another. It can shed light on historical, cultural and technological particularities that have reinforced certain modes of practice. Moreover, it can provide a more acute understanding of the extent to which veteran Anishinaabeg and OMNR may choose to qualify and employ each other's fire line techniques.

5.1 Anishinaabe Bush Navigation and Orienteering Skill

The logistical concerns involved in fire fighting during the 1930s-1960s meant that Anishinaabe people were a valuable human resource beyond sheer manpower requirements. When retired floatplane pilot Jake Siegel spoke to Lee Gerrish and me about some of the Anishinaabeg fire fighters of earlier years, he highlighted certain orienteering abilities that made them especially valuable to the fire program. Jake emphasized that Anishinaabe fire fighters proved indispensable to the fire program because of their highly developed ability to both work and travel in the bush:

Jake: But oh it must have been difficult in the old days before airplanes and so on, and...imagine you're on the ground and you're heading towards the fire. And you might see some smoke and...it's difficult.

Lee: Yeah. And then what do you do with it once you get there?

Mike: You got shovels and back pumps and that's it I guess eh?

Jake: Yeah. Probably. Yeah. And the old pumps they were pretty heavy; cast iron sort of thing. But however, they used to carry a lot of stuff too. I remember they used to talk about when there was a little bit of walking to do they'd say: 'Oh that's an Indian fire.'

Lee: Oh is that right eh?

Mike: I guess those Indians they know how to navigate through the bush quite well eh?

Jake: Ohh. Yeah. Jesus. When you talk about that. You know, this is what gets me thinking, you know, the Indians, you know there's something about some of them, or a lot of them; the older ones anyway, there was really a lot to admire. And I remember we had a fire down on Lac Seul. Well, you know Lac Seul, with all those dead trees sticking up out of the water [after it was dammed and flooded]. So we went to Goldpines and we picked up a couple of guys and I flew down. I don't know...maybe it was about thirty miles from, uhh, Goldpines and... I landed and I couldn't go anywhere! I couldn't get to shore because of the trees; all those dead trees! So I went back to Goldpines, got a boat – or they got a boat – and they went down and, you know this is getting late in the afternoon, and it was dark when they got there. Now here's a shoreline all the way with all dead trees. How did they pick out the spot where this is where they turn in!? While I was flying there, down to the fire, I flew over the fire and I circled it and then went out to the shore, just to give them a look at it. It was this guy James Nodaway Keesic. It was Isaac's brother. He was sitting there just like he wasn't looking at it all! And he was just sitting there. And we flew back to Goldpines; they got in the boat. And they knew where the fire was! They went off in the direction of the fire. And the next day - it was a beautiful day - and I was up about four thousand feet. And I looked down and there was a little red canoe there! And when I flew there, I never saw any streams or anything. And James had a canoe, and there were various creeks, and he was on the very creek, the longest one that got him closest to the fire. And he took all that in [from the airplane]. I didn't even know he observed it! But how did he know where to turn in?

(Jake Siegel to L. Gerrish and M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

James Nadoway Keesic, Jiimis, was navigating Lac Seul by canoe after the lake was flooded by a hydroelectric impoundment that was placed at Ear Falls during the early 1930s (Agger 2008). Trees flooded out by the heightened water level still stood dead off the shore, making Jake's docking impossible. Although Jake didn't seem to notice, Jiimis had observed the exact location of the fire from the air and knew precisely how to get back to that location. Jake Siegel became very familiar with this special kind of skill during his career, although he never fully understood exactly how it was done. Jake observed that Anishinaabeg triangulated their way through the bush from one location to another, and back to the airplane, on a regular basis:

I mean, they can have an airplane *here* and then they can walk *here* and then they'd walk *here* and then from there, they knew exactly the angle to come back to the airplane! It's...I know Roy Keesic told me, like there was some guys lost here, tourists... they had gone out to look for them and they found them. And I asked him: 'Well how do you guys do it?' And Roy couldn't tell me. And it was just instinct or something or other. I had a couple guys on board from Pikangikum; they must have been about maybe 16, 17. We were coming back from a fire that we put out. And we come back and we spotted another little fire. But it was quite a long walk. I'd say it was over a mile anyway. But I landed and I let them go and then I went to Red Lake and got some food and stuff, and when I came back, they were already at the fire. And I mean they were just kids! And, by God, well they walked right to the Goddamned fire! But I guess when you're born into something like that it's...I mean you acquire sort of a knowledge that's foreign...well to a guy like me anyway.

(Jake Siegel to L. Gerrish and M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

Jake was greatly impressed with Red Lake and Pikangikum people's capacity to quickly locate a fire by overland travel. As Jake mentioned, fires burning in remote backcountry areas, where extensive travel was required to reach them, were referred to by other Fire Rangers as 'Indian' fires. Anishinaabeg were known to hold a great aptitude in navigating through long stretches of forest as well as triangulating their position relative to the fire and the drop-off point. Jake also attributed this level of ability to the specific 'bush' upbringing of his Anishinaabe partners.



Plate 24: Elder Oliver Hill steers an aluminum boat through a brook. Fall 2008.
(Photo courtesy of Charlie Pascal).

Paul Fazekas also observed some of the tricks used by Anishinaabeg to navigate to the edge of the fire over longer distances. One time, Paul was dispatched to a fire along with a crew of Pikangikum men. They reached the fire on foot by around dusk after a long walk from where they were dropped off. Because of the late hour, they had walked up to the fire just to have a look at it, and planned to return to camp for the night. Although he had been placed in charge of the group, there were some areas in which he deferred to the skills of his Anishinaabe companions. Once they reached the fire and assessed it, Paul himself was a little unsure as to the direction back to camp. But, he had observed that, almost automatically on their initial walk in to the fire's edge, his Pikangikum partners had planted handfuls of moss in the crooks of trees along the way. On the walk out, he saw that the moss was actually placed so that it was facing them directly. Therefore, they were able to retrace their steps quite easily. In a later interview, Paul attributed this level of knowhow to the unique 'bush' upbringing of Anishinaabe people:

Compare born and raised in the boreal forest versus Caucasian fire fighters coming up from Toronto, you know? Or wherever down in southern Ontario. Yeah they [Anishinaabeg] were miles ahead of us, so to speak. Yeah. I told you the story about putting moss in the trees...I'm glad they did that! Because I'm not sure I would have been able to lead them out that night; it was dark, a mile-walk down to the campsite. So yeah, they had the foresight to do that, you know?

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

Jim Moorley remembered similar methods used by Anishinaabeg not only to navigate through the bush, but also to place forest fires into a workable landscape context from the air. Jim highlighted the fact that Anishinaabeg were taking in a whole spate of topographic and forest fuel conditions as they flew into and around the fire, in order to generate a plan of attack:

Oh. Yeah. I was a rookie. The only fire...that was the only fire I'd ever been on, other than the one I started down south when I was a kid in the grass! [laughter]...They knew their way around the bush. Like I didn't know my way around the bush at all...talking about...I've seen Jimmy [Keesic], like we were flying over the fire and looking out from the Otter [floatplane]. Like how do you know which way to go? I didn't even have a compass. *They* didn't even have a compass! And he'd say: 'well, you look at the trees.' Well, you find you water source, you go: bunch of poplars there, big valley up...like to me, looking out of the plane, it was just flat! Like looking at a freakin' map! Like looking at this! [points to an old aerial photo on the table] And they'd look for terrain, they'd look for fuel types and different things; gorges, gouges, valleys, rivers, hills, streams, swamps right? But it all looked the same to me. They were excellent in the bush.

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)

According to the way he was instructed by the older generation of Anishinaabe fire fighters, Joe Paishk learned a navigational practice that involved reading the fire landscape from the air, forming a mental map, and applying that knowledge on the ground. Both Joe and his cousin Jimmy Sam Keesic practiced the navigational techniques handed down to them by Isaac, Jiimis James and others. These techniques didn't require a compass or map:

And then they give you a map and compass [laughs]! I'd just go in the air and look what it looks like. I don't need no compass. I don't need no map. They were trained to use a map. And Paul would put the map on the ground and say: 'There's the fire right there.' The fire is not on the map! It's over there [laughter]!...What's that big smoke doing over there then? Well what are we doing here eh?...You just look at the landscape... And we were looking at the fire and then from there [the airplane] we'd all look at it, all three of us there in the back. And we'd all talk about it. 'Cause the fire's coming this way in the air, we'd know exactly what to do when we get there. And then we'd just put the line in and that was it. Well there were places sometimes we'd have to walk in there about a mile.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders Nov. 27, 2008)

Joe learned to look at the landscape from the air and, in a sense, formulate a firsthand mental map of the landscape and the fire itself in order to understand how it could be fought. The key was to draw a working connection between what was seen from the air and subsequent movements and actions on the ground. Pikangikum Elder Tom Quill Senior was equally familiar with these methods through his experience on airborne fire patrols:

I guess they had to carry along a whole bunch of fire equipment from where they took off and if they saw a fire I guess where the plane landed they walk to the...and it could be really far along. But we know where the fire was. We could find it right away and then we'd go at it...I guess he's just describing what they did when you spot a fire. They would just circle around and survey that area. And they would use streams or a lake or whatever they had. I guess they were looking at the terrain or the landscape to find out where...which direction the fire would go. That's exactly how we thought. It was exactly how he knew.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Kevin Suggashie, to M. Sanders, Dec. 4, 2008)

This type of aerial observation skill remains a very important component in some of the more advanced training exercises through which Fire Rangers learn to approach Initial Attack. In fact, in his recent position as Regional Training Officer, Jim Moorley has continued to be active in conducting simulation training aimed at developing some of these navigational faculties. Jim also attributes a portion of his own knowledge in this regard to teachings gained from Anishinaabe partners during the early years of his career in firefighting. Nowadays, the use of compasses, GPS's, helicopters and radio communication means that the acquisition and interpretation of landscape information proceed along somewhat different lines. However, when equipment breaks down or a GPS runs out of batteries, individuals may quickly find themselves relying on internalized skills similar to those used by Anishinaabeg over years of navigating through the 'bush'.

5.1.1 Origins of Anishinaabe ‘Bush Competence’

Charlie Pascal: Yeah sometimes like when we go for training, what the trainer would say to us Anishinaabeg is that we should go there too and train Waymeeteekoshee [White man (^{WF})] the way [we] know how to fight fires.

Mike: So sometimes people from here they had more success putting out fires eh? And like the Fire Bosses knew that too?

Charlie Pascal: Yeah they know.

Mike: Like is there something about their skills, like if there’s something about their skills that helped them be better firefighters in some cases?

Charlie Pascal: Yeah he says it’s natural like, Anishinaabe live in the bush. We’ve been living here for many many millions and billions of years ago. They live here and I guess it’s just we have known how to fight fires. And I noticed too that when we were at the Red Lake base, these Fire Bosses would respect us because of our experience with fires.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, July 23, 2008)

Anishinaabeg of early times, be it the Keesic family or Pikangikum members, were brought up in

a manner that stressed the development of skills that were useful for land-based pursuits such as hunting and trapping. Success in their livelihoods required a high capacity for mobility and an intimate firsthand knowledge of a wide expanse of territory, its characteristics and qualities.

Anishinaabeg were predisposed to navigating the country, and the reason why there was such a thing as ‘Indian’ fires, as characterized by Jake Siegel, had to do with the fact that the learned and embodied experience of many early Anishinaabeg was perfectly commensurate with the orienteering skills demanded in forest fire fighting. In my interviews with the Late Elder Whitehead Moose, I came to understand how the task of fire fighting was framed within the context of customary survival skills:

Our previous, like you know, our parents and grandparents taught...we were taught survival skills, like hunting and how to familiarize ourselves with the bush and land...One of the things that we were told by our parents is to listen, pay attention and learn from what you are taught. If you follow these instructions, like these skills, these survival skills, you will live long. And look at me today. I’m 93 and I have followed all those that I was taught.

(Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)



Plate 25: Elder Peter Paishk of Pikangikum (photo courtesy of J. M. Shearer).

Elements of Anishinaabe culture, as explained by Elders, were readily lent to the task of firefighting. Customary navigational knowledge formed an important component of the Anishinaabe cultural skills that were adapted to firefighting. Elder Peter Paishk of Pikangikum was particularly helpful in identifying different culturally-constituted navigational techniques his parents and grandparents taught him to use while out on the land. One technique for identifying the location of lakes from a position in the deep bush had to do with the fact that clouds can take distinct formations due to the presence of lakes below them. As the surface of lakes reflected light back into an overcast sky, it was possible to study the appearance of the clouds to locate water bodies nearby. Peter also mentioned that individuals could mark their position in the bush by being aware of how the trees leaned slightly in one direction. He noted that trees sometimes lean towards a lake and may also tend to lean in certain cardinal directions depending on the specific setting. Observing wind patterns and changes in wind direction could aid in navigation by providing reference points for travel. Paying attention to creeks was also important. One could ascertain where a larger water body was by following the drainage patterns of creeks. Even if the creek was small, a person could quickly ascertain the drainage pattern in order to find a lake. ‘Blazing’ was also a common technique; Peter noted that breaking sticks, placing small logs in a certain position, chinking a tree with moss or simply using an axe to mark a tree were all useful

ways of marking your trail through the bush. Moreover, simply paying attention to the age, type and other characteristics of forest in an area could help a person navigate around. Peter, who works as a guide for American moose hunters, often uses and shares these kinds of teachings to keep his charges from getting lost or ‘turned around’ in the bush (Peter Paishk, Nov. 5, 2008).

5.2 Anishinaabe Knowledge on the Fire Line

5.2.1 Fire Fighting and Life Patterns in Forest Fire Behavior

All of everything is [alive]. Like all of everything. That's why they say they respect the land. Because everything is ahyuhuhshuhwuhtuhg. Our Elders had said to respect the land because everything is ahyuhuhshuhwuhtuhg, alive. And sometimes it'll backfire on you if you don't respect the land. Same thing with fire.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 21, 2008)

While it may be difficult for a Westerner to fully secure an understanding of what the term ahyuhuhshuhwuhtuhg^(WF) truly entails, Tom Quill Senior notes that fire, like everything else, fits this category. Hallowell (1992) has gone into detail on categories of thought in the Anishinaabe worldview that hit upon ideas of being and personhood which relate to what Tom Quill Senior may be trying to say. Berens (2009) is also particularly useful in connecting certain phenomena, such as thunderstorms and lightning, with categories of personhood in the Anishinaabe world. Miller (2010) has more centrally dealt with the topic of fire as a living being as Pikangikum Elders understand it. Throughout the course of his work and my own, my advisor and I have often mused on how exactly fire is ‘alive’ according to Pikangikum people. The matter certainly is deserving of a lengthier treatment than is attempted here. Miller’s (2010) work may be more central and instructive in this regard. For the purposes of my own work, I maintain that apprehending a sense of how fire is ‘alive’ is an important factor in how Anishinaabe people have encountered and fought it.

Forest fires are seen by Pikangikum Elders as a gift from the creator that holds agency on the land. For example, Miller’s (2010) work shows how forest fires are known to play an integral role

in the renewal of Pikangikum's boreal forest homeland. Forest fires are also regarded as a gift from the creator specifically because they have provided opportunities for firefighting employment in the community. Matthew Strang has also indicated that forest fires have been one way in which the creator has looked after the people; allowing them job opportunities at times in which they have most been needed:

Yeah in my days I remember that there was a lot of lightning strikes and along with that there was no rain. Like lighting was more like just a lightning storm in those days. Today when you see lightning strikes it comes with rain he says. Today it's different. It comes with water he says. That's what he notices today. That's what he knows. And when I think about it he says what's happening now is when I think back in my day when there was fire every summer, the creator was looking after us. Because in my day there was hardly or no jobs at all. Any jobs kinda thing. And there for sure you would get paid and buy food and that kind of thing. 'Cause there was no jobs at that time. And when I think about it now the creator must have looked after us. That's how we survived especially in the summertime. There was a lot of forest fires.

(Elder Ohweeghan Matthew Strang in translation by Charlie Pascal. Sept. 12, 2008)

Fire is tied to large and important forces that exist in the Anishinaabe worldview. It is part of the way that the creator brings life and livelihood to the land and people. Fire is thus associated with life. However, what's more significant in terms of firefighting is that the existence of fire as a living thing is often associated with specific features of its behavior:

Fire can be considered as a living thing. [...] As evidence the fire retires in the evening – it rests at night and flares up during the day – beginning around 10 am. It is active. Even on a calm day fire can make its own wind – this is not actually a wind – the wind is within the fire. Another evidence that fire is alive is that it can spread itself by sending balls of fire ahead. It can jump ahead with these. Several times I have seen the cloud (*wuhqway*) of smoke (*puhtay*) from the fire become a thunderbird cloud (*peenaysay whuqway*) – the cloud with lightning within it.

- Tom Quill #1 2-19-2007 (WFMC 2007)

Tom Quill Senior also understood forest fire as a living thing due to the specific kinds of behavior it exhibits over time and space. Forest fires rest at night and become more active during the day. They can also propagate by sending fire brands aloft on the wind to create more fires. The life of a fire is closely tied to wind and weather conditions, those which both feed it and those which it creates. Fire merges with wind to become stronger and can precipitate changes in localized weather and cloud behavior when it does so. A roaring forest fire also shows that fire has a life of

its own simply due to the fact that there is often little that can be done to stop it (Tom Quill Senior, Jul. 22, 2008)

The observed life-patterns of a forest fire are directly tied to its behavior. In turn, this allows an understanding of timing and tactics that may be more effective in fighting it⁶. Like Tom Quill Senior, Matthew Strang pointed out that the behavior of a fire corresponds to specific times of day in which it will rest or become more active:

You know in the night time, in the summer in the night time, the wet, wet little bit in the night-time, that's what he does; goes early in the morning. I know if a fire's going what's going on. About one o' clock is when it started. About five o' clock it goes down. Slows down eh? All night it slows down. Noontime still down. About one o'clock it goes crazy again. That's why fighting fires a long time in the night-time. I know I work in the night-time one time.

(Matthew Strang to M. Sanders Sept. 12, 2008)



Plate 26: Pikangikum Elder Matthew Strang. (Photo taken by M. R. Sanders).

⁶ Hallowell (1937) has discussed a historic Upper Berens River Anishinaabe system for marking the passage of time through the observation of natural and environmental phenomena. He notes that Anishinaabeg reckoned the time of day by measuring the height and position of the sun in its daily circuit across the sky. Elder Matthew Strang also noted that Anishinaabeg had a 'computer' in their mind that they used to fight fires. In another way of speaking, they vigilantly observed immediate conditions, such as sun and wind, to formulate and adapt their firefighting approaches.

Another lesson about the ‘life’ of forest fires is that fire often burns fastest in an easterly direction. Matthew Strang noted that, due to wind factors and the movements of the earth and sun, this was the side of the fire that was often watched most attentively:

There’s a forest fire, they know which direction what it’ll go faster. And he says the faster, he says it moves to the east. That’s the fastest way it goes. Like you never see a forest fire go fast, North, West or South. That’s when we had to be careful. Like you know, look in that area on the east side of the fire. We really had to look. But only when there is a really windy day like it can go fast that way. That’s what he said. But slowly. And the faster it goes to the east. The way, in my opinion, the way I view it is like with the forest fire, the earth rotate this direction and the fire would move that direction like that eh? And that’s why it goes faster east. I wonder if white man looks at it like that? Eh?

(Matthew Strang, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

Like many beings, fire progresses through daily cycles of rest and awakening in the course of 24 hours; it calms down at night and resumes activity later into the next day. If a fire fighter is able to catch the fire during lower activity periods, attack it as it sleeps, their success in controlling it might be enhanced. Moreover, Elders know that fires will move in a certain direction in just about every case. As fire is viewed with a life of its own, Anishinaabeg fire fighters open up a basis on which to render its characteristics intelligible. They come to understand how forest fire behavior adheres to predictable cycles and patterns. They come to develop a foreknowledge of how it will act under certain prevailing conditions. Knowing that fire is ‘alive’ translates into success in firefighting. While OMNR incorporates a whole spate of meteorological measurements, calculations and codes to predict forest fire behavior, the Anishinaabe forest fire behavior prediction system is at least partly encapsulated in the concept of fire as ahuyuhshuhwuhuhug.

5.3 Anishinaabe Fire Line Techniques

When a fire is exhibiting smoldering, surface creeping and running behavior, Anishinaabeg would work at a safe distance from the fire's edge to knock down flames and create fuel breaks which would halt its ability to spread. Recalling earlier days in which hand tools were the primary weapon in fighting a surface fire, Whitehead Moose offered his knowledge of fire fighting tactics used in this case:

We would dig a trench like at the end of the burnt area, the area from there, about this much. We would dig a trench around this area so it won't start a new fire or spread... That's how we did it. The [shovel] blades we used were very sharp and we would use those to cut through the ground. That's what we did. And the fire never went anywhere.

(Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders Nov. 12, 2008)

In Whitehead Moose's early fire fighting career, fire fighters attempted to halt the fire's advance by digging trenches to create a fuel break, a control line carved into the ground, and cut through the bush, that could both starve the fire of combustible material and smother the flames along the edge of the fire. Primary weapons included sharp-bladed fire shovels, axes and Pulaskis⁷. When soil conditions and fire intensity were within a manageable context, it was possible to work right up against the edge of the fire to dig a trench and stop it. In other instances, a trench would be made at a distance from the fire's edge in advance of its anticipated direction of spread. Matthew Strang noted the hard work and coordination of effort involved in fighting running surface fires with hand tools:

It takes a lot of time to put out something like that, he says. We tear it up, like if there's a fire, a fire up ahead, [we] land, then the people had their water packs he said, they just put it out and right behind come those people that bury them, put a trench around them before it spreads he says. Yeah he try and cut it off like if it's burning, or if you think it's gonna spread, just go around it and build a trench. Yeah when I try to put it out like if it's spreading or trying to spread we used hose or backpack and try to put the blaze out first and then some of the others would come around and try and put out the smudges.

(Matthew Strang, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

⁷ A Pulaski is a tool similar to an axe but with a sharp grubbing bit on the blunt end opposite the blade. The grubbing bit is used to dig through the soil and cut through roots to create a clean fuel break.

As distinct from wholly power pump-based water application techniques used to fight fires today, ‘digging line’ using axes, shovels, and ‘pisspacks’ to carve out a fuel break and douse flame was more common in early decades of fire fighting. The logic was to use a little bit of water and a lot of fuel break to hold the fire within a certain area. First, water application checked flame intensity along the edge. Then, after the fire was doused, fuel breaks would be carved out to guarantee the fire was contained. In early fires in the 1930s and 1940s, sometimes involving 20 or even 40-person teams (Norman Quill, Nov. 5, 2008), trenching would often progress rather quickly. Each person would leapfrog the individual in front of him, just as United States’ Hotshot crews do today (Desmond 2007), to quickly build a fuel break. As long as the fuel break was clean and wide enough relative to encountered burning conditions, it could successfully limit the fire’s spread.

5.3.1 Power Pumps and Handtools: Veteran Anishinaabe and OMNR Approaches

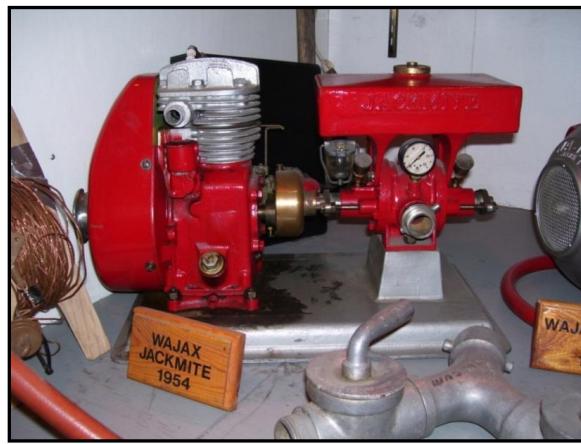


Plate 27: A Wajax Jackmite power pump held at the Dryden Fire Management Centre.
(Photo by M. R. Sanders).

One thing I respect them [the OMNR] is the pumps; from the old, like our generation, to the new types...But those old pumps; no way Jack! ‘Get that pump going!’ [laughter]...weighed 120 pounds. Whoa they were heavy! Some were 130! Ninety pounds [water] pressure...guy would stay there all day [looking after the pump]. They would run for maybe half an hour... Loud! Old Wajax and Mercury; I don’t want to stay there all day! Rather go fight the fire! [laughs] But with the new Wajax, you got two or three hours, four hours of running time. I liked that. Yeah. For that, I respect them.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

Portable fire pump setup and hose lay operations are central to current Ontario Fire Ranger training. Crew members are extensively trained in getting water to the fire by learning how to install a fire pump at different remote water sources, such as lakes, creeks, swamps and rivers. An experienced pump person can get a pump up and running in less than two minutes, even when faced with a difficult water source. Accordingly, Crew Members are also shown how to quickly lay out hose up to the fire's edge, nozzle down the fire perimeter and encircle it as fast as possible. If a forest fire exhibits surface running behavior, its fast rate of spread demands equally fast action to halt it before it gets too big.

Joe Paishk expressed a strong appreciation for newer and better fire pumps that were developed over the course of his career. Newer pumps were lighter, stronger and more reliable, making the job a lot easier. The most recent model of fire pump, the Wajax/Wildfire Mark III, is a central piece of equipment for OMNR Initial Attack Fire Crews. In fact, the Mark III has remained the standard in the Ontario Fire program since around the 1970s. Aside from a few updates, it fulfills the expectations of reliability and simplicity that it was designed with almost four decades ago.

Anishinaabe Elders who were active in fire fighting from the 1930s to 1960s worked with more limited, cumbersome power pumps that were less effective than the Mark III. However, far from being solely a detriment to their success in firefighting, their experience with older pump technology meant that many veteran Anishinaabeg actively maintained a great deal of expertise with other tactics as well.

In essence, a pump and hose lay operation has always proceeded on the basis of the same basic principles. First, the fire crew stations the pump unit at a reliable water source and then runs one-hundred-foot lengths of hose from the pump source up to the fire. Once the fire is reached, crews then work to nozzle down the flames and create a clean fuel break around the fire perimeter. Norman Quill (9 Nov. 5, 2008) illustrated the common practice of 'wrapping' the fire with a hose line in order to contain it. In his example, a main line was run up to the edge of the fire and then

split into two separate hose lines. Two crews then broke off and worked their way in opposite directions around the fire until they met each other.

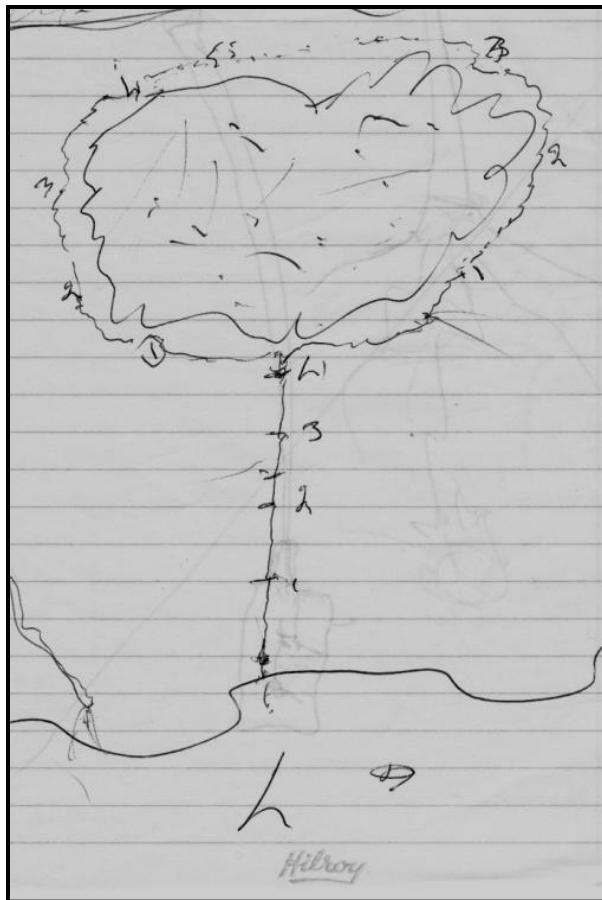


Figure 2: Elder Norman Quill's illustration of a hose lay from a pump source at a lake: 'L', using a 'Wye' device to pair off two hose lines which would be wrapped around the fire. The numbers 1 through 4 signify individual lengths of hose laid out towards and around the fire.

Each time a new section of hose is connected, the water flow at the end of the line must be interrupted so that the hose lay team can couple another length into the line. From the 1940s to the 1970s, Anishinaabe fire crews often used a gated or 'Siamese Wye' mechanism along the hose line both to pair off the lines, and also to divert the flow of water so they could add additional lengths of hose. Norman Quill drew a picture which described the use of these kinds of Wye mechanisms.

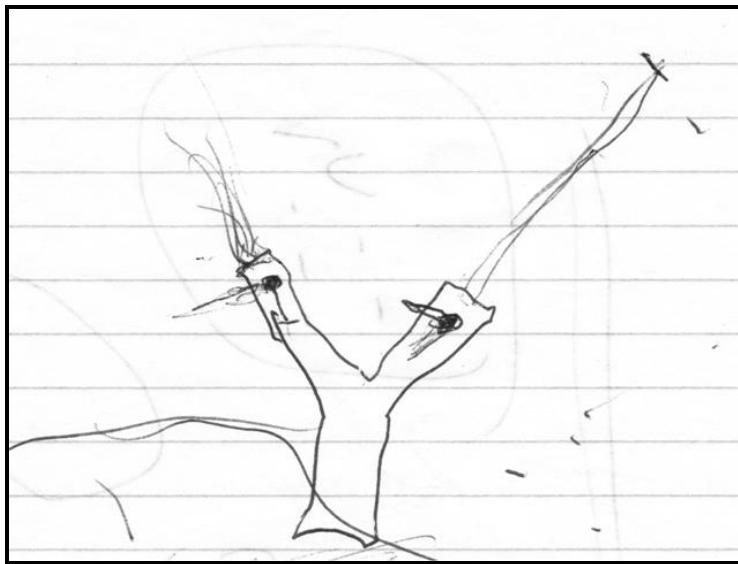


Figure 3: Elder Norman Quill's illustration of a 'Wye' mechanism showing how water flow would be split into two streams and controlled using ball valves on either outlet end.

In order to tie in a hose line using older style pumps, Anishinaabeg shouted down to a crew mate stationed at the Wye who operated the ball valves and controlled the flow of water in one direction or the other as needed, interrupting the flow on one or the other side so that the hose lay teams could tie in more hose. As Tom Sr. recalled, pump operators had to be careful not to close off both valves and constrict the flow of water from the pump altogether because the resulting build-up of pressure in the line would quickly stall out the pump. Someone would then have to walk all the way back down the line to start the pump up again. It could also prove difficult to coordinate the flow of water at the Wye with crews laying out hose far ahead. Tom Quill Senior described his experience as the 'pump man' on a fire:

[He's talking about] clamps; if both of them were used [both valves closed] I guess the pump broke down. I used to be the wye and pump operator. All day. When he first started out. I guess they used to shout at him to 'close it' 'stop it' and sometimes he couldn't understand them from there it's so far away!

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Kevin Suggashie, to M. Sanders, Dec. 4, 2008)

A key difference between older style pumps and the Wajax Mark III is that the latter model will not cut out even when the water flow is totally constricted in the line. The Wajax Mark III has a centrifugal clutch mechanism that allows the pump engine to keep running although the water

flow is completely impeded. The hose line can be choked off completely at almost any point with a pair of hose stranglers and the pump will keep running. This eliminates the need to station a person at the wye and/or pump site to keep things running smoothly. In theory, the Mark III can run unattended for around four hours. Therefore, all hands can be dedicated to helping hold the fire.

As Joe Paishk indicated, earlier pumps were also more limited in water pressure than newer models. Depending on the distance from the water source to the fire, there could also be additional pressure loss through friction and elevation. Because it is crucial to ensure that burning and unburned fuels are separated along the fire line, Elder Anishinaabe fire fighters often carried out their attack by having a hand-tool crew operate in tandem with a hose lay crew. First, one team of four or five would set up the pump and lay hose along the fire's edge to douse the flames. Then, the other crew would bring up the rear and reinforce the firebreak with hand tools as the hose lay team continued with their initial pass along the fire's edge (Matthew Strang, Sept. 12, 2008).

The Wajax Mark III model used today can maintain pressure at the nozzle in upwards of 200 psi. Therefore, when its full potential is realized, it's not merely dousing the fire with water, but also creating a powerful jet of water that can cut and dig into the soil to create a clean fuel break. In theory, this removes the need to have another crew reinforce the line with hand tools. In contemporary contexts, the emphasis is on the nozzle operator to adequately check the fire and dig line by applying water with adequate volume and pressure (OMNR 2010).

The more challenging logistics involved in using older style pumps, i.e., their heavy weight, limited reliability and negligible water pressure, meant that Anishinaabeg veterans often supplemented their use with axes and shovels. Sometimes they also chose not to use a pump at all. Depending on how far the fire was away from a water source and how intensely the fire was burning, it might be possible to use shovels and 'piss-packs' to hit the fire right away. While these more manual

methods were obviously a bit more labor intensive under certain circumstances, they also allowed Anishinaabeg a unique understanding of what it took to cut off a fire; and what sections along the fire perimeter were more of a priority.

Pikangikum Elders remember instances in which the distance from a water source to the fire was so great that it was deemed impractical to put in a hose line, no matter what the level of available pump technology. Alec Suggashie remembered that hand tool methods remained in use throughout his career, especially on smaller, more remote fires, due to this fact:

For example too if there was like, you know, what you call a smaller fire, if it's a small fire way out in the bush; deep into the bush, we would just walk over there with our spade or shovels that we used because if we used hose, we would use a lot of them, he says. So that's the reason. If it's small, like you know, we would just fight it with our shovels and the thing we used...if we would find sand, that helped us. Like, you know, dig up sand; put it around the fire so the fire won't spread. That's if the fire was small, he said.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 22, 2008)

Alec Suggashie and his crewmates weighed the work effort involved in smaller, more distant fires and sometimes chose to use hand tools instead of running a hose line to the area. This experience and effectiveness with hand tools remained salient among Anishinaabe crews while newcomers from the south were said to rely much more on pumps and hose. When long distances were involved, newcomers simply placed another pump halfway up the line in order to boost water pressure and volume:

Our partners with the white people who had fight fires, people who were fighting fires, what they would do is they would use hoses and pump. A pump close to the shore beside the lake and they would use another pump way out somewhere half ways, just because the pressure was weak and that's the reason they done that. That's what our other crews did. And we were the people that had to clean up after them taking all that hose down and the pump! Make us do those jobs he says.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders Jul. 22, 2008)

Alec's partners demonstrated some ingenuity in getting water to the fire by simply placing another pump halfway up the line to retain water pressure and volume over a greater distance. In the SP-100 training manual, this is referred to as a 'tandem' pump setup (OMNR 2008). While it improved water delivery to the fire, this method also resulted in more effort during the cleanup

stage of a fire, an aspect of fire fighting which Alec became quite familiar with during his career. Alec explained that Anishinaabeg approaches hinged on an understanding of how to use elements other than water to put the fire out.

Yeah he says that how he notices like the way these Waymeeteekooshee I guess they wanted to do it the easy way; that only water would work fighting fires he says. That's how I noticed that that's how they did it. They used water most of the time. But with us like when we walked far into the bush we would use only the shovel and we would dig sand into the ground. Sometimes we would find sand way deep and we would dig it out; and sand works as same as water he says. And that's how. That's the difference that I know from working with these Wemtigooshiwag. Sand works the same thing as water he says.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 22, 2008)

Alex Peters, who worked briefly as an EFF during the late 1970s and early 1980s, discussed how fire suppression without water really drew out the skills of Anishinaabeg from older generations:

Alex: Yeah. I remember one time I went to Trout Lake eh? There was about ten...or there was about fifteen of us. They took us to Trout Lake. It was right in the afternoon and...they took us to the fire. It was way in the bush; it was about three miles into the bush eh? Use our shovels and axes. But we had about...it was mostly all our old experienced firefighters eh? From Pikangikum. There was maybe two of three of us young guys eh? We were there about three or four days there. Fire was out; *all* out. No water. They just used their shovels. They worked down at the edges of the fire eh? Prevent it from spreading. They just had gloves on and felt around and...

Mike: They know exactly how to do that eh? Just uh,

Alex: Yeah. Yeah. Just with their hands.

(Alex Peters, President, Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation, to M. Sanders, Nov. 9, 2008)

Another way to maximize the use of older or more limited power pumps was to cut right to the head of the fire, the most active part, instead of progressing around its perimeter. As Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk (Jan. 27, 2009) explained, it was sometimes possible to lay the hose line right through 'the black' at the rear of the fire in an attempt to more quickly reach the head from behind. In this way, the part of the fire that was spreading most quickly was dealt with immediately, while the less active parts were temporarily bypassed.

Like when we had that fire there; there was a fire right here you had to go by the edge like that. And then over, and then over like that [around the perimeter]. And the old

fashioned way you can go this way [straight up the back and through the middle], zigzag like...If it back burns it's pretty slow. When the wind blows this way [, into a previously burned-over area,] that's pretty slow. When the wind blows the other way [, outwards from the fire perimeter,] that's when you gotta go chase it eh? Yeah. Instead of going up in the trees like that, [or] just go in the edge like that eh? Over here it's faster eh? If you want to go up in here and want to fight it here, like [between] the right hand and the left hand [flank] and then it's faster eh? Over here [up from the back] you just walk and just come at the fire. And you start making a trail in there. Now you gotta go by the bush in there; by the bush-line.

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

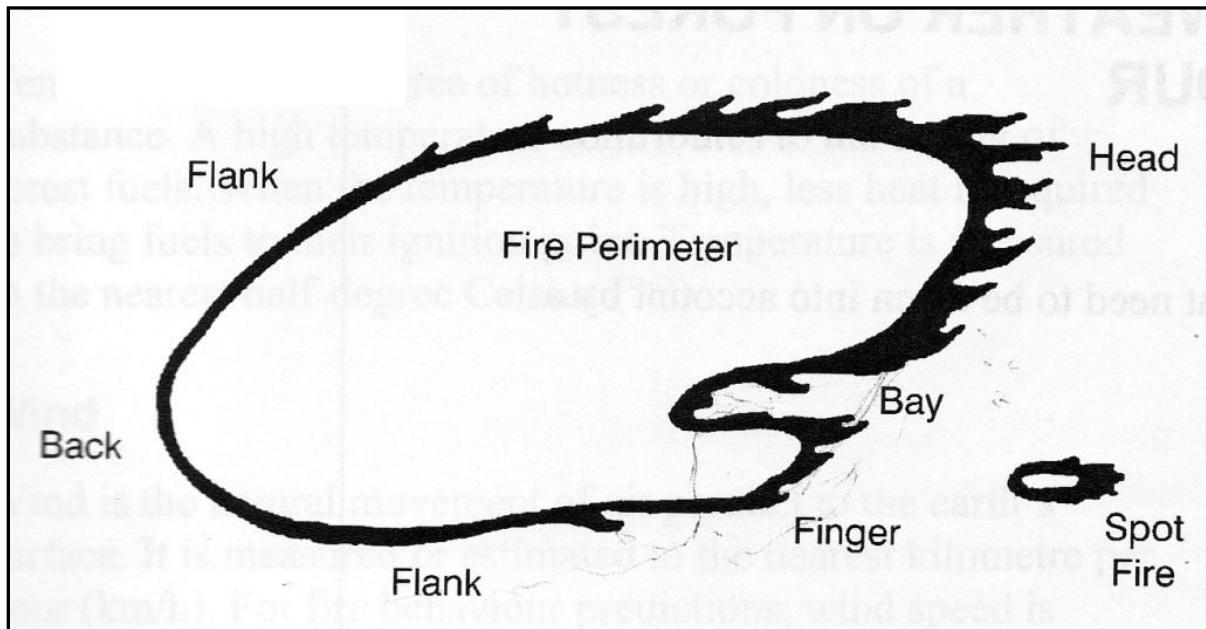


Figure 4: A representation of a forest fire showing its various parts.
Taken from OMNR (2008).

It should be pointed out that laying hose through 'the black'; where the fire has already burned through, is not seen as an acceptable method in contemporary times. As Joe Keesic noted, you have to go along the bush line rather than through 'the black'. The main goal of Initial Attack is to put the fire in a position of Being Held, meaning that its entire perimeter is encircled by the hose line and knocked down with water to the point where there is a minimal possibility for outbreaks. Fire Rangers are trained to lay hose in 'the green' to both prevent the hose line from burning and to ensure the line is fully secure around the entire perimeter (OMNR 2008).

Joe Paishk encountered this divergence between Anishinaabeg and DLF/OMNR approaches firsthand through his participation in a firefighting simulation exercise during the early 1970s. Joe recalled an instance in which the Fire Bosses marked out a mock fire with flagging tape and had the crews lay out a hose line to demonstrate how they would attack it. In this case, Joe and his other crewmates chose to cut through the middle of the fire right towards its 'head'. The trainers were quite surprised by this tactic. But as Joe Paishk noted, their approach involved a sense of contingency in following the fire, the wind and prevailing conditions that were influencing fire behavior, its rate and direction of spread:

I just go where the fire goes, how the smoke is, where it goes, where the ashes go...but in the book they want us to make a trench and water it down. We forget the rest. But I was taught the most important thing is...is how the smoke goes, ashes how they fell. There might be a fire down there [in another part], but it's not too heavy. If it's going to be heavy, you know it'll be a jump [fire].

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Oct. 17, 2008)

5.3.2 Floatplane Water Drops

The Anishinaabe style of fire fighting described above also benefitted from the use of floatplanes rigged to carry and drop water on the fire from the air. Jake Siegel flew Norseman, Beaver and Otter floatplanes that had all different systems of water uptake and release, that were used during the 1950s-1970s to calm down the fire and thus aid ground crew efforts (Jake Siegel, Nov. 28, 2008). While the amount of water delivered was much more limited compared to contemporary water bombers, a few loads of water dropped in the right place could nonetheless mitigate fire behavior and allow ground crews a better edge. For crews who were often working mainly with hand tools, this kind of extra support proved helpful. Jake Siegel's Otter, which was in service from the mid 1950s to the mid-1970s, had a few different water-bombing configurations that ranged in capacity from 200-220 gallons (OMNR 1986 and Jim Moorley, Dec. 23, 2008). Jim Moorley remembered that fire fighters used to call these water drops the 'Irish Mist'; they were mainly said to be effective in raising the relative humidity and reducing fire activity to a limited

degree. However, depending on burning conditions, the success of direct ground attack efforts could hinge on Jake's added support (Joe Paishk, Oct 17, 2008).



Plate 28: Jake Siegel's Otter makes a water drop. Photo taken around the early 1970s.
Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.



Plate 29: Tom Quill Senior walks the edge of a smoldering fire area ca. 1973.
Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.

5.4 Anishinaabe Firefighting Practices and Fire Behavior

5.4.1 Hotspots and Smudges

Fires often display limited burning activity that is confined to the forest floor. These smoldering ground fires are found when a forest fire has initially burned through an area, under certain weather conditions, and/or if a fire has been knocked down and placed under control by ground crews. ‘Mop-up’ activities are then used to rout these smudges or hotspots, which can burn deep into the organic layer of the forest floor. Routing out smudges is hard, but important work in making sure a fire is dead out.

Veteran non-Native firefighters I spoke with quickly noted that Anishinaabe crews were exceptionally skilled at mop-up. Unsurprisingly, the teaching offered by Anishinaabeg Elders with regard to locating and extinguishing ground fires was quite extensive. Tom Quill Senior shared a

great amount of knowledge as he explained the hot-spotting and smudging techniques that Anishinaabeg had refined over their careers:

Yeah I had experience with these kind of fires when they're well into the ground. What we did with those is we would dig. We would dig until there is no more, like it's not warm, and we would put them out until they're completely out or cold. 'Cause they're pretty hard to put out when they're deep into the ground, that was my experience with those, he says. And in an area where there's muskeg or there's a swamp nearby, with these kind of hotspots, we would dig them out and bring them to these muskeg areas and we just, you know, you can put those out and rub muskeg like a wet sponge over these areas...One thing he enjoyed most of all was, when the fire's out, he'd walk around in a burnt area, looking for smudges, and when you smell a smudge you have to go look for it. That was the fun part. Trying to find where that smudge is. That was one of the things I enjoyed most was looking for smudges after the fire. Anxious to find anything that was left behind...When he found a smudge or a hotspot he would use a spade or a shovel and he would just dig around it, where the coals are and create an area right into the burnt area. And then when you put it aside right in the middle I would look for gravel or sand and bury the smudge.

(Tom Quill Senior in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, July 22, 2008)

Sand is good for putting out fire. You can cover it with sand and put it out. Clay is not good. The fire will still be there under the clay. [Sand is better at smothering fire than clay.] At the end of the day when the fire begins to die down is when we would attack the fire. We would work through the night to dig around the fire because that was when it was not active [the fire was cooler]. We would have to dig down all around the fire. Expose all the roots of the old balsam fir and spruce. That was hard work because in places there was three feet of black soil [duff]. The fire would get into those roots and be very hard to put out. You had to dig them all up.

Tom Quill 2-19-2007 (WFMC 2008)

Tom Quill Senior stressed that a smudge had to be extinguished by digging into the ground, isolating the burning material and using wet muskeg, sand or gravel, dousing or smothering the fire. The use of wet muskeg is not mentioned in the current SP-100 Fire Ranger training manual (OMNR 2008). In the Canadian Shield area of northwestern Ontario, it is possible to find swamp and raised bog areas which hold loads of highly saturated moss or peat several feet thick. Fire fighters like Tom were astute at using what they found close at hand to their immediate advantage. Different types of soil, sand, gravel or clay, held different properties in smothering the fire.

Tom also recalled that hunting for smudges was one of most fun parts of the job. Sniffing out and spotting diffuse ground fire is a challenging task calling on acute skills somewhat similar to hunting. The SP-100 training manual uses the term Cold Trailing to refer to how the senses of

sight, smell and touch can be employed to locate hotspots (OMNR 2008). In a conversation with Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk, I received a detailed explanation of how cold trailing was used to locate smudges. Both of them were taught to look for both ground fires and fire that remained smoldering inside standing trees, especially poplar or birch trees, during certain times of day:

Joe P.: Well you just gotta look for the wind direction there. That's all you gotta do.

Joe K.: Yeah.

Joe P.: But when it's calm, you walk a little bit 'til you stop. Walk a little and then stop. But sometimes you couldn't find it because it was smoldering in a tree. You'd have to cut it down.

Joe K.: Yeah. Like those chicots [dead standing trees], or inside a poplar eh?

Joe P.: That's the reason why, you know, work on the smudges in the evening. After supper we'd go back in the bush. They don't do that in some of these crews. You'd have to stay back. And it's smoldering in there. You can smell it. We never did listen to the bosses. Jimmy [Keesic] and I would just go fight fire in the evening. It's still overtime.

Joe K.: You know you're starting to get close when you see this little puff of smoke in there eh?

Mike: That time of night too eh? It's maybe better than...

Joe P.: Better than during the day. Yeah. When the wind is always blowing...

Joe K.: Even early in the morning. If you want to find smudges you go like maybe about ten feet in the line and then when the sun comes up you'd see it. You'd just walk in there eh? We'd walk in there. Just walk maybe about five or ten feet off the line in there. You can see them in there...

Joe P.: There's a lot of things we gotta watch and that's how we pick up from the old generation.

Joe K.: That's how we find those smudges, because early in the morning you'd see them better than the afternoon eh?

Joe P.: But there are some crews that will not let you go early in the morning sometimes, because they gotta eat first. Well I'd go out and fight fire...what we'd usually do is like Jimmy [Jimmy Sam Keesic] and I would get up in the morning with our crew and we'd go and find smudges, and then we'd come back and eat breakfast, and then go back again. But this time we'd have to take our lunches.

Joe K.: Yeah. They don't do that anymore.

Mike: Like I guess you just go right at the right time eh, the only time to find those smudges?

Joe P.: Yeah. Like if you go later on in the afternoon you won't find them. You have to go right first thing in the beginning of the morning. And then we'd go back and have breakfast and then we'd go back and take our own lunch.

Joe K.: You'd send one guy in there and put another guy in there twenty feet over from him.

Joe P.: As long as you could see the guy next to you, you know?

(Joe Paishk and Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

Joe Paishk and Joe Keesic advised that combined wind, sunlight and smoke conditions specifically at dawn and dusk could be exploited to achieve better success in cold trailing. At both dawn and dusk, when the sun is at an acute angle to the earth and wind conditions are lower, a fire fighter could observe smoke hanging almost like a curtain in the sunlight. At the same time, fires did not burn as intensely during these periods of the day. Therefore, certain fire areas could be routed more easily than during peak burning periods in the afternoon.

For Alec Suggashie, sniffing out and tracking down smudges was also important because these types of fires could sometimes flare up into more involved fires throughout the course of the day:

Charlie Pascal: He said the way he would find these hotspots are through smell. 'Cause he can clearly, like you know, smell a hotspot or a smudge even from a distance. For example as far down as the....at the dock from here. And sometimes when...sometimes he couldn't find one because very small sometimes and you could barely smell it from a distance. And sometimes he wouldn't find it and he would come back later and find it when it got a little bigger or...like sometimes during the days, like in the morning it goes out and you don't find these sometimes until later on in the day when they begin to smoke if you can't find these little ones in the morning. But you eventually find them he says.

[Charlie and Alec talk in Anishinaabe]

Charlie Pascal: I was just asking him, like you know, when like during the day the smoke, like you know, it starts to smoke like when it gets warmer or the wind picks up kind of thing, and he said yes.

Mike: And when you're in a fire area like that I guess I've heard sometimes it can, like it's just smoldering eh? But then it blows up again sometimes I've heard. And I wonder if that's ever happened to him like where the fire was small and then starts to grow and then up to the top of the trees again like that?

Charlie Pascal: Yeah he had that experience with that where the fire would pick up and sometimes when you look for smudges or hotspots and sometimes you see a big [...] trees with small roots going deep in [the ground] all over and sometimes you would miss those ones, miss those roots that are smoldering or hot, and that's what can eventually create fire. Yes he said he had that experience.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 23, 2008)

Tom Quill Senior also spoke specifically about how a fire can resurface from underground through the roots of trees. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of ensuring these kinds of fires are dead out. At first, underground fire may be virtually undetectable. However, after awhile, burning roots can result in a flare up because fire can often find a pathway to burst back through to the surface and continue to spread:

There could be no evidence of the fire that was under the ground *puhpuhmeenuhkwasseenoon*. Underground fire with no evidence on the surface. When fire gets into the roots of a mature balsam fir or spruce (*keechee meenuheegoog*) it is very hard to put out. They have large roots and fire can stay there a long time. Underground fire needs an opening to come up again – to flare up. Where the ground area is open it will come out on a hot sunny day. It is called *puhpuhkeetaag* or *puhpuhkoocheyahkeetaag* when it breaks out and flares up.

- Tom Quill #1 2-17-07 (WFMC 2007)

Because fire outbreaks could be difficult to detect under these circumstances, paying particular attention to hotspots was very important. Matthew Strang noted that the presence of larger, deep-burning smudge fires made it necessary to dig trenches deep into the soil in order to contain ground fires. This extra effort was something that newcomer recruits had to be taught:

The one thing that Waymeeteekooshee did when they were looking for hotspots; they just use sand, cover it up and that's it. That was a mistake that they did. But us, we dig around a trench...Yeah when we used to fight these smokes or smudges or hotspots, they really worked on those really hard he says. You can feel it under the warm or even the roots are warm or have spark in them

(Matthew Strang, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

If the fuel available to a ground fire was not broken by a trench, it was possible that the fire could sneak past a control area and continue burning. Also, if burning material remained deeper in the ground, a fire could persist underneath the established line. It was essential to not only smother the hotspot, but to create a clean fuel break as well.

He went out firefighting in Thunder Bay. Just the Crew Boss [was] from here and the rest were Waymeeteekooshee. And what he noticed about the Waymeeteekooshee what he did was when he go look for smudges in the bush, like we have to dig around as far as it's cool like right in that burnt area and that's where we dig up sand and put it out, and we see Waymeeteekooshee they did it differently. They just took sand and put it in top; they didn't dig around it. And that's how sometimes these fires would start. When you just do something like that. And that's how he noticed.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, July 23, 2008)

As far as Alec recalls, Anishinaabeg had a leg up in dealing with smudges relative to new recruits from down south. This is consistent with the statements of southern newcomers who both witnessed and learned the 'smudging' techniques of Anishinaabeg as they progressed through their early careers. Jim Moorley explained that Native fire fighters demonstrated exceptional capabilities in locating smudges during the 'mop-up' stage of a fire:

Oh fantastic! Incredible at mop-up! Oh yeah. Like hey, you could point twenty white guys to the fire and [they'd] come back and say that fire's out. Put five Native guys in there and they'll find twenty smokes. That's right. That's true. You know, who would think about...people don't think about walking into the sun when you're looking for [smudges]...nowadays the Fire Boss has a map and he just points right over here: 'I want you to fight fire here.', you know? You gotta tell 'em where there's smoke. The Native guys, you just tell 'em which edge you want out. And they'd tell you where to go, you know? Mostly you'd start in the east and work to the west to keep a direct line into the sun right? That's how you find the smoke. Or, they'll walk into the wind. New guys don't do that right? They'll walk, or they'll stumble, or something right. Those guys, they had a system. They'd spread out and they'd be able to see the other guy right? Once they got a bite, a smell, they'd all stop. They'd all sit and wait and then they'd get up again...

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders Dec. 23, 2008)

Paul Fazekas, who was active as a Crew Member around the same period as Jim Moorley, during the early 1970s, provided a similar account in which he also credited Anishinaabeg with great skills in dealing with smudge fire location and attack:

Yeah. I mentioned that before and...that's one thing I learned. They kinda taught you how to use the elements to...like when we're in mop-up stage on a fire, like a lot of the...the deeper the fire burns, the less telltale it is as far as putting up smoke. It could be two feet under the ground; the hotspot, just putting up little or no smoke, so we might just get a little wee wisp. So yeah, they taught us how to use the wind, you know, we had to get downwind kind of thing and try and trace it back to where it is and look for the most likely areas where you know it was gonna be sort of thing. Yeah, they were pretty good at that.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders Nov. 28, 2008)

At least some newcomers from the south, who were at first relying only on their formal training, learned from the practical experience of Anishinaabe fire fighters, many of whom had worked for a number of years and had learned their smudging techniques from older generations. Anishinaabe 'smudging' techniques involved an acute knowledge of ground fire behavior which was effectively used to put the fire out.

5.4.2 Dealing with a Roaring Crown Fire

When a forest fire really goes for a ‘run’, there is basically *nothing* ground crews can do to stop it.

Not surprisingly, SP-100 instructors made sure that their students were especially warned of the dangers involved with this kind of ‘crowning’ fire behavior. Neither Pikangikum Elders nor OMNR would ever advocate leaving ground crews in a position where they were expected to contain this kind of severe fire. The associations between crowning fire behavior, strong wind conditions and jump fires was highlighted by several veteran Anishinaabe firefighters. Elders’ accounts of fast-running crown fires always included some accompanying advice regarding safety and survival in these situations. The late Wuhbeequay Whitehead Moose described fast-running fire behavior and referred to the survival skills he had to put into action when faced with this kind of fire:

Charlie Pascal: And there were times that were hard, like you know, especially when it was windy. ‘Cause sometimes they were in the bush and all of a sudden there was a gust of wind that would come by and, you know, hit the fire. And that’s where he put his, umm, wisdom in action; like the survival skills that we had in the bush. That’s what he used. And from where we left in the morning, - that’s where the fire is - he would go in that direction. He says he knew that there was no big fire, just smoke, he says. And they would go back from where he came from...Like for example, for safety when there’s a gust of wind like when it’s windy, during your...your firefighting, I would say that you go where there’s no fire in the area, like, where maybe there’s... a rock outcrop... Fire goes fast when it’s windy he says. Once a fire, like you know, gets bigger, like it’s on the trees, it just goes and goes as fast as it can and it’s like a wind and, at that time, he sees, like what do you call ‘em?...umm...

Mike: Cones?

Charlie Pascal: They can go very far and like start a fire, a jump fire, he says. They can go far. Even across a lake, to an island. That’s how a jump fire starts. And if there’s a muskeg on a fast fire, that’s where we go if it gets too dangerous. Like sometimes you see a little creek. That’s all wet, and the muskeg is wet. All of it; ‘cause we know it’s always wet. It’s like we always ran to the muskeg because there’s water there. We know there’s water there. I never knew of anybody getting burned the whole time I was firefighting. We know how to survive.

(Whitehead Moose, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)

Whitehead identified three areas where a fire fighter might find safety when a fast fire takes hold; a muskeg area, a previously burned area, and a rock outcrop. All three areas are devoid of readily combustible fuels and potentially safe from conflagration. His knowledge is consistent with OMNR’s SP-100 training manual, which stresses the importance of establishing escape routes and safety zones as a matter of course from the moment a crew hits the ground (OMNR 2008).

Firefighters rarely if ever directly attacked a fast-running fire. However, in some situations, running and torching fires can quickly progress to a crown fire stage, requiring a high level of situational awareness on the part of ground crews. I asked Norman Quill about how a fire fighter could remain vigilant with regard to this acceleration in forest fire behavior:

Reggie Peters: He said when there's a big fire. I guess when there's a big fire, there's wind that forms from there. That's how the fire happens. And there's pine cones that can travel from that big wind, I guess from the fire. And it throws the pine cones. And that's how you get big fires...

Mike: Like I guess a danger part of fighting the forest fire is when the fire is on the ground and then it goes up and just blows up eh? Knowing how that's going to happen eh? I wonder if there's a secret or like a sign that's going to tell you when the fire's just going to blow up?

Reggie Peters: He said they were always watching signs, like if it was a calm day and if the land was really dry. They always knew about the hills and the valleys; where the water was...He's talking about the old forest. Talking about where the tall trees are, and he said that the fire makes that wind. It travels fast...He said the fire is like a rapids and it's going in circles....

(Norman Quill, in translation by Reggie Peters, to M. Sanders, Nov. 5, 2008)

Norman emphasized the particular variety of forest, an old stand, which he associated with this kind of fire. When looking at the canopy of a jack pine or black spruce forest, with their club-like arrangement of needles, thin branches, pitch and cones, one can understand the kind of fire Norman is talking about. Once fire is able to climb into a coniferous canopy, it finds a substantial amount of fuel. Anishinaabe fire fighters were always watching for signs that this type of fire was approaching.

Joe Keesic of Red Lake/Lac Seul Band described crown fires in much the same way as Norman Quill as they both identified the cyclical, rolling pattern of winds accompanying this crown fire behavior. Joe Keesic also commented that trying to stop a crown fire is much like stopping a moving train:

Mike: I guess you seen a lot of big like, the crown fire when it's coming fast eh?

Joe: Well maybe it jumps about a mile or two sometimes eh? If it's really windy eh? Especially in like a crown fire. Crown fire burns on top eh? Surface comes running maybe 100 yards. You know? All embers coming off in there eh? Just moving eh? Sometimes maybe a mile or three a minute. When it gets moving like that. Crown fire; burns on the top, burns in the surface on the back eh? Treetop to treetop? That's dangerous eh? You gotta know where the wind is blowing. You gotta know where the wind is going to go with that fire. And it's just...go stand over there in that funnel and try to stop it, you know? [laughs] It'll just go by you there.

Mike: Always gotta watch and look and feel where the wind is going eh?

Joe: Yeah. Yeah.

Mike: Sometime I guess maybe that crown fire is far away but it's coming eh? Sometimes maybe you can hear it?

Joe: Yeah. Oh. Yeah. It's just like a train coming eh?

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

As Alec Suggashie pointed out; a fire fighter had to clearly understand what priorities were the most important when confronting fast-running fire. Sobriety of mind, combined with keen observational knowledge, could serve a fire fighter very well. Regarding fast-running fire, Alec stressed the importance of keeping a clear head to carry out the right survival actions:

He says that I guess the most dangerous things that he had experienced was...fire going fast he said. I guess the... that...he's saying is that the fastest fire that can go is on treetops he said. That's the most dangerous fire that he knew is like the treetop when it's really windy, and you can hear the wind like fire taking off, and that's where the most danger is...Yeah that same time when this kind of fire is there's heavy smoke and sometimes you don't want to panic, you have to take control of yourself in these kind of situations when you're under this dangerous fire. Like sometimes we don't know, or like we didn't know where the fire is 'cause there's always jump fires everywhere, or you might run into a jump fire. And at the same time you have to...to think, he says like, where to go, where not to run. And at the same time when you're working on the line with the fire hose and pump, you know, you just have to leave them behind. Don't bother trying to save those things. You just have to leave them the way they are. And when you're with your crew or somebody, your partner, you always have to stay together. Know where you are at all times. And the fastest fire I know is going uphill he said. That's the fastest fire that you can see or experience, he said, is an uphill fire; going uphill. The fastest fire, he said.

(Alec Suggashie, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, July 23, 2008)

Alec instructed me regarding the importance of not panicking during a severe fire, carefully assessing the direction in which the fire is spreading and making sure that evacuees stay close together when leaving a severe fire area. Moreover, in Oweehcheh's story, human life was strongly prioritized and fire equipment had to simply be left behind. At this stage of fire activity,

the main emphasis was on finding a safe area to last out the fire, as well as a safe route away from the fire. For instance, Ooweechcheh was aware that fire could run uphill very fast. Therefore, his story illustrated that escape in this direction could carry heavy danger.

Fast-running fires had to be taken very seriously. By way of describing his past experience, Joe Paishk of Red Lake/Lac Seul Band reinforced the danger of acting foolishly in the face of fast-running fire. Joe's story of a particular incident hinted at unique indicators and characteristics that can foreshadow the outbreak of fast-running fire in the hours before it develops. Joe also plainly conveyed the gravity and speed with which evacuation had to be carried out:

Joe Paishk: If there's a fire coming toward you, run as fast as you can. [laughs] I'll never forget the one incident there, not only once but a couple times, there was a young teenager that worked as an EFF [Extra Fire Fighter]. Beautiful hair, long. He never...it was always messy. I and keep on trying to tell him "Braid it."

Mike: [laughs] He's going to lose it eh?

Joe Paishk: He never did [braid it]. So, the next morning we got up. It was calm. I remember that it was calm. Still as could be. And I told the crew I said "You know, it's too calm for me I don't like it." They said "Why is that?" "Oh. Take a look." And then, some of them knew what I was talking about. Some didn't; the others. It was only about an hour and the other crew had went on the other side and, okay let's go everyone. All of a sudden, later on in the day you could see the smoke overhead; over our heads. We got there. Wow! How come in that direction? I told the guys that the fire's gonna be here in two minutes! "You guys run like crazy!" They said "No, we're not gonna get hurt. There's no way!" I said "The fire creates its own wind." You could hear it. "Run like crazy!" Good uh, good thing I was in action. I started running. And then one of these young guys, [laughs] he didn't care. You know, he was just walking. I said "You better run too." And then he start running. He was way behind us. And then all of a sudden we hear this "Help! Help!" I stopped, "Did you hear that? Somebody's calling." You know, it's that young kid. I said "You guys keep running, go over there and I'll come up there and I'll find him." It got thicker and thicker and he's caught right in the brush. You know, branch, uh, spruce. Got caught, just tangled. He didn't know what to do. Caught in the bush [laughter]. I said, you know, "What do you want me to do?" I said "I don't want to just cut the branches. You'll be dragging it with your hair." I said. And he told me, he says "Don't cut my hair." Well, I might as well leave you here [laughter]! What can I do! He looked at me, didn't say too much. And I could see the fire coming towards me. Aw, I better do something. I said "Close your eyes!" I just start brushing his hair. Cut his hair off about that much. Just enough so the branches wasn't...I said: "Now you gotta take off." And then he took off. He was way ahead of me. He was so scared. And we got to the float and jump in. And the fire just went by and burned everything!

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Oct. 17, 2008)

Because Joe was able to recognize the presence of a fast-running fire at a distance, he and his partners gained some extra time to escape. Even though some of his companions doubted his

observations, Joe hinted that the earlier conditions of clear, calm weather forecasted what was to come. Although Joe recognized the distant roar of the approaching fire, his long-haired Crew Member came close to death when he failed to acknowledge this. Although I found a bit of laughter in hearing Joe's story, he really stressed that this was absolutely no laughing matter at the time.

In a follow-up verification session with Joe Paishk in mid-January, 2011, Joe also remembered another phenomenon associated with crown fires as explained to him by his Keesic family benefactors. Joe noted that sometimes the oxygen flow around a roaring fire can create fire explosions that engulf large areas in a matter of seconds. Similar to flashover or back-drafting occurring in a house fire, this phenomenon was cited by Joe as something that represented a substantial concern for ground crews on forest fires. Joe noted that this phenomenon could be anticipated in certain circumstances by paying attention to the movement of the wind around the fire and 'popping' sounds in forest fuels surrounding the fire. Explosions resulting from the build-up of superheated gases have been known to result in the death of firefighters in the United States (NFPD 2003). Similarly, Joe noted that an individual had to pay attention to signs and signals that this might occur. Again, escape was the only option, as death could quickly result from the heat and force of the explosion.

In a severe fire event, foreknowledge of certain landscape features and their special qualities could offer a distinct survival advantage. In evacuation circumstances, survival chances could be increased if fire fighters were able to use certain environmental or landscape characteristics to their benefit. Adding to what Whitehead Moose advised concerning potential safe areas around a fire, Tom Quill Senior identified another evacuation area and described what he knew about its unique characteristics from his own firsthand experience:

Charlie Pascal: The dangerous part was that when the forest fire is very active it can eat up a lot of trees in a second. That's the most dangerous part. We would never go in front where the fire is going he says. That's an area that was the most dangerous part. 'Cause you'll never know when there's a jump fire ahead of you or at the back of you where you came from and that's the area that's unpredictable is when there's jump fires around you.

That's the most dangerous time is when they had these jump fires on either side of you or right on the front line of the fire. And the most dangerous part too is the fire can go really fast. Even if you try to catch a fire, you won't catch it even if you run. 'Cause you'll never know... That's one of the dangers too; that a fire can go very fast...There was this one time when we were in danger, we were in a small lake, more like a pond or small lake, we were right in the middle of a forest fire and what we did was we jumped into the lake in the small lake and stayed there. That was a dangerous time when I was firefighting. That was my experience, he said. And when we were in the water there was heavy black smoke, you could hardly see anything. And what we did was, I guess, smoke doesn't go right into the water, there's about a foot or two feet above the water, and that's how we survived. That's how...

Mike: Like almost like that eh? [Submerged up to the chin] in the water?

Charlie Pascal: Yeah, the smoke doesn't go all the way into the water, somehow about a foot above the water that heavy smoke, that's how we survived. Everything burned; our equipment, our clothing, our tent, he says. And it was dangerous at that time. That's my experience.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Jul. 22, 2008)

Not only flame, but thick smoke can incapacitate a person rather quickly. As Tom explained, a small lake or pond could ensure survival not only by providing respite from flames, but because smoke, when it hovers over water, leaves an area to breathe just above the surface. Tom's awareness of this phenomenon allowed him the small margin of safety he needed at the time.

Norman Quill spoke about an instance in which no lake or stream was nearby to escape to during a severe fire. With the direction of Nishki' aa, Isaac Keesic, he and his partners quickly put a unique survival technique into action while retreating to a wet muskeg area:

Reggie: One time they were, they got stuck, they got trapped by the fire...He said that one time they were trapped and they were by the muskeg there. And...he said they had to build a shelter under the muskeg. They used this...the stuff from the ground; the muskeg. They put it, umm, to their mouths and breathed from there. 'Cause it was too smoky I guess...

Mike: How did they do that? Was it like a small peekookuhn [a type of conical lodge^(WF)] in the muskeg there?

[Norman speaks in Anishinaabe while sketching a small picture]

Mike: Ahhhh. Yeah so...

Reggie: When they were stuck in the muskeg...

Mike: [Referring to the picture] So he's got the[...]the poles, leaning there and then I guess he's got the moss in there eh? [...]

Reggie: Yeah it has to be wet.

Mike: See that's interesting what he spoke about this small house he made because the Waymeeteekooshee Suhkeetayweekeeemuh [White Fire Boss], he never told me that. That must be good Anishinaabe trick.

Reggie: He said that was Isaac Keesic...He said that umm, that they knew that. Eight of them were in there, these Pikangikum guys, and that the ground was really cold in the summer, the muskeg, and it really helped them to breathe...He's talking about a house fire, talking about running in the house, I guess. He said you can, uhh, wrap yourself in a big wet blanket, and run inside and you won't burn. You'll be able to breathe when you're in that, but it's going to dry up pretty fast and then you'll burn.

(Norman Quill, in translation by Reggie Peters, to Mike Sanders, Nov. 5, 2008)

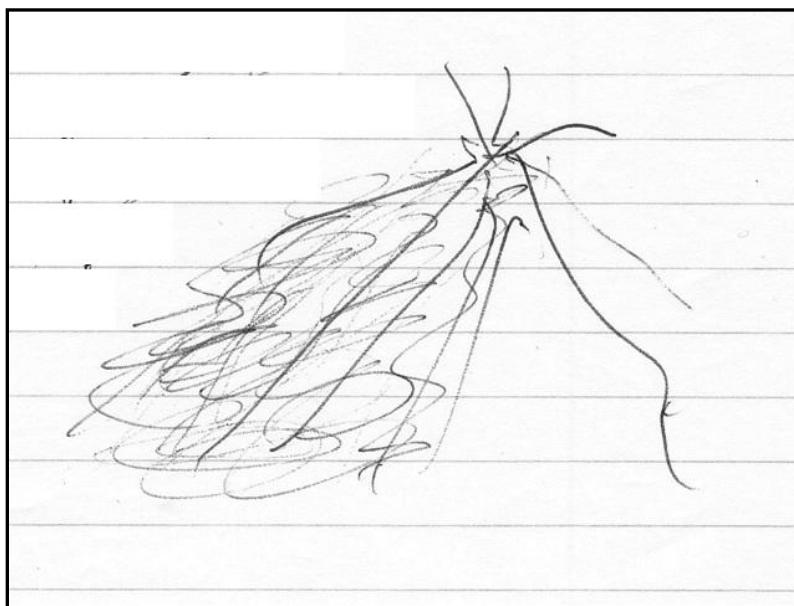


Figure 5: Elder Norman Quill's drawing of a small lodge quickly built in the wet muskeg by Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic, himself and their six other crewmates. It was chinked with wet moss and used to shield the crew from heat and smoke from a roaring crown fire.

This small temporary shelter was effective because it created a barrier against both heat and smoke, presumably for a limited time until the fire nearby had quieted down. At the time I spoke with Norman Quill, I was already familiar with the use of a muskeg area as a safe zone through OMNR training. However, the added measure of protection that was used by creating a small shelter chinked with moss, as well as the use of moss to breathe, was a unique addition to my fire fighting learning. Norman Quill's story sharpened my understandings about how to escape severe fire behavior.

Joe Paishk indicated that another method of securing a safe zone was to quickly find a patch of grass or area of fine fuels that could be quickly burned out to produce a black patch large enough that the fire would burn around a group of individuals. Since phenomena of wind or air conditions, fuels and moisture around a forest fire can be used to predict its behavior and direction of travel, there are also some burning techniques that can be used to control a fire, even in extreme cases. Elder Charlie Peters never spoke a lot about specific firefighting techniques during my stay in the community. However, on one particular occasion, he told a very detailed and instructive story about using the behavior of fast-running fires to an advantage. He explained a technique for dealing with the aid of a rough drawing that he made to illustrate what he was saying:

Charlie Pascal: He's going to draw you a diagram of what he thinks.

Charlie Peters: Fire; it go there. When fire is start in the daytime at about 2 o' clock or three o' clock, it start. The wind this way [out of the west]. The fire here. The fire here [west side of map] and the lake here [east side of map]. Camp here [on west shore of the lake]. Fire is started in the afternoon too. Right here [west]. Very fast. Fire fighters here [between the camp and the approaching fire]. Crew firefighters. When it's coming this way [eastward], umm, camp here. Umm, crew firefighters here. When the fire it start, too fast eh? Fast! Fast burning this way [eastward towards the camp]. And...[continues speaking in Anishinaabe language]

Charlie Pascal: Did you understand that?

Charlie Peters: Good news, Firefighter!

Charlie Pascal: Yeah he says he knows he can share you a secret about fire safety. He says this is the fire that comes approaching fast and these dots are the firefighters; the crews on both sides. How to stop the fire; this is their camp here. And what they would do is like get gas, pour it along this area [between the main fire and the camp]. The gas or the fuel or whatever they had. They would pour it and sometimes like this side, this is where they pour the gas...This is the water. This is where we would pour gas and set it on fire. And when you set it on fire it meets the fire coming in from the west and it would meet and it would save the camp!

Mike: It goes back like that way [eastward] eh? A burnout?

Charlie Peters: Save in your pack a gas!

[laughter]

Mike: That's all Anishinaabe knowledge eh? That came from them eh?

Charlie Peters: When you go fighting fires don't forget that eh? [laughs] Saving a guy from the bush! [Continues speaking in Ojibwa.]

Charlie Pascal: Anishinaabe way he says.

(Charlie Peters, Matthew Strang and Oliver Hill, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

Charlie Peter's way of fighting fire with fire worked on the principle that the forest fire was drawing air inward in a westerly direction to its head as the fire burned eastward. Therefore, when another fire was created ahead of the advancing flame front, it was pulled westward by the main fire, consuming the forest fuels that stood in advance of the main fire. Because its direction of travel was predictable, given what was known about the movement of wind around the fire, it was anticipated that this control burn would starve the advancing fire of combustible material and calm it down before it burned through the camp.

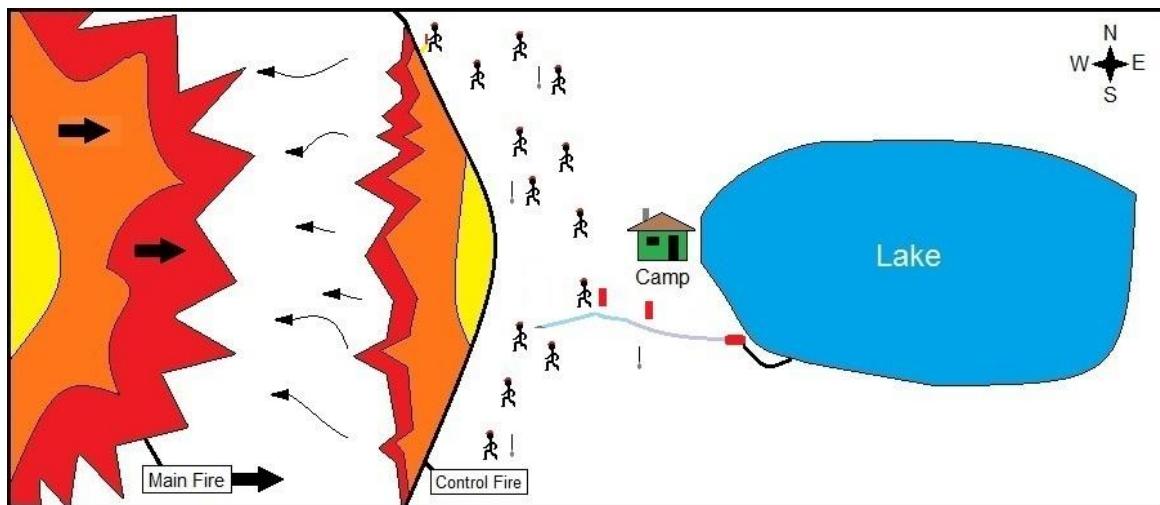


Figure 6: Burning fuels ahead of the main fire in order to exhaust them before the fire reached their camp. This tactic, as explained by Elder Charlie Peters, capitalized on air/wind uptake towards the fire's head.

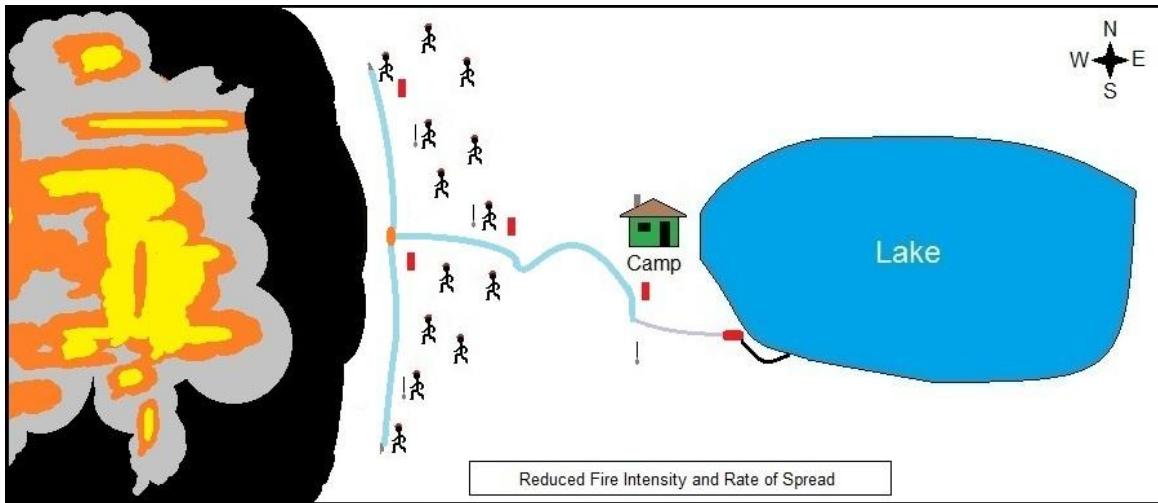


Figure 7: The forest fire has been cut off by the control fire and has been reduced in its intensity to the degree that it can now be managed by ground crews.
(Illustrations by M. R. Sanders, reproduced from Charlie Peters)

5.5 Fighting Fire with Fire: Anishinaabe and OMNR Perspectives

We've got to follow the fire that's what we do sometimes. Otherwise we have to go ahead of the fire and build a fire coming toward it. So this way it will stop. This is the way how they trained me.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Oct. 17, 2008)

Sometimes we'd call an extra crew just in case if there's a...if we see the fire going this way, so fast, we call for a second crew. And the second crew we'd just send them up. Make a trench somehow right in the front, if possible. And then burn it out this way [back towards the flame front]. That's what Jimmy [Keesic] and I used to do. Burn it back.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

When I had the opportunity to sit down with Norman Quill to talk about his past fire fighting experience, a lot of our communication was modulated through his illustrations of fire fighting with pen and paper, alongside diagrams and illustrations I showed him from the SP-100 Manual (OMNR 2008). When I showed him a picture of a Ground Ignition Operation, used to burn out areas in advance of a forest fire, he instantly recognized the context and intent of the material. Norman was aware that white people used a drip torch, a spouted canister with a wick, containing a mixture of diesel and gas, to burn out certain areas. During his career, Norman remembered using birch bark dipped in oil as an ignition medium to light control fires. According to Norman,

using fire to fight fire was a feature of both Anishinaabe and OMNR approaches, albeit using different tools (Norman Quill, Nov. 5, 2008).

As Norman recalled, there was sometimes a debate among Anishinaabe fire fighters regarding the appropriateness of these practices. For example, Norman recalled that Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic often expressed apprehension about burnout activities. Nishki'aa was apparently worried that a controlled burn could quickly become an out of control fire. Also, as a Boss presiding over fire crews, he might have had to accept a more central responsibility if things did get out of control (Norman Quill, Nov. 5, 2008). Anishinaabe veterans were aware that burning out an area of land to control a forest fire required a strong sense of how factors such as forest cover, weather and fire behavior are interrelated. Similarly, Joe Paishk and the late Joe Keesic knew that burnout operations could carry an element of risk. For example, a change in wind direction or speed could cause a burnout to jump past a firebreak and start spot fires outside of the contained area, quickly turning a situation from bad to worse (Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk, Jan. 27, 2008).

Customary burning practices, which remained part of Pikangikum livelihoods into the early-mid 20th century, were remembered in detail by Elders in the community. Customary burning, which was carried out to enhance harvest activities on the land, offered Pikangikum people a basis on which to observe fire behavior firsthand under specific pre-set conditions. The burning of grassy marshes by Pikangikum people, which was done to boost the species productivity of an area, was conducted with attention to specific set of weather indicators and seasonal fuel conditions (Miller 2010). Elder Tom Quill Senior appreciated the connection between customary grass burning and firefighting because they both relied on the same well-developed foreknowledge of how the fire would burn under certain prevailing conditions:

Mike: But...what I'm thinking is because the Anishinaabe have that knowledge of fire [customary burning] - how it burns on the land - I think to myself that [this] extra knowledge makes them better firefighters. If they see that kind of fire and the way it burns, they have a better instinct about firefighting. I wanna know if he would agree with that maybe?

Kevin:....[L]ike I know it was faster in the summertime and when it was dry. It spreads faster. It could be pretty rapid. In the springtime it's kinda slow because the ground is still kind of wet. They used to do it when there was still more ice on the lake. He said they'd burn the grass and sometimes they just left it. They just left it and wouldn't bother with it. That's what my dad he did one spring time; setting the grass on fire. And it was better grass that came out in the summer. And that's how the fire was used; to regenerate. I guess they probably learned how to fight that fire because of the knowledge they had of what the fire would - how it would burn - when they set the fire in the springtime. They knew that the fire is not going to go anywhere. It wouldn't go that far.

Mike: Well one question I could ask him is how they would use fire to cut off the forest fire; if he ever did that?

Kevin: Yeah he used to do that; on the fire line. From the fire line you just burn it. Like keep burning. Yeah. He did that often. Fight fire with fire...Yeah. Weekwuhs^(WF). Birch Bark...Yeah that's what he did. Yeah: because it goes out faster when you do that. Yeah. Use the birch bark [to ignite fire]. When you do that it would go out he says. And you know enough to go out and firefight. Fight fire the way the Anishinaabeg do.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Kevin Suggashie, to M. Sanders, Dec. 4th, 2008)

Through knowledge borrowed from his observations of customary grass burning, Tom had acquired the ability to interpret the pattern and spread of fire. This sensibility was an important factor in how Anishinaabeg fought fires and conducted burnout operations. Tom noted that, by making this link, I had reached a deeper understanding of how to fight fire the way Anishinaabeg do.

Spring forest fires can burn in irregular patterns, resulting in burned out 'fingers' along the surface, with patchy green, unburned 'islands' and 'bays' carved out from the fire's point of origin. Because they had a sense of how spring fires could behave, Anishinaabeg including Tom Quill, Norman Quill and Joe Keesic were comfortable using birch bark to burn out the fingers and bays of a fire. This was intended to make the fire front more rounded instead of irregular and also done to clean out unburned areas, 'islands' of unburned fuels within the fire that could flare up later on. Birch bark was used to burn out the edge of a fire into a rounded shape, instead of an irregular, patchy fire front. Instead of running fire hose back in between the deeper 'fingers' and 'bays', it was possible to burn it out with birch bark and run your line in a straight path across the fire front.

The late Joe Keesic simply noted that burning in this way was also done to just ‘clean up’ the fire; defining its boundaries and removing unburned fuels from its interior (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008). As Joe Keesic recalled, the Fire Bosses would sometimes get mad at that type of approach. But as long as he was not reckless in this practice, it was ok. Sometimes, Fire Bosses who didn’t know about the practice were curious as to why Joe’s fire edge was more even and rounded as opposed to the patchy fingers and bays along other people’s sections. The Fire Bosses didn’t always figure it out (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008). However, when they did, there were repercussions:

Joe: You gotta use your own mind which way is the easy way eh? Like me, I used to...when you have fingers and bays like this. They used to wrap all that with the hose line. Well what the hell's going on up there? I said: “Just burn it!”

Mike: Burn it back eh? Burn out those fingers?

Joe: Fingers. Yeah; instead of going on over there. And then, uhh, we used a birchbark [laughs]. Yeah sometimes these guys wondered why my fire was always...

Mike: All round? Yeah? [laughs]...

Joe: Oh. Yeah. Drop it in there and it would burn it right out. That's what I did.

...I remember we went to North Spirit Lake. And I just had these guys burning. And we hear a helicopter come in and take off again. And we were in there burning these islands and fingers and what not eh? [laughs] And I guess they had us on patrol. And I guess they kept asking why this fire was in such a straight line eh? [laughs] like there's no fingers and bays. And the islands in there [laughs] we burned them eh? Try and make it look good [laughs]. Well then they finally caught me. They said I'll just be a Crew Member. Still I'd do it. Burn this, burn this. Yeah.

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2009)



Plate 30: The late Red Lake Elder 'Big Joe' Keesic. Photo reproduced by M. R. Sanders.
Courtesy of Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters.

OMNR institutional experiences over the last four decades have led the organization to exercise a healthy caution with regard to Ground Ignition Operations (OMNR 2008). This includes the use of standard protocols involving a designated Ignition Team working under a chain of command system. This is done to ensure that burnouts are carried out according a pre-defined plan, under specific weather conditions and under the supervision of qualified leaders. Burnouts are always accompanied by a strong recognition of the fact that introducing *more* fire into a situation can always hold the risk of additional problems, such as the fire burning even more out of control. Although Joe Keesic obviously had a working knowledge of how to fight fire with fire, his conduct apparently fell outside of this system of safeguards and led him to get in a bit of trouble.

Nevertheless, the above examples highlight an interesting dimension of Anishinaabe Elders' sophisticated knowledge of fire behavior as developed through Indigenous learning and experiential contexts. Using birch bark as an ignition source and customary knowledge as a guideline, Anishinaabeg crews refined burnout practices that would likely be appreciated by modern firefighting institutions in their scope and intent. Elders were especially aware of how the effectiveness of applying fire to the land was contingent on certain burning variables, such as

weather, forest fuels, topography and fire intensity. Moreover, the Anishinaabe use of fire to fight fire was carried out to support underlying goals that are quite similar to those of contemporary ignition operations. OMNR and Anishinaabe Elders share a basic mutual understanding that, if done correctly, a burnout can be used to stop the spread of a fire in its tracks.

5.6 Summary

Veteran Anishinaabe fire line teachings contribute a wealth of relevant knowledge that is significant to fire fighting training. Elders' stories are compelling in scope and detail and culturally unique in origin. While preliminary, the information provided here could surely contribute to the creation of a complete Anishinaabe SP-100. Moreover, there is a substantial basis upon which both Anishinaabe Elders and the OMNR may find that their training material is highly correlated.

In looking at the various sources and qualities of knowledge represented here, three overlapping frames of thought emerge under which the various fire line teachings can be loosely grouped. First, several aspects of teaching and knowledge underscore the unique ontology, worldview and cultural rearing of Anishinaabe Elders. These include bush orienteering skills, understandings of the nature of forest fires and knowledge of forest fire behavior. Second, various aspects of firefighting teaching and training are readily understandable to both Anishinaabe Elders and OMNR. Because they have both relied on firsthand, empirical knowledge to fight fires, veteran Anishinaabeg and the OMNR have refined quite similar approaches with regard to various categories of forest fire behavior, as well as specific techniques used to put them out. Third, Anishinaabe Elders and OMNR have perfected fire line tactics and approaches that are distinct from one another. Because there is a cultural, historical and technological divide between the two traditions, OMNR and Anishinaabe Elders fundamentally diverge in some respects in their preferred course of fire line actions.

Differences between Anishinaabe and OMNR schools of thought in firefighting are also massively important to consider. While both Natives and Newcomers speak highly about the training they

have received from one another, it is also true that their fire line practices have diverged in significant ways. As shown in the next chapter, the difference between ‘old-fashioned’, Anishinaabe firefighting and OMNR ‘book’ firefighting was salient in the minds of several Anishinaabe veterans. Moreover, this difference was seen to be a central issue in changes that affected Anishinaabe participation within the Fire program during the mid-1970s.

Chapter Six

6.0 The Anishinaabe and ‘Book’ ways of Firefighting

The previous two chapters tell the story of how Pikangikum Anishinaabeg came to be important fixtures of the Fire program during its early decades of development at Red Lake from the 1930s to 1960s. They delve into some of the Native-newcomer relationships that were significant in this regard and detail some of the unique firefighting knowledge put into use by Anishinaabeg people throughout the relative ‘heyday’ of their involvement in the program. In the 1970s, however, changes in the institution of firefighting in Ontario contributed to a gradual decrease in Pikangikum firefighting involvement. The various interview testimonies highlight a tension between two schools of firefighting logic and practice: one represented through the cultural sensibilities and backgrounds embodied by Anishinaabe people, the other encompassed by a provincial-level dedication to safety, efficiency and modern Western ingenuity.

The memories, thoughts and feelings of various individuals, Native and newcomer alike, all share a common understanding: what the Elders refer to as the ‘old fashioned’, Anishinaabe way of firefighting has come to stand at odds with the modern, ‘book’ way of firefighting introduced by OMNR. Over forty years of development and change, the ‘old fashioned’, ‘Anishinaabe’ way and the ‘book’ way have slowly diverged. As the institution has adopted a mostly ‘book’-centered approach in many senses of the word, both seasonal Unit Crew and casual Anishinaabe firefighting participation levels have diminished.

Under the DLF, firefighting was a ‘mom and pop’ affair involving little in the way of internal sophistication. During the OMNR era, from the 1970s to the present, a whole spate of advancements slowly increased the degree of sophistication, technology, formality and hierarchy within the institution of firefighting. Across this time period, OMNR has remained active in advancing programs directly aimed at retaining Anishinaabe workers. However, developments in Ontario and concurrent changes in fire line training; hiring and organization have resulted in a

lessened degree of involvement for community members. The following chapter examines these changes through the voices of several individuals.

6.1 The Prophecy

But they knew that the white people would be coming in those days. Because all these old people, they would have a vision. You know, they would have ceremonies of their own. You know, once the fire is all calmed down they'd have their own vision that the younger generation soon would be working with white people in the future. At that time we didn't believe them [laughs]... And then he [my uncle] said: "You might as well enjoy working with your people for now. But in the future, that will change."

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Oct. 17, 2008)

Prophecy is a significant part of customary knowledge and has remained important to Anishinaabe people into contemporary times. Certain respected Elders hold the skills and experience to receive these visions, dreams or understandings. An important function of prophecy is to foreshadow changes that will come to affect Anishinaabe people in the future (Shearer, 2008). A specific prophecy, as told by a past generation of Elders, has dealt directly with Anishinaabe participation in firefighting and changes that were to come over time. Even before substantial changes took place within the Fire program, Anishinaabeg had already gained an understanding of what lay ahead. This knowledge was shared with Keesic relatives like Joe Paishk, as well as among Pikangikum Anishinaabeg fire fighters such as Tom Quill Senior:

That Elder there, Nishki'aa foretold that there would be Wemtigooshi [white man] coming. And that they would be the only ones fighting fire, he says...It would be like Nishki'aa says; there will be many white man fighting fires but very few Anishinaabe, he says.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 21, 2008)

There was hardly any white people too; hardly see any at the time. He didn't see much of white men fighting fires. It's just recently he says. I guess that's what that guy [Isaac Keesic] said. He said later on in the future it'll be a lot of white men fighting fires.

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Kevin Suggashie, to M. Sanders, Dec. 4, 2008)

The understanding of the future acquired by Nishki'aa was respected by Anishinaabeg from different communities, a fact that underlies his position as a widely esteemed Elder into his later life. Moreover, the prediction he shared was seen to hold true in the years after his retirement

around the late 1960s. Joe Paishk remembered that Nishki'aa saw this development progressing through stages over time:

We all knew at that time. Even we each knew at that time too. Like they said, it would come that day, they were taking over, you know? And they were right. We'd be just a...like Isaac [Keesic] would say to me: "you know Joe, for us we were here first, before them, and now we're training them; now they're gonna push us aside." But that's true. It happened. It will just be all them; their guys and...But he also knew things were changing.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

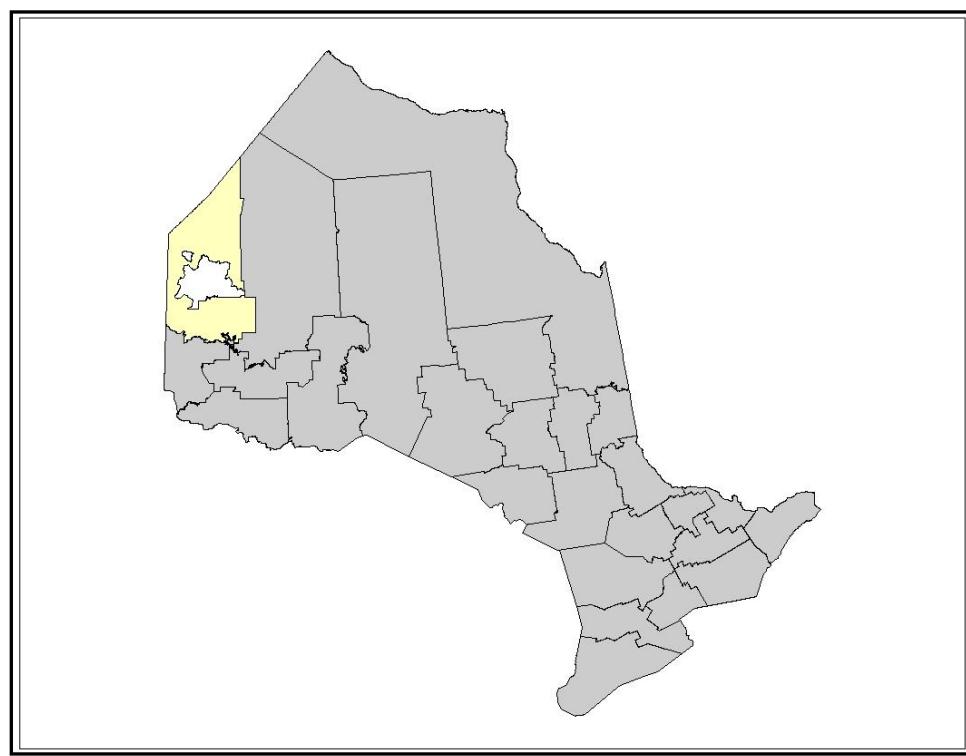


Figure 8: Map showing the Red Lake District Boundaries and the Whitefeather Forest boundaries within it. Courtesy of OMNR

6.1.2 The Birth of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Changes consistent with Elders' prophecies began to take place in the early 1970s, when the DLF was reorganized into a new delegated authority known as the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. While anticipated during the 1971-72 fire seasons, this change officially took effect in 1973 (OMNR 1986). This re-organization at the provincial scale resulted in a number of changes that filtered down to the fire crew level. William T. Foster, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources at

the time, assumed a directorial role in overseeing the transition from DLF to OMNR. Foster introduced a number of changes in the Fire program. These included the introduction of an air tanker fleet, the use of a Forest Fire Danger Rating system and the implementation of new fire control training systems (LAO 1989).

The birth of the OMNR also resulted in changes to jurisdictional boundaries covering the Red Lake area. This led to a higher concentration of fire fighting resources and staff positions at Forestry Point. Red Lake Fire Headquarters had previously functioned as one of three Division seats within the Sioux Lookout District. After the OMNR was created, it became the Headquarters of its own District (OMNR 1986). Accordingly, fire staff positions that were previously held at Sioux Lookout were transferred to Red Lake. This included the establishment of new desks at Forestry Point that were meant to fulfill these additional responsibilities and functions (OMNR 1986).

Forest fires were particularly numerous in Red Lake during certain years in the mid-1970s. In fact, Pyne (2007) indicated that, relative to previous records, the 1970s was the hottest decade for fire outbreaks in Ontario as a whole. A heightened frequency of forest fire incidents led to a closer examination of fire response systems, resources and capabilities at the provincial level. Jim Moorley described the roots and results of changes during this period:

I would probably say after '76 things started to hit the window. Like we had a bad fire year in '76, over 303 fires right? And I think Red Lake fell in the spotlight of things and there was changes. We were starting to get things like Fire Patrol Supervisors, Senior Fire Officers that we didn't have before, like, we started to get Fire Management Technicians. Like the organization was starting to turn into - from a hobby farm - to a thing where they started needing professionals for fire organization right? Money was being spent, things were being looked at; facilities were being built...Oh yeah. There was a lot of change. That's when they started planning all these new buildings and stuff, eh? Oh yeah. It takes years to get new buildings. We didn't have a lot of desks and things. Before then it was all in Sioux Lookout; that's where the main headquarters was and they'd get all the new desks and everything. And that's when Tom [Francis]...I think Tom came up in '75 in there and then Don Pento and Reg Tivey came around '76. Yeah [beforehand] we didn't have a lot of desks.

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)

A provincial-level overhaul of fire response systems was an important driver of change. Moreover, new forestry practices had also begun to affect the forest fire landscape around Red Lake. Prior to the 1970s, modern industrial forest harvest was just beginning to gain a foothold in the Red Lake area. As forest tenure systems encroached northward, there was also a more dedicated concern with forest fire prevention to both safeguard these interests and deal with forest fires resulting from older methods of cutover-style harvest:

Well...you gotta remember the bush was different. Yes and no right? Like; I alluded to before with the moving over of Dryden Pulp and Paper into the Red Lake area. They did cutovers right? This created huge fires because, in the old days, they would cut with chainsaws and leave slash piles six or seven feet high solid right? And prior to that, yeah, they did logging in Red Lake. But it was selective logging; like they'd comb the shore right? And pick off all the big frickin' pine right? The north didn't even register until logging came eh? Oh there was lots of big fires occurred up there but no-one even knew they were there. You know? They burned for days...If there was a big fire burning on the Trout Lake ridge [northeast of Red Lake], nobody cared. There was no reason to do anything. It didn't belong to any timber company, right? Now everything is divided up and belongs to timber companies and they got their claim on every tree in the bush now right? You know?

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders Dec 23, 2008)

Jim's description of fires fuelled by logging slash is highly consistent with the early 20th century Canadian forestry experience documented by Pyne (2007). It's a story that has played out in many parts of Canada, eventually leading several jurisdictions to mandate specific logging practices to minimize fuel hazards left in cutover areas. Most importantly, efforts to heighten the effectiveness of the Red Lake Fire program during the 1970s were reinforced through an increased imperative in safeguarding expanding forestry values and responding to a more complex and intense fire landscape. Before industrial forestry came into play, the DLF had fought fires using a more limited basis of priority and a more modest complement of staff. As the OMNR came to assume responsibility for fire control, protection priorities were heightened and the dedication of resources was increased. The whole system was re-evaluated and re-vamped.

6.2 Institutional Change and Anishinaabe Currency in Firefighting

During the 1970s, OMNR slowly increased the centrality of standardized, formalized fire crew training and organization within the Fire Branch. The newly-created OMNR aimed to ensure that fire crews were well-equipped to respond and fight fires using the best available means at their disposal. Fire fighters who entered the program in the early 1970s, such as Jim Moorley, remarked that the institution was quickly changing from a somewhat ad-hoc, informal system of firefighting to a more formalized system in which standard fire line training came to the fore:

Training: like I remember the first guys that came up that did any kind of training. Tom Francis. Tommy came up as a Fire Operations Supervisor and... we would never train. We would sit around all day in the warehouse, or get to work packing fire hose right? Almost every fall we'd take the fire hose out of the pack where it had been sitting all spring and roll it. And then every spring we'd take it apart and roll it again eh? [laughter] It was never more than a packsack! That was about all the training we did right? I wasn't shown how to start a power pump until my second year right; and I was a Crew Leader! It was Tommy Francis that started it, like...and simple things like what are the names of the...what are the simple tools in the toolkit right? What's this called? Well I don't know! This is a Siamese Wye, this is a plain Wye, like, you know? The guys from Pik. might have known what they were used for...well obviously they knew what they were used for. But...the names for 'em, they didn't know right? There's not a firefighting organization in the world, or at least I wouldn't hope there would be, that didn't know what their equipment was. That didn't know how to use it. As opposed to sitting around and waiting to use it and then learn how it was to be used? Right?

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec 23rd, 2008)

Understandably, the Ontario Fire program wanted to ensure that there were standard principles and protocols, a common currency of fire line practice instilled in the crews, which guaranteed a measurable degree of safety and effectiveness. By the mid-1970s it was no longer seen as acceptable for crews to engage in firefighting without this kind of dedicated training. The hands-on, learn as you go-style of training that Alec Suggashie remembered undergoing as a Crew Boss during the 1960s was altered to include a greater degree of classroom instruction and a greater focus on written communication and administrative skills. Forest firefighting came to involve a heightened level of technological and organizational sophistication that was seen to be necessary to the program.

While Jim Moorley expressed a great appreciation for the down-to-earth skill of Anishinaabe fire fighters, he was equally aware of difficulties stemming from a more dedicated, formalized system of fire fighting among this group. As new safety and certification requirements were introduced, firefighters were increasingly versed in standard terminology that was designed to produce a common occupational knowledge. Jim noted that the advent of technology was a big factor in influencing these changes. Technology included water bombers, helicopters, new kinds of pumps, radios, mapping systems, fire science and behavior classification systems and all the paperwork that was tied to these elements. These novel factors in fire fighting represented a challenge for some Anishinaabe fire fighters who had previously headed up Unit Crews during the 1960s. As Jim noted, Pikangikum Anishinaabeg were ‘northern living people’; they were steeped in their own language and culture and somewhat insulated from the fast-paced changes taking place in the south. The new OMNR language of firefighting didn’t always make that much sense to them:

So, technology slaughtered them....The only reason we started doing that kind of stuff [training] was to get familiar with terminology. Like you’d take a hose box apart and when you’d ask for a double Siamese, like kind of pump coupling, they wouldn’t know! They wouldn’t know what it was right? That [training] was our way of trying to force them to learn right? Like, we never fired a Native that worked hard and fought hard for years. They kept Johnny Keesic there and you probably met John. Like I heard he was in Pikangikum. We kept him because he was good in the bush. You’d put him on the fire... and Christ; he’d be the best firefighter you ever had! It was technology. It was radios. Uhh, driver’s licenses even. You had to drive to fires; you had to start driving to fires with no driver’s license. Ummm, in some respect; bookwork, timesheets...Yeah. Fire reports. Cost reports. It just killed ‘em. Like first year I worked I didn’t even know there was such a thing as overtime. Like Jimmy Keesic never got overtime filled. Or he never...he did fill in overtime forms, but very seldom. He didn’t know...Yeah. Oh yeah. They would talk amongst themselves on the radio. Like they would be embarrassed to call Red Lake or ask for food or gas or whatever...Paperwork was a big stumbling block. Driver’s license was a big stumbling block. The way we did business; like well before S-100 it was Crewman Training courses. And for whatever reason, there wasn’t...it wasn’t part of the way they did business. Like going through the work of doing Crewman Training and an exam at the end; half of them didn’t know how to write. And I can tell you, I remember sitting with them for days on end doing oral examinations and not a problem. Very hands-on; very bush savvy-style people. But technology killed them.

[...]It was a different world. It was a totally different world. There were no telephones in Pikangikum. They had a radio telephone up in the community. There was no T.V. These people were *northern living* people. You did some training. You’ve seen how the training’s done now. Manuals, videotapes, on-the-job stuff all the time. [If] you live in Pikangikum, it’s a huge transplant coming out of that environment and placing them in the environment that you had in Dryden Fire Management Headquarters right? It might be well for the other folks who know the technology there. But these folks, like I said there’s

no T.V. They didn't see what was going on in the world. There was no news and they didn't give a shit right? Like who cares? [laughter] Live for today right?

(Jim Moorley to M. Sanders, Dec. 23, 2008)



Plate 31: 'Mixed' crew sits down for a break. From left, Jimmy Sam Keesic, Tom Quill Senior, Tim Bush and unidentified, ca. 1970s. Photo taken by Joe Paishk. Used by Permission.

In our first visit together, Tom Quill Senior told me he was the last of his generation to hold a seasonal fire fighting position at Red Lake. At the time he started out, he had been working with many Anishinaabeg and held a leadership position as Crew Boss. By the time he quit, around 1976, non-Native people had slowly taken up the majority of seasonal staff positions. Over his career, the job of firefighting had changed a lot. Tom remembered how the introduction of certain restrictions limited the benefits of the job. At the same time, changes in training requirements and practices led Anishinaabeg to withdraw from seasonal positions:

Charlie Pascal: Yeah it's just been recently there's a lot of like, you know, a lot of firefighters white men. I remember at that time they started to have a lot of white men firefighting and pretty soon, later on, I was the only person working with them. And what happened was I lost interest, by that time when there was a lot of white folks around, firefighters, and I began to notice in those days, that they were starting to charge me [for] meals and my accommodations and when something broke down they would charge us

and that's how I lost interest because of that, And I just finally quit. And when they started charging these things; because I had to look after my family at the same time, so I couldn't afford, like you know, to feed my family and pay the things that we were charged at the same time. And that was the reason; couldn't afford it anymore...

Mike: I guess earlier he mentioned some changes where when he first started there was a lot of First Nations people and Pikangikum people then slowly more Wemtigooshi came along eh? And I guess at the same time did he notice, did the MNR change their training too when they did that?

Charlie Pascal: Yeah that's one of the changes I have seen is that they're putting more restrictions over to stuff like fire. But in my day, in my younger days earlier, there wasn't anything like what to follow procedures kind of thing like whatever is involved today he says there wasn't anything in my days. Yeah that's one of the changes...I guess when they set this training policy in place where only certain people could fight fires and that's what they follow. Their restrictions on who goes firefighting. Like what I wished at that time was when I was firefighting we had a lot of experience how to fight fires, but once they set their policy in place, their training like what they wanted their firefighters to do, they didn't want us to do what we learned like from the past. They [Anishinaabeg] wanted to use their own way of training. That's what. But they [OMNR] couldn't let us do that.

(Tom Quill, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanderrs, Jul. 22, 2008)

When he first started out, there were twelve of them [Pikangikum Anishinaabeg]. There was no...just like you said, there was a gradual decrease in Anishinaabeg fire fighters. And recently there was only like four of us. Alec [Suggashie] was there...Soon it was just me. And one of those years I was alone by myself; the only [Pikangikum] Anishinaabe...I guess it was even getting more hard and more complicated, I guess, firefighting. If you didn't write down, like they used to write down everything on a fire, you had to do those things, reports eh?...He said it's changing from what it used to be.

(Tom Quill, in translation by Kevin Suggashie, to M. Sanders, Dec. 4th, 2008)

Tom Quill Sr. emphasized that training requirements introduced towards the end of his career, ca. 1970s, made Anishinaabeg less interested, perhaps less able, to participate in the Unit Crew system. He had a much greater appreciation for pre-established methods of fire fighting that were distinct from new methods and approaches being introduced by OMNR during this time. Anishinaabeg fire line approaches were seen as incompatible with those of the newly-created OMNR.

6.2.1 Crewman and Fire Course Training

Crewman and Fire Course training for seasonal, recurring staff, the precursor of today's SP-100, 200 and 300 training programs, were introduced into the crew system during the early 1970s. Participation on unit crews at the Crew Boss/Crew Leader level was becoming more contingent

on these kinds of training. Joe Keesic and his cousin were among the few Anishinaabeg who chose to seek Fire Course One certification in order to qualify for a leadership position on a Unit Crew. Joe remembered that Fire Manager Tom Francis convinced him to take Fire Course One certification after some initial hesitation on his part. Joe remembered being unsure about his ability to pass the course given his limited experience in the English-based, Euro-Canadian education system:

Joe: Well some people, some people they don't want to go to the Fire Course One eh? Well, look at me I dropped out in grade ten eh? When my mother passed away and I was looking for a job. And then even Tom Francis said: 'you wanna go Fire Course One?'; 'Fire Course?' I said: 'where's that?' he said: 'Sault Ste. Marie.' And I said: 'I won't go there.' I just didn't want to go eh? And he said: 'well, 85 points, you pass. If you've got 85, you're alright'. And I told him I got no money to go over there. He said: 'We'll give you some money to go.'

[...]Well all these people now they're all university and college eh? They went there. Not me, I went to grade ten. And then they called me, Tom Francis called me there to come out. Maybe I'd make it. And we had a bunch of papers in there. And he said: 'you did alright. 96 points and you passed'! Then I went to Fire Course 2 again. I made it again! Well these guys they were about 199 and all that. I was the lowest one eh? Me and my cousin were the lowest...

Mike: So they do that Fire Course for Crew Boss? Or?

Joe: Ohhh. Just the fire crews. The ones they want to put on the staff eh?

Mike: So you don't have that fire course you can't get on staff eh? So that's probably what they told a lot of these [Anishinaabe] guys eh? Back in...

Joe: '70's and '80's, around that time.

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

Joe was exceptional among the Anishinaabeg of his generation in proceeding through the official training to maintain a currency according to the terms of the Fire program. Although he came out with the lowest test scores, he was able to 'jump through the hoops' and secure qualifications for a recurring staff position. Relative to a lot of the individuals from Pikangikum, Joe was more integrated into the world of the newcomers. He had lived and worked around Red Lake in a number of forestry-related positions from an early age. He also spoke fluent English and enjoyed a number of social connections with non-Native people around his home in the Red Lake area.

Because the bulk of changes in Fire organization and training filtered down from upper levels of the institution at the provincial scale, they also stressed forest firefighting knowledge and techniques that were more centrally built through Euro-Canadian terms of fire fighting logic and language. These differences in language and concept represented a stumbling block for Anishinaabeg of Pikangikum, who sometimes spoke very little English. Although they held a wealth of firsthand, empirical firefighting knowledge, many had limited or no formal schooling and were not used to operating in an English-based reading and writing, classroom context. As veteran Pikangikum firefighters perceived a tipping of the scales in favor of these skills and backgrounds, they also recognized a crack in the close bond that had previously existed between them and the Fire Bosses at Forestry Point.

6.2.2 Hiring Requirements and Changing Roles

In my first interview with Joe Paishk (Oct. 17, 2008), he recounted a meeting between upper-level Fire staff and Anishinaabe workers during the early 1970s in which Fire managers had stated, rather outrightly, that they would ‘not hire Indians’ anymore. I was surprised to hear that OMNR ever issued a directive exactly to this effect. However, it may be that Joe’s perception of the event is a potent synopsis of how the substance and intent of training and hiring changes in the 1970s, as outlined above, were received and understood by some Anishinaabeg. In speaking with Joe through hours of interviewing, I eventually got a somewhat clearer picture of a meeting between Fire Boss Tommy Francis and the Anishinaabe crews stationed at the base. Tommy was evidently attempting to explain that formal firefighter training was to become a much more central component of hiring at Forestry Point. In order to hold a seasonal-recurring position, or work in a supervisory position on a fire crew, you had to take this training:

[Tommy] went to camp; to the bunkhouse. And they explained to them and I interpreted for them. And some of these guys knew English. And then they all talked together after it was done. And they looked at me and looked at one another. And in Indian [language] they said [something in response]. And I didn’t want to say that to Colin or Tommy Francis. And then they asked me: ‘What did they say?’ I said: ‘You’ll find out.’ That’s all I said. When the spring came, they called ‘em up. Nope! Nobody wanted to come because they wanted to hire all high school students. It was hard for us people. It was hard for me.

And then, what's going on? They all asked questions. What's happening? And they knew what was going to happen in the future.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

By the early-mid 1970s, seasonal-recurring staff were required to sign a contract to become part of the crew system (Joe Keesic, Jan. 27, 2008). Moreover, the past system in which Crew Bosses would often handpick and improvise their own crews from available personnel on base was also changed. The Unit Crew system proper, in which Fire Managers created a roster of pre-set crews for the season, came into effect. Leadership structure on five-person crews was revamped to include a Crew Leader position, occupied by an individual who had passed Fire Course One training. This designation replaced the previous Crew Boss form of Unit Crew leadership. Crew Bosses then served as second-in-command with formally trained Crew Leaders serving as the principal.

Under the older crew system, Joe Paishk remembered that categories of hiring were a lot less differentiated. In fact, it was hard to tell a seasonal Crew Member from an EFF. Neither EFF's nor regular Crew Members had uniforms. Moreover, the flexibility of EFF hiring could mean that a particular individual would be kept on for just about any amount of time. This could be for a specific fire incident, or perhaps up to several months on base. Under the DLF, there was no directive that would limit EFFs from serving a Crew Boss role on Initial Attack. As the OMNR became the delegated authority for fire control, it enveloped this system with different hiring categories that involved certification and testing for more senior and recurring crew positions. Many Anishinaabeg felt that this training was beyond their sphere of expertise and, according to Joe Paishk's interpretation, this was the beginning of the end of their involvement in the seasonal crew system (Joe Paishk, Jan. 27, 2009).

6.2.3 ‘Mixed’ Crews and Anishinaabe Participation

When Lee Gerrish, Jim Moorley and Paul Fazekas came to Red Lake in the early-mid 1970s, they brought a kind of worker capital that the institution was coming to value to a greater degree in light of novel organizational contexts. Because they had been through high school and secured

diplomas in forestry/natural resource related fields, young southerners were well versed in the modern terminology of resource management and had an advantage in terms of English written communication skills. At first, the modus operandi at Forestry Point was to pair these individuals with Anishinaabe firefighters in a ‘mixed crew’ context. In fact, to an extent, this was done to support a learning environment that both Anishinaabe and newcomers could benefit from. Joe Keesic described this change:

It was as soon as I came in there. Like in '73 seems to me every year it would change. Like the first time I started it we would try and get all Indian crews in there. Like the first time Tommy and... they were the only guys in Red Lake. It was Tom Campbell that would mix all these crews in eh? Like they were all city boys eh? Like from college. ‘They can learn from these guys in there’, he says. They can learn this way.

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

Fire Management Supervisor Randy Crampton agreed that the placement of Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe people together on mixed fire crews may have been done mainly to ensure that certain organizational requirements were met. At the same time, he acknowledged it was also possible that southerners could gain valuable field experience from Anishinaabeg veterans who held some basic knowledge of firefighting and bush navigation:

If I had to guess I would say it was probably more to do with the fact that there was somebody that would complete, you know, the critical functions that were required to like, i.e., keeping time in check, you know, reporting hours, putting in food orders, umm, and equipment orders, umm, and giving status, ummm, fireline status reports. Stuff like that. So it was more likely done for those reasons like, other than [for Anishinaabeg] to give experience to somebody from southern Ontario or from a southern area. But at the same time that was a nice spinoff. You know, that would have been a nice spinoff, a nice trade[...]

[...]Yeah there's one year I had an all-Native crew and, uhh, the only time I'd ever pull my compass out of my pocket was to use the mirror [laugh] to dig something out of my eye [laughter]. I guess there was no need for me to pull my compass out, but without those guys I would have had it out, primarily on every fire.

(Randy Crampton, Fire Management Supervisor, to M. Sanders, Oct. 2, 2008).

The practicality of making mixed crews, from the perspective of Fire Managers, may have been meant to hold a twofold effect; it allowed for the introduction of college-educated southerners who could adhere to fire policy at the organizational level, while also placing these individuals in the care of experienced Anishinaabe fire fighters with bush savvy and practical knowhow. Testimony

advanced by Lee Gerrish, Jim Moorley and Paul Fazekas in fact show that they were learning a lot of practical skills on the fire line from Anishinaabe co-workers. Moreover, in a lot of cases, there was a sense of friendship and kinship that was maintained even across broad linguistic and cultural divides.

In theory, both Natives and newcomers could learn from one another. However, the situation on mixed crews was often described as more complicated in reality. Joe Paishk explained his perception that southerners were hired onto fire crews mainly because of their ability to fulfill certain formal tasks; such as fire reports, which included written descriptions of the terrain and forest type in which the fire was situated. This kind of requirement was foreign to Joe, but more familiar to the white Crew Members he was placed with in his last few years:

[...]hey wanna hire all university and the high school students...‘Cause they want somebody who can do the paperwork. All the paperwork. ‘Cause none of us did that paperwork. Except the crew that I worked with; Lee Gerrish and all those guys, only people. They were the ones who did it. But I was never trained that way. How am I gonna spell ‘Labrador tea’? I could spell ‘tea’, but ‘Labrador’ I can’t. And they want to know how it looks like. Like I could tell them in my head, right? But not in the paper. I couldn’t write it down. I could draw it. Swamp maybe and all that stuff. And then another thing they want to know is the hours. Which I did. It’s easy for me to do that. The time is, umm, okay the time is this. And they wanna know...during that time they want me to walk around, see what it looks like. Tamarack tree, how do you spell ‘Tamarack’? I could say it. I knew how to say it, I just didn’t know how to spell it. And I usually let those guys do it for me. Those four guys. And they would write it down for me. And then, uh, I guess, during that time we could see a lot of things between all of us and then the white people there on that side, they know how to write and we don’t. We have more experience than they. But they have more experience on book; on the paperwork. And that’s the reason why they said, you know, Pikangikum said: ‘okay, forget it.’

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

Working with white people underscored epistemological and linguistic divides that were much starker than in the past. Joe was used to working with Anishinaabeg like Jimmy Sam Keesic, Tom Quill Senior and others. It became harder for crews to work together when mixed crew formations were introduced:

Yeah. this crew and that crew and...but it did not work that way. Because among the three of us we were so used to one another, we used to know exactly what to do. But when they changed that rule and then they had them – you knew what to do, you didn’t

have to tell 'em what to do – but when they changed the rules then we gotta start telling this guy what to do and that guy what to do and what's going on. And I'm sure Joe [Keesic] had it the same way too. But they don't know what's going on! [laughter] They want to do it the other way, you know? Go by the book.

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

Tom Quill Senior recalled some of the same sorts of difficulties with newcomers that he worked with on mixed crews. It was difficult to communicate, to have teachings and instructions understood. It was difficult to coordinate fire fighting in the same way Anishinaabeg had done previously. At one point Tom Quill almost quit because of his frustrations in this regard. At the same time, Fire Manager Tom Francis was actively trying to make sure that Tom was happy. He didn't want him to leave the program over a falling-out on the fire line:

Yeah when the white men came, he noticed that he says. They were on their own, they didn't want to listen to anybody... Yeah at one time I remember I was on a fire with these white men. And I tried to tell them, like you know, give them instructions or direct them where to go. He says I almost quit right there come home because they don't want to listen. They do their own thing. And when they knew that I was just going to just quit there they told me not to quit... When they heard that he was going to quit because they didn't listen then they approached him... Do you know the name Tom from the Fire Centre? He can't remember [the last name]. He only knows that there was a Tom from the Fire Centre that used to be a Crew Boss. He was almost like one of those big bosses... Tom Francis... Yeah he was the one that uhh... they sent me to a different crew, he says. Tom Francis told me to go to a different crew. Tom Francis didn't want him to come home. He sent him to a different fire or a different crew [to keep him on].

(Tom Quill Senior, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Nov. 21, 2008)

As Tom Quill Senior's story indicates, Fire Managers were aware of some of the difficulties that were arising from new contexts of crew organization at Forestry Point. In the face of these challenges, there were also instances in which Fire Managers were actively working to try and retain experienced Anishinaabe fire fighters. Tom Quill had been with the fire program for years, served as a Unit Crew Boss, and was a competent firefighter. Although he evidently struggled with some of the new forms of Unit Crew leadership and organization, there was no reason to simply to let him go.

However, while individuals like Tom Quill Senior stayed on, they drifted out of leadership/Crew Boss roles as the system was restructured. Tom Quill Senior had worked as a Crew Boss under

the past system. But under the new Fire Crew system, individual advancement 'up the chain', so to speak, was made more contingent on a demonstrated ability to work within the terminology and technicalities of the OMNR Fire program. Leadership roles were increasingly constituted on the basis of demonstrated acumen in the administrative and technical functions of fire fighting. Southerners gained valuable field-based education from Anishinaabeg. But they also excelled within the more specialized tiers of fire organization above the Crew Member level, quickly taking roles as Crew Leaders. This was significant to Paul Fazekas' entrance and advancement in the Red Lake Fire program:

Mike: Yeah. I guess the other thing is maybe too; probably back in the early seventies or so, like when you were starting to come on, the MNR was maybe looking at more refined ways of keeping track of incident reporting and things like that as well? But that's maybe one thing where you'd want to have a few people that were reliable with the paperwork on that specific crew eh?

Paul: Yeah. Yeah...Well, that's how I evolved so quickly, you know; not having, as far as I'm concerned, enough experience to be a Crew Leader and having fought fires half of a season. Umm, because of that reason, you know; communication and the whole bit. So yeah. That was basically how I started. And like you said, with the more formalized training and everything that came at all levels, the number of Natives on the Initial Attack crews have declined.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

Paul initially got on quite easily, with little or no formal training, by simply being persistent in bugging the Fire supervisors for a fire dispatch. Also, while he gained a lot of informal training on fires from Anishinaabe veterans, he received little or no formalized training at his initial level; he simply got on a plane and went to the fire. However, with Fire Course One training, Paul quite quickly achieved a Crew Leader position because of his more developed capacity in fulfilling certain requirements, such as incident reporting and paperwork. Anishinaabeg did not assume these roles to the same degree. In fact, Paul remembered that Anishinaabeg would sometimes shy away from these roles altogether:

Paul: See a lot of [Anishinaabeg] were reluctant to take on those roles. Like as a supervisor I tried to...like Lenny Comber...I think he was a Crew Boss. Don't get mixed up in the titles 'cause that's...once [the] Crew Boss was the Crew Leader, what you call a Crew Leader today. A lot of them were very reluctant to take on supervisory roles. With the mixed crews and especially as things got more, uhh, more formalized they just started backing away from that kind of role. You know, the supervisory level kind of stuff

so...Yeah it's no different. I'm on the volunteer fire department and at one time we went to a training manual that was very [much] formalized and a lot of the 'old school' volunteers: that was it. They just didn't want to take that kind of training. It didn't happen.

Mike: Yeah. The one thing that...‘cause Joe Paishk was mentioning it too and it took me a couple times of interviewing him to make sure I got it right. But kind of what he was saying was...now it was somewhere between '76 or '78, somewhere in that later period of the seventies, where there was an upper-level management decision that was made to ensure that any permanent staff go through a certain sort of training course kind of thing?

Paul: Uhh, training got more formalized. There was something they called Fire Course One. And that was more for Crew Leaders. And maybe that's what he's referring to. Because I took Fire Course One, the title was the same in 1975. So I think...I'm sure that's what he was getting at. And it was for the leadership staff [Crew Bosses/Crew Leaders].

(Paul Fazekas, Nov.28, 2008)

6.3 The Book Way and the Old Fashioned Way

From your training, like with that binder there, that thing, do you think you're gonna fight fire with what you are taught? He's asking you.

(Oliver Hill in translation by Charlie Pascal, Sept. 12, 2008)

When I showed a copy of the SP-100 Fire Fighting Manual (OMNR 2008) to both Pikangikum and Red Lake Elders, or asked them about matters of fire training, many of them recognized a sharp change in the fire fighting training systems that came about into their later careers, mainly during the 1970s. Elders strongly contrasted the 'book' fire fighting instruction and organization systems introduced by Fire Bosses with their own sphere of experience and practice:

Charlie Pascal: This Book. This book!! [SP-100 training manual]. I wouldn't have retired if there wasn't a training program in place. We still would have fought fires today. The Elders were the active ones especially the smudges; hotspots, working on the hotspots. Those were the active ones.

Mike: So the reason that they quit fire was because of...

Charlie Pascal: Of that book there [SP-100].

Mike: Because of this new training eh? So I guess that makes it more difficult for them to have all the requirements. That's kinda what they say or?

Charlie Pascal: I guess so...their experience, like they're more knowledgeable than the book. I would say.

(Oliver Hill in translation/interpretation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

Distinctions drawn by Elders between the ‘book’ and Anishinaabe way of fire fighting hold a strong place in Anishinaabe stories of fire fighting as carried out through Forestry Point.

Understanding exactly where veteran Anishinaabeg fire fighters have situated themselves with the Fire program requires an understanding of how they distinguished their fire fighting practices and terms of competence from those of the newcomers who became more active in the crew system during the 1970s.

While provincial-level managers have mainly concerned themselves with upholding an improved standard of fire fighting practice and safety, some aspects of this progression have been cast by Elders as irreconcilable with Anishinaabeg approaches and presence within the program. For the most part, Elders like Oliver Hill stated that terms of fire fighting knowledge and conduct were set by OMNR without the inclusion of Anishinaabe experience. The ‘book’ created a different system apart from that with which Pikangikum Anishinaabeg were previously comfortable.

Red Lake Elders Joe Paishk and Joe Keesic, like their counterparts in Pikangikum, delineated a distinction between the ‘book’ way practiced by OMNR and the ‘old fashioned’ way in which they had both been trained during the 1950s and 1960s. Categorically, they both stressed the effectiveness of the ‘old fashioned’ way very strongly over that of the ‘book’ way. It was the way they had been trained and taught; an approach that they steadfastly embodied and defended within the Fire program, in spite of the approach of Fire Bosses and southern Crew Members:

Joe K.: Well I enjoyed fighting fire. I Just wanted to get out there and have fun and some people can take...a lot of people can't take it serious eh? Back in those days we used to have the old fashioned fire fighting eh? Now everything goes by the book now eh?

Joe P.: See that's the biggest mistake eh? Go by the book.

Joe K.: It seems to me the fastest way to put out the fire. Now you gotta go by the book now.

Joe P.: See that's the way Jim Moorley was doing in our crew. He told me...he talked to Jimmy he said: "This is what in the book, that's what it says." But Jimmy [Keesic] and I we didn't agree with him. We said: "No. We'll do it the old fashioned way." Then when you looked at it, how we did it, he began to realize, every fire we went to, he wants to go

by the book. We said no we don't want to go by the book. We want to go by what we do when we were trained by the old guys.

Joe K.: Yeah. That's how it was. Just like you dropped a book in there it was just gone. And the minute you turn around there's all these white people and you gotta go by the book... Seems to me all the work training they've been doing; seems to me it doesn't work... See there were a lot of Native people working in fire. Seems to me nobody does want to come back. It's the same thing over in Sioux Lookout in there now. Yeah. It's all over like that...

Joe P.: But like I said. To me, with this whole book that you're going to write about, that's a good idea. They should have done it in the past with all those old generations that have passed away. They would probably have better stories than we have today. Like with the old generation; the old techniques. You know each generation has its own style: the old generation and my generation and your generation is different again; like the white man coming in with all these ideas of their own. But it does not work with these other generations before. It just passes on to our generation and it stops. Like in '73 that was it. Things changed. Some of the old generation, like Joe, like you were saying, they were the old fashioned type. That's exactly what we were thinking too about that time, until about '77 or '76; because they're not going to change. They [OMNR] will be using the same old book. But it's the ones like Joe, like you said; use the old fashioned fire fighting.

Joe K.: I think it's the more faster way to do that old fashioned. Right now, by the book, it's just... I don't know. I just go like that. When I go out on the fire, I use my own style like that eh? If you go with the white man only, you lose out eh?

Joe P.: They're losing that style of the old days...

Joe K.: Like you could tell him in there eh? You could write it down and then he goes in the office and tears it out eh? They don't want to use that. They want to go by the book. That's what they do.

Joe P.: Explain to them why it's done; tell it to them, because the book way does not work. We've seen it. I've seen it. He's seen it. You've seen it. Everybody fighting fire, even the older generation, they told me a lot of things. Like Albert Turtle [aka Oliver Hill]. He's seen it. I know I talked to him about it too. Sam Quill. It does not work. Even Jimmy Keeper and James Keeper said the same thing. It does not work. They [OMNR] wanna do it their way. You know. But that's not...

Joe K.: I don't know where that book came from. Who made it? Somebody must have made it down east eh? Inside the office there...

Joe P.: I believe if you go by the old fashioned way you will be more accomplished and you will be more happier.

Joe K.: Yeah!

Joe P.: If you go by the book you're going to be ashamed of it alright.

Joe K.: You'll see!

Joe P.: You'll know. Like I said you'll know... That's why I quit. I knew that things were changing in '73...

(Joe Paishk and Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

Elders Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk, who were aware of my interest in working on a fire crew, both made something of a personal plea to me to pay attention to the ‘old fashioned’ way. Several people from Pikangikum were known to feel the same way as well. Elder Tom Quill Senior argued that there were limits to the effectiveness of OMNR training relative to firsthand knowledge of how to fight fires:

MNR fights fire using their training and that limits their understanding and way they put their abilities to work. Anishinaabeg are different. They have knowledge of fire and used it. We did not quit until the fire was out. MNR people would not fight as long, but would quit at the end of the day – before the fire was out. We wouldn’t quit after 8 hours.

- Tom Quill 2-19-2007 (WFMC 2007)

When I described the distinction between the ‘book’ way and ‘old fashioned’ way made by Joe Keesic and Joe Paishk, Current Fire Management Supervisor Randy Crampton was able to quickly recognize what they were illustrating from his own personal experience. Through his early years in the crew system during the 1980s, he and his crew mates also used fire fighting methods that combined the ‘bush’ and the ‘book’ way, as he himself understood it:

Yeah. We definitely have training standards and, ummm, it’s expected that our training standards are taught, learned and sort of abided by. A lot of it is addressing efficiency and stuff like that. Now, you know, are those efficiencies gonna be applicable to every situation out in the bush? Probably not, but the majority of them, they should be. And, you know, at the same time...’cause I can remember, you know, the same thing with it. It wasn’t always the situation where we followed what we were trained to do when we were out in the bush. We used to, you know, we used to always say “There’s the bush way and there’s the book way”. You did the book way when the bosses were around and then you did the bush way when you’re just out there under your own supervision, so to speak. But ummm. You know, we did, back then, ummm, District and Regional crew competitions were a big thing. And you were required to, you know, to show your proficiency through mock scenarios and you were expected to complete the requirements by the training standards. Yeah every crew I think had, you know, their own way that they did things, but at the same time, they knew the book way because there was a time would come when you’d have to perform that way too. It was kind of a, you know, you used the best, uhh, means to suit the situation that you’re involved in. I think everybody adapted fairly well. But yeah, he [Joe Keesic] is totally right.

(Randy Crampton to M. Sanders, Oct. 2, 2008)

Randy Crampton’s interpretation of this ‘book’ and ‘bush’ distinction deserves to be noted. However, Anishinaabeg people tend to cast this distinction in much sharper contrast. This is

because Anishinaabe framings of the ‘book’ and ‘bush’ way appear to hinge not only on divides between theoretical and practical realms of fire fighting, but also on divides in language, culture and knowledge-transmission that are more stark between newcomers and Natives respectively. These matters became particularly significant at Forestry Point in the 1970s. While non-Natives more readily integrated aspects of the ‘book’ and ‘bush’ way, Anishinaabeg veterans from the generation with which were concerned more squarely rested their terms of practice solely within the ‘old-fashioned’, ‘bush’ way and did not find the ‘book’ way compatible with their style and capacity in firefighting. Since understanding and adhering to the ‘book’ had become crucial to how the Ontario Fire Branch conducted itself, its incompatibility with Anishinaabe workers created a barrier, both perceived and actual, to firefighting participation.

Of all the Elders I’ve spoken with, the late Whitehead Moose, in his advanced wisdom, was the sole Pikangikum member who explicitly advocated an acceptance of both Anishinaabe and OMNR terms of practice in firefighting. While he supported knowledge gained from his own background and culture, he also stressed that there was an important reason for modern OMNR training. Overall, Whitehead believed that OMNR was interested in teaching Anishinaabeg important skills. Whitehead also believed that these skills from the ‘book’ realm could be paired with those originating within a distinctly Anishinaabe way:

I guess it’s important like, you know, to have something like that [SP-100], he says. I guess the reasons for that is that, uhh, - if they set something like that - they have all these important tools that they use. Like special equipment; aircraft, water bombers. That’s why they have this. I guess we have to respect it. They want to teach us. Yeah he’s talking about the water bomber how they...like it’s just...like the treetops; knock them off like. There’s a water bomber...

[Charlie Pascal pauses to talk to Whitehead]

What I’m asking him is like, if he was a firefighter would he follow that or?

[Whitehead answers in Anishinaabe]

Yeah if I understood what was in there I would probably follow it. But as Anishinaabeg, like, my knowledge, that’s what I would do, he says. And at the same time, follow that...

(Whitehead Moose in translation by Charlie Pascal to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)

Elder Whitehead stressed that Anishinaabeg and OMNR could continue to work together in order to find ways to bridge their knowledge, sensibilities and culture in order to cooperate together.

Whitehead expressed a level of confidence in the fact that the same close relationship that has existed between OMNR and Pikangikum over roughly 15 years of Land Use Planning would also extend into matters of Pikangikum participation in firefighting. Perhaps the divide between the ‘book’ and the Anishinaabe way can someday, somehow, be overcome.

6.4 Anishinaabe Participation From the 1970s Onward

The late Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic and Kuhpeekwuh Kootooteeyach Art Larsen both left the Fire program during the early-mid 1970s. As senior staff members under the DLF, Isaac and Art had been important agents in the hiring and training of Anishinaabe seasonal workers at Forestry Point. Initially, Art Larsen was in the running to serve as the head of Forestry Point under the newly-created OMNR. However, the competition process ultimately favored another candidate, and Art retired not long after the change (Jim Moorley, Dec. 23, 2008). Issac Keesic was likely the only Anishinaabe to hold an upper management position as Deputy Ranger under the DLF. Having served close to forty years at Forestry Point, Isaac Keesic had come to the point of his natural retirement from the program. At around the same time, Anishinaabe people's involvement in firefighting through seasonal positions on fire crews slowly ended.

In the aftermath, various Anishinaabe Unit Crew veterans found themselves on somewhat different paths leading away from the Fire program. The selection process did not favor Pikangikum people's hiring, and Alec Suggashie noted he did not make the short list of Pikangikum staff called down for the summer. His eight years of service abruptly ended around 1976 (Alec Suggashie, Jul. 22, 2008). Sam Quill, the ‘godfather’ of Pikangikum people in Red Lake, moved on to a position with Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) in Pikangikum after serving over a decade in the crew system. Sam also maintained working ties with staff at Forestry Point in the years after his fire career. Jim Moorley indicated that Sam was a tremendous

community resource in instances when OMNR had to fight forest fires in close proximity to Pikangikum. Jim noted that he would often call Sam Quill to help secure vehicles, supplies and lodging for firefighters who were working on fires close to the Pikangikum Reserve (Jim Moorley, Dec. 23, 2008).

Citing disappointment with how the fire program was changing, Tom Quill Senior quit the Unit Crew program around the mid-1970s after a 16-year career (Tom Quill Senior, Jul. 22, 2008). Tom's exit signaled an end to an era of Pikangikum people's close relationship with the Fire program that had lasted close to three decades, involving between eight and twelve seasonal workers per season. Tom was the last individual from this original cohort of seasonal, Unit Crew workers to retire from Forestry Point.

In the mid-1970s, Joe Paishk was also nearing the end of a twenty-year fire career (1956-1976). As he got older, he also became increasingly disappointed with changes in the institution. Joe left the program around 1976 to take up a position with the MTO. Although he spoke fondly of his experiences on fire crews, Joe Paishk also held a feeling of bitterness with regard to the decline in Anishinaabe leadership and involvement in the Fire program. Overall, Joe's heart was in the 'old fashioned' style of firefighting that was on its way out during the final years of his career (Joe Paishk, Nov. 27, 2008).

Joe Keesic was the sole individual from this cohort who stayed on for the better part of the next 30 years. He retired in 1999 after a long and distinguished career. When he passed away in the spring of 2010, current Fire staff from Forestry Point came out in droves to pay their respects and acknowledge Joe as an integral member of OMNR's 'fire family'. Many individuals who are still active in the Fire program today continue to speak fondly of Joe Keesic's great abilities as a firefighter and his youthful, outgoing and positive personality. More than anyone, Joe Keesic was also able to synthesize aspects of the 'old fashioned', 'bush' way with the newer 'book' way in order to maintain a currency in the Fire program. Joe also served as a tremendous resource in

working with a number of Far North community crews that have been used in past years to aid in Red Lake District firefighting efforts.

6.4.1 The Continuity of EFF Participation

While Anishinaabe Unit Crew participation slowly dropped off during the 1970s, the use of Extra Fire Fighters continued into the late 1980s. In much the same way that Anishinaabeg EFF's had been important to DLF Fire Control in the early years, their availability during heightened fire events remained important during the early OMNR era as well. Mike Schillemore, who worked up from the crew system to the supervisory level at Forestry Point during the 1970s and 1980s, indicated that northern Natives from several different communities were relied upon heavily as EFF's over this period. In 1981, Mike was assigned as the Far North Fire Operations Supervisor overseeing protection for the northern half of the Red Lake District. The area covered by Mike's desk encompassed a number of First Nation communities, whose members were active in fighting fires under the EFF system. By the close of the 1980s, OMNR had built up a roster of around 140 individuals from Pikangikum who could be mobilized as EFF's (Mike Schillemore, Dec. 9, 2008).

The use of EFF's was coordinated with the use of Unit Crews as part of a two-tier fire response system. By the mid-1970s, OMNR Red Lake had developed an Initial Attack Unit Crew system involving a pre-set roster of seven or eight five-person crews that were trained and stationed at Forestry Point (Jim Moorley, Dec. 23, 2008). Initial Attack Crews, who represented the first line of forest fire response, were centrally trained to get a hose line in and put the fire under control as fast as possible. Most often, they specialized in holding and halting a forest fire's spread successfully within the first few days of their deployment, depending on the fire's size and behavior.

In many cases, the follow-through involved in putting the fire 'dead out' was then conducted by EFF workers who were hired by the OMNR on an incidental basis. Once a fire was attacked to

the point of Being Held (BHE), it was sometimes necessary to quickly recall the Unit Crew to base in order to respond to other forest fires, or to stand at the ready for fire alerts. Heightened fire situations, involving a number of outbreaks at once, demanded the use of these Initial Attack forces specifically for the containment stage of fires. In these instances, EFF's then became very important in bringing a fire from the BHE to OUT stage and retrieving all equipment from the field during the final demobilization stage.

In the 1970s, EFF's were sometimes used in an Initial Attack role as well. While their role became more limited over the years, Paul Fazekas remembers periods during his early career in which teams of up to 100 Far North firefighters were brought down from the communities during heightened fire events. In some cases, they did in fact retain roles as Initial Attack resources as well (Paul Fazekas, Nov. 28, 2008).

While the crew system had involved formal training and testing, for most of the mid-1970s and 1980s, formal training requirements in order to gain incidental work as an EFF were still minimal. The OMNR was actively visiting and holding some short training sessions in a number of Far North communities, such as Pikangikum, Poplar Hill, Deer Lake and Sandy Lake, during this period (Mike Schillemore, Dec. 9, 2008). However, while the sessions aimed to ensure an operational knowledge of some of the tools and tactics involved in firefighting, it was not always necessary for an EFF worker to hold any kind of certificate or training stamp to get on a crew (Alex Peters, Nov. 9, 2008). Because there was still little in the way of testing or paperwork involved, Anishinaabe people maintained their roles in this specific tier of firefighting. This kind of work held both benefits and drawbacks relative to the former crew system.

The flexibility and relative informality of the EFF system allowed OMNR to hire a broad cross-section of individuals from Pikangikum. Both younger and older members of the community were active in the EFF program throughout this period and continued to work together on the fire line. Anishinaabe participation as EFF's in a mop-up or sustained attack role was often a multi-

generational affair. Charlie Peters remembered that he was involved in firefighting through the EFF system at various times from the age of 17, until around the age of 60; a 43-year span that ran roughly from the late 1940s to the late 1980s (WFMC 2007). Jim Moorley (Dec. 23, 2008) also recalled working with Charlie when he was in his late 40s and early 50s. Even at that age, Jim remembered that Charlie was like a moose in the way he walked almost effortlessly through the bush. Similarly, Joe Paishk remembered that Whitehead Moose worked on EFF teams in the mid-1970s, at around the age of 60. In fact, Joe mentioned that he had leaned on Fire Managers to transfer Whitehead from the roster of bush camp cooks to the EFF fire crew roll:

But later years, like in around '76 or '75 in there. They tried to put him as a cook. And they asked me in there. Look at the names. And it was all kinda names where they're from. And they write 'em down and they looked 'em up each name. And for cooks, I couldn't believe it was his name! I said I want this guy too. But he's not gonna be a cook. He's gonna be on the line with me. I said this guy's the best firefighter I ever had. Not only them, but the rest. But these cooks; I want these five of them. All of them all...they didn't like that. They don't want them to get lost. But these guys know their...they know what they're doing. I said in Indian: 'You work with me. I want you to be on my side' And he did. I said to Colin, mind your own business. He didn't like that either so...They wanted them to cook. I said no way! A lot of these guys can cook their own meal. Anybody can cook in our crew. We don't pick it. I know these guys. I know the old generation I'd put 'em to work. That's where they enjoyed more than...that's what they wanna do, that's it. But I don't let them carry over 100 pounds. 'Cause I know their legs are not that sturdy. Give them the lightest one you can find and they carry it. And then they're happy with that. And I told Colin Williams. I said: 'supposing we were to take Whitehead Moose and the youngest guy, you, and we'd carry that hose a mile. Who would carry it?' He said: 'I cannot carry that thing a mile'. And I said; 'that's exactly what. If he's firefighting he can carry that thing over two miles if he wants'!

(Joe Paishk to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

Having the older generation involved provided a massive training advantage among EFF crews. Alex Peters, now President of the Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation, was hired on as an EFF a few times during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In his teens, Alex worked alongside Pikangikum Elders with fire experience who were in their 40s and 50s. Under the tutelage of these veterans, Alex learned how to fight fires on the job through firsthand observation and instruction. During a fire event on the Trout Lake ridge northeast of Red Lake, Alex and the Elders worked under a Fire Boss from Armstrong, Ontario. Alex noted that the Fire Boss didn't have to do much in the way of directing or instructing the crews; the Elders knew what they were doing and just went at it. Within about three days, the fire was all out. Alex learned valuable

patrolling, cold-trailing and hotspotting techniques by taking direction from the older generation right on the job (Alex Peters, Nov. 9, 2008).

Alex also recalled that by the time of the infamous Red Lake Fire 14 of 1980, Pikangikum Band and the OMNR had organized a roster of crews that were made up of a few older firefighters and a few of the younger generation, in order to support this kind of learning (Alex Peters, Nov. 9, 2008). In fact, Fire 14, a 107,900 acre fire which almost engulfed the town of Red Lake and triggered the evacuation of 3600 people (Pyne 2007), called on the use of several EFF workers from Far North Native communities. Joe Keesic remarked that the northern reserves were virtually ‘cleaned out’ to staff this fire. Joe joked that the only people left on the Reserves during Fire 14 were the Band Council members (Joe Keesic, Sept. 30, 2008).

EFF employment remained easy to obtain because there was not a lot of emphasis on formal training, testing and certification. EFF work also involved people from multiple generations and offered a source of income that was significant for community members. EFF work was often centered on patrolling, cold trailing and ‘hotspotting’. Therefore, it called on the same set of skills for which the older generation of Anishinaabe workers were particularly renowned. However, in contrast to Unit Crew participation, it offered less consistent employment. Moreover, some Anishinaabeg felt that the EFF mop-up and demobilization roles were akin to doing the ‘dirty work’ of firefighting. While Initial Attack crews were engaged in the more central and exciting part of the job, EFF crews mainly cleaned up after them. Joe Keesic remarked that some Anishinaabeg didn’t like this arrangement. Even though veteran Anishinaabeg had Initial Attack expertise, they were practicing these skills to a much lesser extent after the 1970s due to their more limited involvement in the Unit Crew system (Joe Keesic, Jan. 27, 2009). Nevertheless, some Pikangikum Elders, such as Ohweeghan Matthew Strang, were happy with their involvement in the EFF system and have expressed a sense of pride in their participation as EFF’s over several years (Matthew Strang, Sept. 12, 2008).

6.4.2 Auxiliary Crews, Northern Fire Technicians and Community Fire Officers

Starting in the late 1970s, the OMNR forged an additional firefighting relationship with Far North communities that centered on the development of fire crews to be equipped and stationed on the Reserves and staffed by local Band members. Over the years, these crews have been maintained under various monikers; Auxiliary, Northern Fire and Community Fire Crews, for the same basic purpose. These community-based forces have usually consisted of one or two Unit Crews, made up of four or five individuals each, who are designated to conduct Initial Attack on fires that pop up in close proximity to Indian Reserves. OMNR has created equipment caches within the communities and worked to ensure they have a pre-designated number of individuals who could be called upon to carry out these actions. OMNR can also authorize the commissioning of boats and vehicles, owned by community members, in the event that transportation to and from fire incidents requires the use of these resources.

Under this system, at least one or two Band members from each community are formally trained to the Crew Boss level in order to serve as the principals in Initial Attack activities. In addition, each community has had at least one Auxiliary Crew Member, Northern Fire Technician or Community Fire Officer (CFO) who is placed on the payroll for the duration of the fire season to maintain a state of readiness in the event of fire outbreaks. Under the current system, the CFO is the primary liaison with OMNR in the community. They stay abreast of the fire situation on a day-to-day basis, communicate and receive information dealing with forest fire situations around their home Reserve and action forest fires accordingly. As Mike Schillemore noted, OMNR found a huge advantage in having these firefighting resources available at the community level. This has made it possible to action fires much more quickly, rather than having to dispatch a Unit Crew, at distances in upwards of 100 kilometers, from Forestry Point (Mike Schillemore, Dec. 9, 2008). These programs have also placed a degree of ownership in fire protection services within the hands of First Nations themselves, as well as heightening the safeguards that are in place around Reserves.

By 1991, OMNR had also delineated Community Protection Zones around Far North Communities which were assigned a full response to fire outbreaks falling within a 16-kilometer radius of the Reserves. Community-based fire crews were identified as the first line of defense in attacking these fires. OMNR also enacted some measures to ensure that some of the training and certification for the communities was carried out according to the unique cultural and linguistic background of Anishinaabeg. For instance, Mike Schillemore noted that Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) training material was translated into Cree/Ojibwa syllabics for the express purpose of training Anishinaabe community crews (Mike Schillemore, Dec. 9, 2008).



Plate 32: Pikangikum Community Fire Crew Members undergoing recertification, Sept. 2008.
(Photo by M. R. Sanders)

At present, OMNR continues to retain one Community Fire Officer (CFO) from each Far North community. The various jurisdictions that cover the Far North, such as Red Lake, Sioux Lookout and Geraldton district, hold training and orientation sessions, running roughly one or two weeks, for CFO's from the various communities. These programs are typically administered by assembling the various CFO's at their respective Fire Headquarters to be trained and refreshed as a group. During an interview session at Forestry Point, Current Fire Operations Supervisor Steve Toman offered me a comprehensive synopsis of the CFO program as it operates today:

Yeah. It used to be a Fire Management Tech, like a Far North FMT and basically they changed the wording to Community Fire Officer; and what it is: they are employed by the MNR and we supply the fire suppression equipment that they cache out [in the community]. And they [CFO's] are responsible for making sure they have a crew or two that are trained and qualified to fight forest fires. And that's what they do. That's our control measure. If we have a fire next door to Pikangikum, I immediately call them. And that's what they do. They are the primary resources to action fires within that Community Protection Zone. They're the first on the scene to action the fire in that area. They liaise with the SRO [Sector Response Officer] at the desk there and let us know what kind of resources we need there. They're basically; they're our connection to what goes on in that community [...]

[...]Everything is in place...They have a leader and a group and we try and supply them with anything they need to get the job done. If that equipment gets used, we try and do everything to make sure we can bring that equipment back, and get it recycled and make sure they have everything they need for the next time.

(Steve Toman, Fire Operations Supervisor, to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

The various permutations of OMNR Far North community protection that have been in place since the late 1970s have allowed some key First Nation community members to cultivate a longstanding relationship with the Fire program. Among the CFO's who are currently active in the Red Lake District, at least two have been involved in the program for around two decades or more and have fought fire on many occasions under various hiring systems; as EFFs, Northern Fire Technicians and on Community Fire Officers. Moreover, at least one CFO presently exceeds the required Crew Boss/SP-200 level of training and has completed certification at the Crew Leader, or SP-300 level, meaning that he is qualified to occupy an Initial Attack role equal to that of Unit Crew Leaders stationed at Forestry Point.

Like the EFF system, Community Fire protection programs have created grounds for both success and challenge with regard to Far North community participation. While certain individuals have become trusted fixtures of Red Lake Fire through their work as CFO's, the consistency of staffing within the program has varied over the years, and from one community to the next. For brief periods, OMNR has sometimes been left without a comprehensive roster of trained individuals in each community as people have come in and out of these positions over the years. Moreover, in the same sense that EFF work was often highly incidental and temporary, the

activation of Community Fire Crews was equally contingent on the actual presence of fire outbreaks within a specific area. While the CFO is on the payroll for the duration of the fire season, Community Fire Crew Members are hired on only for specific fire incidents. Therefore, while they have remained important, Community Fire Crews have existed within a more limited sphere of operation and engagement relative to Unit Crews stationed at Forestry Point. Nevertheless, the efforts of OMNR and Far North First Nations in creating Community Fire Crew and EFF rosters has involved substantial interactions as centered on some mutual fire protection goals, built up over decades of work. Mike Schillemore noted that these programs were developed to the degree that OMNR had cultivated a good relationship with several Far North Communities by the end of the 1980s. OMNR was able to quickly call on a wealth of firefighting resources to attack forest fires within specific portions of the Red Lake District. Although Pikangikum presence on Unit Crews has declined over past years, there have remained some, albeit more limited, avenues for involvement in the program. When used, Community Fire Crews are known to be fast, efficient and effective in contributing to firefighting services in the Far North portion of the Red Lake District (Mike Schillemore, Dec. 9, 2008).

6.4.3 Type 2 Contract Fire Crews

In 1995 the Conservative government of Premier Mike Harris came to power in Ontario with a platform to cut government spending in a number of areas. Under Premier Harris's Common Sense Revolution platform, one important order of the day was an outsourcing of services previously held at the government level. These spending-cut initiatives eventually resulted in the creation of a privatized equivalent of the EFF system in Ontario. A Contract Fire Crew form of organization, known as the Type 2 system, was established in 1997 and essentially replaced EFF hiring as done directly by OMNR (Murray Macquarrie, Nov. 26, 2008). Under Harris's government, the pre-existing EFF program was subsumed by a new system of private contractors that took on the responsibility for organizing and supplying forest firefighters for a mop-up/sustained attack role. The main rationale for outsourcing these services was apparently to save money by offloading costs previously incurred directly by the province.

Murray MacQuarrie, who has overseen Type 2 services for the northwestern Ontario division of Outland, the largest provider of Contract Fire crews in Ontario, has trained and deployed Type 2 crews from Pikangikum at various points since the creation of this program. In recent years, Pikangikum Type 2 Crews have been contracted through Outland to fight fires not only within Ontario, but also in Saskatchewan and in British Columbia. Pikangikum Type 2 crews served as firefighters during the infamous Kelowna firestorm of 2003. Murray indicated that the B.C. Forestry Service was massively impressed with the work carried out by Pikangikum crews during this incident. Overall, Murray noted that Pikangikum workers have done an excellent job in fulfilling a Type 2 role during incidences in which they have been used. At the time of our interview (Nov. 26, 2008), Murray had a roster of approximately 100 people from Pikangikum who held SP-100 entry-level Crew Member training. In addition, Murray had a short list of Pikangikum band members with SP-200 Crew Boss certification. Murray was also hoping to see an increase the number of certified Crew Bosses from Pikangikum to boost the complement of potentially available crews.

Outland (2010) places a specific emphasis on hiring people from First Nation communities for work as Type 2 firefighters. Since 1997, other forestry services and First Nation Band organizations within the province of Ontario have also stepped up to provide Contract Fire Crew services to OMNR. Geraldton Community Forest and Wikwemikong First Nation are two other examples of entities that have offered Type 2 services and employed First Nations people (Murray MacQuarrie, Nov. 26, 2008).

Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters has used the services of Type 2 organizations at various points since the creation of the program. Fire Operations Supervisor Steve Toman indicated that Type 2 workers have done an excellent job in the mop-up stage of fires on more than a few occasions:

I know for a fact over my years of fighting fire - like I'm not going to take anything away from our Type 1 [Unit Crew] guys with this mop-up role - but you get the right group of Type 2 folks...when that does happen it's really something to see. Like they can find smokes in areas that are very difficult to find. You gotta get every smoke out. Like when

you want to...when the fire's out, it's O-U-T, that means there's no smokes left and that means, at the end screening with the AGA [aerial infrared] scanning machine and flying over marking hotspots. But, you know, as a Sector Leader, and a few times working as a Crew Leader, working with those guys you kinda pick out a chunk, you know, maybe a more active part of the line where you think there're smokes. And as a Sector Leader just kind of bumping around watching those guys narrow down and whittling their way down to finding a smoke you know is there somewhere. But...they're just very good at that. They're good at what they do...some of the Type 2 guys; like you have a gang of Type 2 guys on the fire that are incredible. They need little or no direction.

(Steve Toman to M. Sanders, Nov. 24, 2008)

In addition to serving in a mop-up capacity, Type 2 crews can be and have been used on Initial Attack in instances where fire behavior and intensity is limited to smoldering and minimal flame. Although Type 2 crews do not include a member certified to the SP-300 Initial Attack Crew Leader level, which is required when fighting more active fires, a Type 2 Crew Boss with SP-200 certification can serve in a limited Initial Attack leadership role.

As already indicated, the basic intent of the Type 2 system has been to offload some of the training, equipment and travel costs from the OMNR to a private company in order to save money. Under the Type 2 system, the contract company is paid by OMNR and in turn hires on a pre-determined number of firefighters as identified on the basis of need by a specific headquarters. For example, Murray MacQuarrie places workers on the payroll, supplies some camping, work equipment and uniforms to the crews during fire deployments and deducts the cost of this equipment from Crew Members' pay checks. When called by the Ministry to supply Type 2 crews, Murray also organizes a rendezvous point to which Type 2 workers must report in order to be mustered for their assignment. In some cases, Type 2 workers will be expected to shoulder the responsibility to cover travel costs in order to report at these pre-set locations. The Ministry pays the contractor directly and the contractor then takes a cut and passes a set wage down to the workers.

One perceived drawback of the Type 2 system has to do with this devolution of costs previously taken up by the Ministry under the EFF system to the level of the individual worker under contract. Joe Keesic indicated that a more limited level of pay and a different pay structure has

led some people to disagree with the way the Type 2 system operates because the income is not as attractive as before. Moreover, Joe also indicated that Type 2 usage primarily in a mop-up role has led some First Nation firefighters to feel as though they have been placed on the backburner relative to regular crews:

Seems to me now there's this Murray, Macquarrie; he's working for Outland now. Yeah he was in there asking me to help him out eh? Nobody wants to work for Outland anymore. Well, they got a hard time to get paid for a month or two months as Type 2 then. Look at over here when they were EFF they get paid in two weeks time...Yeah. It's a really poor outfit. That's why they don't want to work for them. Well I wouldn't mind working for them just to do something. But then I heard about how they don't get paid. Like if they ask those guys to come in over there, you gotta find your own way [to the rendezvous point...]

[...]Yeah. Mop-up. Dirty jobs. Yeah. When a fire comes up they send their MNR crews in there eh? Seems to me they'd pull 'em out and then they'd all go in there; like EFF and Outlanders. And they'd leave a mess in there for cleaning up for them eh? Do the dirty jobs...that's why they don't want to do it. That's what they do to them when I was in Armstrong in there eh? They put all the fire crews in there and then: "Why are they going to leave these guys get in there?" I told them. Well, they said: "that's the way it goes." Always the Indians goes up in there and do the dirty work for them eh? See they don't get no overtime for that eh? They just get straight time. They get 14 bucks an hour and get straight 14 [hours a day].

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Jan. 27, 2009)

At one point after his retirement in 1999, Joe remembered that Murray MacQuarrie approached him and asked him if he would be willing to train some of the Type 2 staff. However, because Joe did not hold a favorable view of the system, he declined to participate in that role:

Joe: Murray Yeah. He wanted me to train these Outlanders eh? I said "I don't know." And I told him, I said, "they got a hard time to get paid" [laughs].

Mike: Yeah? They don't make as much money [under] these Type 2 [programs]?

Joe: No. No.

Mike: I guess they gotta pay for their camping stuff? Gotta pay for their coverall and stuff like that eh?

Joe: Yeah. Yeah. That's lots of money. And I just said 'No'"...Yeah. Well some people they used to go up in uhh, Outland I guess. Now nobody does work for them anymore eh?...Well they use some people from fire crews as IA [Initial Attack] crews who will just go on in there and encircle the fire. Well it used to be the old EFF's that used to go in there afterwards, mop-up and all that eh? Do the dirty work for them. Yeah. That's what they were saying I guess, you know, do that dirty work for the MNR boys.

(Joe Keesic to M. Sanders, Nov. 27, 2008)

Veteran Fire Manager Paul Fazekas perceived some of the same effects through his own experiences in the program. Under the Contract Crew program, Paul recalled that there was a digression in the firefighting roles that Anishinaabe had previously held under the Unit Crew and EFF systems. Paul felt that both OMNR and Anishinaabeg have lost out because of this lessened level of involvement:

Like we say, at times we'd have just the EFF's coming and we would have about 50 or 100 firefighters down from northern communities to the Red Lake base, to mobilize and use for dispatch. And for some period of time over a number of years we were using them as an Initial Attack force. Sometimes with a Fire Boss going with them to get them, break them in. And like I say: we were using them and it just dissolved you know...the contract crew system came in. They were...MNR lost when the outsourcing [came in]...we lost hands-down. And that's...to me that's when it ended. Right there. Abruptly ended there.

[...]I mean I think the Natives feel that too. They know that they're being used as secondary. And I could see that from where I was, kind of thing eh? And they start to lose sort of a pride in what they do. Ummm, you lose a lot and I think that's happened.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

Mike Schillemore, who was present during the shift from the EFF to Type 2 system, remembered that he heard some similar opinions from people in the communities he had worked with. Some individuals did not like the new arrangement. At times, contract supervisors were also not as active on the fire line supplying the needed equipment to Type 2 workers. In these instances, OMNR had to make up for equipment shortfalls to ensure contract crews were well-supplied in the field. This made the system more complicated in some instances. Moreover, Mike indicated that the efficiency of deployment relative to the EFF system was lessened under the Type 2 system. Because there was more paperwork and bureaucracy involved in going through a contract 'middleman', response times involved in deploying Type 2 crews were sometimes slower. Mike also indicated that the shift to the Type 2 system under the Harris Government had a weakening effect on the established relationship between the OMNR and Far North communities under the EFF program. Over the years, OMNR had built some solid connections with the communities. However, these connections and relationships were undercut by the shift to Type 2 Contract Crews administered by a third party (Mike Schillemore, Nov. 9, 2008).

Both veteran OMNR Fire Rangers and contractors have also indicated that Type 2 hiring and usage has meant that Anishinaabe workers have been deployed less frequently as opposed to past decades. This has not necessarily proceeded from any sense of unwillingness on the part of OMNR to use these resources. Partly, the problem has been a shortage of fire incidents requiring the use of Type 2's. Since the year 2000, fire seasons have tended to be fairly calm. Contract Crews and Unit Crews alike have both been missing out on direct fire experience.

It's...like you said, it's true though, the system for whatever reason...well the change of government I'd think; when we went to contract crews. It was... outsourcing was the key word of the day and it wasn't just the crews it was outsourcing all a whole number of things. So that was part of it. And it's really had a change. Like if I was to think even for northwestern Ontario contract crews I think about the last four years that I was on...but I can think maybe there was one year that was reasonably busy. Well, number one: contract crews are used for the mop-up patrol and they're *not* used, maybe once in four years, so they're even losing on that angle, like you know?

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

6.4.4 Thoughts and Feelings of the Elders on Recent Changes

Elders themselves wax nostalgic about former days, before the introduction of the Type 2 system, in which they experienced more regular firefighting employment. Sam Quill, for example, held an interest in restoring an EFF context of participation that would engage community members to a greater degree, as similar to the past:

I guess that process is... that are in place right now are MNR's is working under certain process. I would've just started with that old process: the EFF's - the Extra Fire Fighters. There are a lot of EFF's in this community that you would've used. Because of all this new process that you have you have to have trained fire fighters. Now you see what that is doing to putting out fires he said. If they had a fire they would just come and pick up plane loads of fire fighters [...] That would've been better. Go back to the old process [...]. - Sam Quill, Pikangikum Elder, Community / OMNR Fire Meeting 3-6-2007 (WFMC 2007)

Matthew Strang also emphasized that he would like to see the same amount of Pikangikum resources used for fires today as were used in past decades of the EFF program. In fact, Matthew noted that restoring an EFF context of participation, involving a number of workers, could even save the OMNR some money:

Charlie Pascal: And he says like with the government or the ministry would save a lot of money like if they could just hire labor, like us? Eh? And they would work fighting fires. Like today he just spends a lot of money on equipment, helicopters and water bombers, those kinds of things.

Mike: I guess it's good to have a lot of men working together instead of bombers and everything eh?

Charlie Pascal: Yeah.

(Matthew Strang, in translation by Charlie Pascal, to M. Sanders, Sept. 12, 2008)

Elder Charlie Peters similarly indicated that EFF employment involved the use of a greater degree of firefighters; an arrangement that held obvious benefits for community members because more people were employed:

I fought fires beginning in 1943 when I was 16. The last time was when I was 1989. [...] lots of people would go fight fires. Now there are only 4 people in a fire fighting crew. There used to be 40 people per crew[...]Charlie Peters 9-29-2006 (WFMC 2007)

In the same sense, Pikangikum Elders recognized changes in the reliance on manpower in fire fighting since the 1950s as stemming not only from training, but also technological change. Peter Paishk of Pikangikum connected this technological change to a drop in the use of firefighters on the ground. In fact, Peter felt that the use of air tankers was one factor that undercut the need for the kind of larger crews that Charlie Peters was familiar with:

Yeah yeah. Ummhmm. Yeah and then they have one time they have the water bomber eh? That's why they're not using the Indian people. Maybe too... Maybe they stopped from using the people from all over eh? Maybe they stopped using guys from Red Lake even...Yeah. And that's what happened now...Some guys was talking about that was danger eh? Sometimes they hit a tree; a tree would break right in half. That's what happened eh? That really changed around when they got water bombers in there. I don't know what happened. Then they dropped it and the water kept going on in the wind eh? But then they [OMNR] figure...figure it out [how to use waterbombers]. Maybe long time ago it didn't cost much to...[buy] gas or...to pick up those people [from Pikangikum] and all that. They didn't pay that much to do that a long time ago. Sometimes I don't know...I don't know how much they would pay for firefighting [nowadays with water bombers].

(Peter Paishk to M. Sanders, Nov. 5, 2008)

Generally, Elders advocate for an approach to firefighting that relies less heavily on technology and is more akin to the EFF system under which they had participated in past decades. They

envision a system in which human resources from the community are employed more readily and in greater numbers.

6.4.5 Further Changes to Certification and Training Under the Private Sector System

The introduction of the Type 2 system coincided with a change in the administration of entry-level training that also came about under the watch of the Harris Government. At around the same time that the Contract Fire Crew system was devised, entry-level SP-100 training, along with First Aid and fitness testing, also became mandatory for work as a firefighter. Moreover, these qualifications now came under the purview of private contract organizations that charged for these services. Prior to 1997, OMNR had shouldered the expense of training its firefighters. But by around 1997, the costs associated with fire certification became incumbent on the prospective Fire Crew candidate, who now had to pay to take these courses from a private contractor. Randy Crampton, who came to Red Lake in 1984, briefly discussed how this shift took place during his career:

[I]t's a lot more incumbent on the individual to make a commitment go out and get the S-100, the Pre-fit testing and the First Aid training, prior to even being qualified to bid on the job. Like I said, the MNR looked after all that stuff back when I first started. So it's a huge commitment for the individual today as compared to when I started.

(Randy Crampton, Fire Management Supervisor, to M. Sanders, Oct. 2, 2008)

At present, an individual who hopes to either gain an entry-level Unit Crew position or work as a Type 2 must shoulder the expenses associated with gaining these qualifications through organizations such as Outland and through a separate fitness testing agency. Although certification positions an individual as a qualified candidate, it does not necessarily guarantee that an individual will be hired on to a Fire Ranger Crew Member position. For instance, when I completed Ontario Fire certification in 2008, there were a number of individuals in my class who had gone through the motions in advance to secure a Unit Crew position contingent on passing the training. However, some other classmates had not had a Crew Member position guaranteed to them, although they had nonetheless chosen to take the advanced training in the hopes that a

job would pan out. The final bill for SP-100, First Aid and PRE-FIT fitness testing was roughly twelve hundred dollars.

Following the privatization of training services around 1997, individual First Nation Bands more frequently assumed the funding for training which had previously been assumed by OMNR. In recent years, Murray MacQuarrie has visited the community of Pikangikum to provide the week-long training course (Murray MacQuarrie, Nov. 26, 2008). In addition, a fitness testing organization visits Red Lake on a pre-set day before the fire season to hold PRE-FIT sessions. Far North First Nation band members have to find their way to town in order to complete this testing. Alex Peters (Nov. 12, 2008) noted that in recent years, the Pikangikum Band has shouldered the cost to maintain the currency of its members as entry-level firefighters. For those bands already struggling with limited funds allocated under Indian Affairs, or through other programs, this can represent an additional financial stress. Fire Management staff have indicated that not all Bands have allocated the necessary funds to pay for training services. Moreover, in recent years, due to the commitment involved in visiting and providing training in remote northern locations, some Type 2 organizations have been less active in the Far North.

Importantly, two arrangements with regard to training and hiring can be seen to mitigate some of the above challenges. Firstly, from time to time, OMNR has continued to administer standard SP-100, SP-100 re-certification and associated training directly in the various communities. Community Fire Crew Members continue to receive training and orientation directly from the OMNR, and SP-200 Crew Boss training is also offered to Community Fire Officers directly by OMNR as needed. OMNR has stepped in to oversee the training it feels necessary to maintaining resources in the north where contract organizations have fallen short. They can only do so to a limited degree as this places them in undue competition with contract service providers. However, OMNR has not entirely relinquished its direct role in training for Far North Communities. Secondly, OMNR has also put in place a special adaptation of the EFF program that has been geared towards helping prospective candidates of all stripes recover the costs associated with

entry-level training. The EFF program has continued in the form of a temporary, one-month, hiring period for staff who have gained the appropriate qualifications without securing a full Crew Member position. Under this novel context of EFF hiring, individuals are placed as Additional Hires with the benefit of gaining direct experience as a Crew Member. The EFF/Additional Hire program sometimes carries the possibility for individuals to compete for a seasonal placement on a crew. Moreover, in a busy fire season, EFF/Additional Hires may also be retained for an extended period beyond their one-month contract. OMNR is allowed to hire up to eight EFFs on an as-needed basis before it is required to engage a contractor. Because the OMNR recognizes that entry-level candidates have committed a fair amount of time and money to gaining certification, they also see an advantage in maintaining supplementary avenues to involvement in firefighting.

However, as training and certification have become increasingly intensive during the privatization era, members of the older, Unit Crew and EFF generation of Anishinaabeg have not even bothered to compete for firefighting employment. While Elders and veterans in the community retained a wealth of first-hand, empirical knowledge about firefighting, many of them had been raised in an Anishinaabe language and cultural context which was very different from the world of certification required by OMNR by the late 1990s. In the same sense that Pikangikum Unit Crew involvement had been engulfed by new forms of Fire Crew training in decades past, their subsequent role as casual EFF's was eclipsed by the Type 2/privatization system in about 1997, which now involves SP-100, First Aid and PRE-FIT fitness certification. Although the younger generation has somewhat more of an educational background in reading, writing and testing, the Elder generation holds much less of a propensity to fulfill these 'book' requirements. This, along with the more limited use of community members in secondary, mop-up roles has severed the multi generational, EFF-style of on-the-job training that had taken place in past contexts:

That's it. You know, whether all that sort of experience from when I started, you know, was handed down to the next generations of Native firefighters, I don't know. Like it's hard to say. And I have my doubts...as to with the training and experience, I just don't...what I call the Elders now, I don't think that much has passed on anymore. It's

hard to say...maybe from a father or a grandfather to a grandson or a son, but I don't think in any formal way there's anything. So they're...I think when they [the youth] are out there, they're where I was 25 years ago.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 28, 2008)

To an extent, both the substance of Fire Training, as well as the privatized context of its administration over past years has also presented a challenge to younger generations of potential Pikangikum workers. Like many remote First Nations communities, Pikangikum has a lower proportion of high school and college graduates as relative to the mainstream, non-Native population. The continued challenges faced by northern communities in this regard spill into the context of formal Fire Fighter training. Various community members I have spoken with from both the Pikangikum and Poplar Hill communities, who are around the same age as I (about thirty years old), indicate that they went to about grade eight or ten in school. These communities also retain a strong use of their own indigenous language. Some of my acquaintances in these Reserves have indicated that they learned English mostly through firsthand, incidental interactions with white people who have visited the community over the years. One community member also mentioned that they learned English mostly from television. Some of the terminology in the SP stream of classroom training can thus pose a difficulty. Anishinaabeg do not necessarily understand terms like atmospheric stability, precipitation, vertical and horizontal forest fuel arrangements. Terms such as these, embedded in classroom training, are imports from outsider language and cultural sensibilities.

Younger generations of Pikangikum people often have had less learning exposure to a whole spate of 'bush'-based knowledge and skill than past generations. While Elders continue to hold a massive amount of knowledge regarding a 'bush'-based lifestyle and competence, younger generations have been cut off from learning this knowledge because associated, 'real life' situations of practice on the land have been curtailed. Jim Moorley worked with a generation of Pikangikum firefighters who were steeped in this bush-based knowledge. For the most part, there was never a second thought given to the fact that Pikangikum people of the 1970s knew exactly how to operate in remote, bush settings. Over more recent years, younger individuals who hold

the same level of competence, in everything from camp setup to bush navigation, have been harder to find. Some non-Native veterans of the fire program assert that it may be more common to find that the youth of Far North communities now hold roughly the same level of knowledge and acumen as those ‘wet behind the ears’, southern, non-Native firefighters who joined the program during the early to mid 1970s. Concomitantly, recognition of this reality has been one important reason why Elders of the community have undertaken the Whitefeather Forest Initiative in the first place. Elders who are aware of these developments maintain a strong level of interest in ensuring this knowledge can continue to be passed down.

6.5 The Whitefeather Forest Initiative and the Development of Bak Lake Forward Attack Base

The growth of the Whitefeather Forest Initiative, starting in the late 1990s, has spurred new developments in fire coverage that have directly involved Pikangikum people and their traditional territory. Since the Whitefeather Forest Initiative began, Land Use Planning and Forest Licensing processes have been ongoing, with community-based forest harvest operations slated to begin in 2012. A number of aspects of resource management continue to be addressed in a community-based planning partnership with OMNR. One of the most significant developments that have come out of this longstanding planning process has been the extension of forest fire protection coverage to an expanded area, including a special Subzone in the Whitefeather Forest.

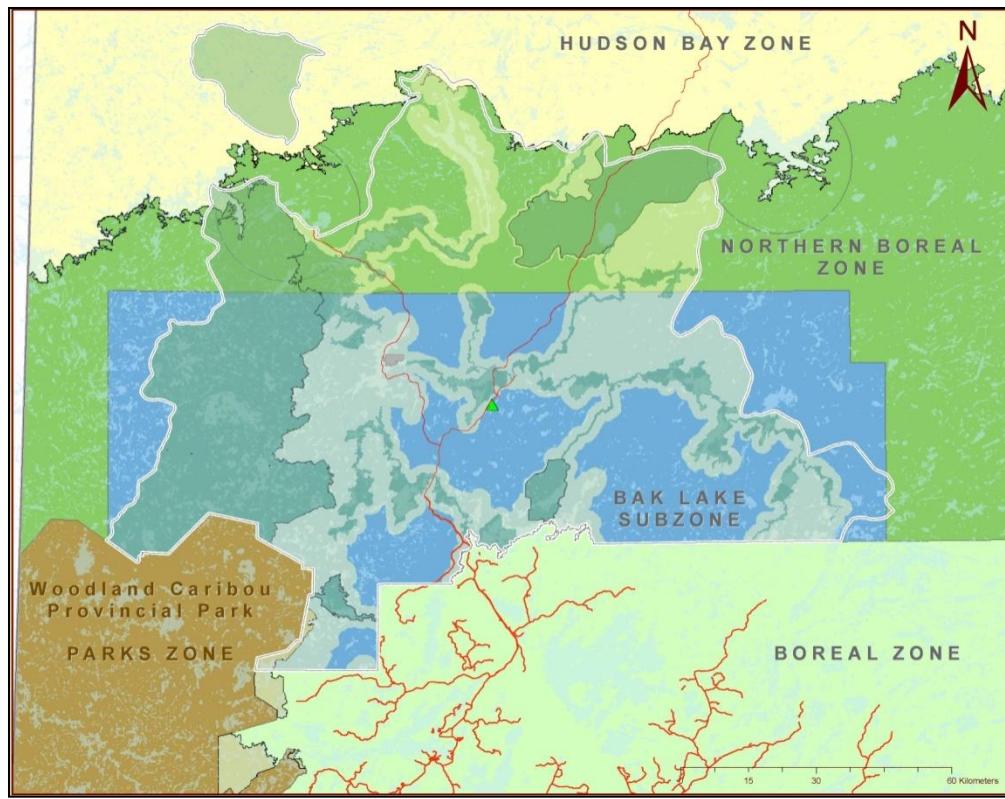


Figure 9: Map of the Bak Lake Subzone within the Whitefeather Forest.
Provided by OMNR Red Lake District.

The politics of fire coverage in and around the community of Pikangikum have always been complex because the community is located in a unique position. As discussed earlier in the work, Pikangikum people were hired to assist Ontario Land Survey representatives in laying out the 11th base line, which runs right through the middle of their community in an east-west direction. Interestingly, the 11th base line formerly served as the northern boundary of fire coverage under the DLF and early OMNR. In fact, before the development of Community Protection Zones in the Far North, ca. 1991, only half of Pikangikum was officially covered by fire protection services because of the unique position of the 11th base line.

Elders have recalled a few different historic instances in which community members had to fight forest fires on their own due to these specific parameters of fire protection. Some Pikangikum Elders, such as Matthew Strang and Oliver Hill (Sept. 12, 2008), expressed disappointment with

the fact that they had fought fire for so many years with DLF/OMNR without having the same measure of protection consistently provided to their community in the past:

So several years ago there was a fire. You can still see the evidence of the new growth right here in the community. There was a forest fire that came right at our door step. Nobody came to our community. Nobody came to airlift the community. Nobody came to assist us that time. I seen, Elder Jake's dad fight the fire right outside his house. I'm bewildered because we were not seen in the same way; not as valuable as those others to the south. We were left here to die. That's how I see that he says. The policy had no reflection on us whatsoever, he says.

- Oliver Hill Community / OMNR Fire Meeting 3-6-2007 (WFMC 2007)

As Chief of Pikangikum, roughly around the mid to late 1980s, Alex Peters recalled that fires had burned around the Reserve in one specific season without receiving a full response from OMNR. Because trap line values were seen to be threatened by these fires, Alex was quick to respond to this situation and seek more fire coverage from the province by engaging higher levels of the provincial government:

Alex: We had a big fire here one time. To maybe...aww it was all over. I was chief that time eh? And the MNR had that [base] line. And they said like all they do is keep the community safe.

Mike: So all up here, back here it burnt out eh?

Alex: Yeah. All burnt yeah. But I made a big ruckus to the ministry, even to the Ontario government there. I even told like the premier. I told him to just stop sitting eh? Get his ass up here...our community is burning eh? He told us he would send some people up here.

Mike: Who was the premier at the time?

Alex: I don't know who it was. I first called his office. I said "are you gonna put out the fire?" I told him. Like these traplines eh? Are they gonna be safe? Are you gonna save these cabins? Like in the south they have these camps eh? Like the fish camps. So they just try to save these guys. They wouldn't touch ours eh? It was at that time it started eh? They took me to every trapline where the fire was. Took me to see the crews there at every cabin eh? They just took me out almost daily by helicopter to see the firefighters there eh? They wanted me to see that they were doing something.

Mike: The minister took you eh?

Alex: The ministry they had a helicopter eh?

Mike: So they did go past their base line then?

Alex: That time yeah. They had crews up here at every camp. That made a lot of difference that time. They started taking us seriously eh?

Mike: that was maybe ten years, fifteen years ago?

Alex: Trying to remember what year I was Chief. I think it was there. Ten, fifteen. They wouldn't touch anything eh? Past the line. And you know who worked on those lines eh? Cutting the lines?

Mike: Your dad [Charlie Peters]?

(Alex Peters to M. Sanders, Nov.9, 2008)

Importantly, expanded fire coverage systems that have improved upon a formerly minimal level of protection around Pikangikum were slowly coming under the purview of the organization beginning in the mid-1970s. In a short phone conversation in the winter of 2008, former Fire Manager Tom Francis indicated that as early as 1974, OMNR was reviewing a policy item known as the Northern Expansion Proposal. This proposal was designed to both push fire coverage north of the 11th base line and investigate the feasibility of establishing a Forward Attack Base north of Red Lake in the vicinity of the Berens Lake area, close to Pikangikum. While the attack base did not materialize at the time, during the 1980s and 1990s fire coverage north of the 11th baseline was gradually increased to extend more protection to First Nations communities. As already indicated, an important component has been the creation of Community Protection Zones at the beginning of the 1990s. In addition, coverage for areas falling north of the 11th base line and outside of the Community Protection Zones also became more frequent. To a certain degree, this extended coverage has likely come in response to the overtures of community leaders such as Alex Peters in past decades.

Prior to recent developments, full forest fire suppression had mainly applied to a designated area, known as the Area of Undertaking (AOU), which the Crown Forest Sustainability Act (1994) identifies as the geographic boundary within which forestry licenses can be legally issued. The AOU delineates the northern extent of commercial forestry as running roughly along the 51st parallel, just south of the Pikangikum community. Because the safeguarding of wood supplies has always been a significant goal of provincial fire protection, full suppression coverage has

traditionally corresponded with AOU boundaries. Formerly, the Far North, which lay beyond the northern limits of the AOU has been identified as an area in which fires are primarily left to burn and fulfill their ecological role. As already indicated, Pikangikum people have often taken exception to this dichotomy. A 'let burn' policy north of the AOU has often been cited by Elders as a threat to the multitude of established human values which are present across the breadth of their traditional territory. These concerns have been heard and responded to by OMNR as Land Use Planning has unfolded since the 1990s.

As the Northern Boreal and Whitefeather Forest Initiatives have come to fruition, provincial fire response systems have been accordingly adapted to include a new zone north of the AOU known as the Northern Boreal Zone. A portion of the Whitefeather Forest Area, known as the Bak Lake Subzone, has been extended full fire suppression coverage through these developments. The Bak Lake Forward Attack Base, situated roughly eastward of Pikangikum Reserve near the South Arm of Berens Lake, has been built to facilitate a heightened level of protection as consistent with this expanded area of coverage. Bak Lake Forward Attack Base has advanced Red Lake Fire Headquarters' ability to respond to fires in southern portions of the Whitefeather in a quick and direct fashion. Bak Lake is a fully functioning satellite of Forestry Point that provides immediate protection for the Bak Lake Subzone. Bak Lake is also a significant staging point that can be used in conjunction with a strategic network of equipment and fuel caches throughout the northern half of the district. Thus, it also serves as an advance jumping-off point allowing for quicker fire response within the Far North.

Whitefeather President Alex Peters has indicated that support for the building of Bak Lake by Elders and trappers of Pikangikum First Nation has come chiefly through the understanding that it can serve as an important site for the training and hiring of Anishinaabe people. Pikangikum First Nation, as well as other Far North communities, can realize the benefits of this development. Alex noted that the vision of the Elders is to see Bak Lake serve as the axis for a whole training initiative aimed at developing firefighting resources in the Far North. The Whitefeather Forest

Initiative has aimed to place Pikangikum in a lead role as far as decision-making processes in their traditional territory. Similarly, Alex has indicated an interest in supporting a lead role for Pikangikum and other First Nations people in the staffing and operation of Bak Lake through solid partnerships with OMNR (Alex Peters, Nov. 9, 2008).

In recent years, OMNR and Whitefeather have collaborated on the development of a forest-based training and employment program centered on the clearing of damaged forest stands created by a windstorm 'blowdown' event in the Bak Lake area. Whitefeather provided a number of individuals from the community as summer staff to cut and clear storm-damaged material around Bak Lake. Anishinaabe interest in summer employment, involving exposure to advanced chainsaw operations, coincided with an OMNR interest in clearing out storm-damaged areas around Bak Lake. The program reflected some of the mutual goals of collaboration for the Attack Base (Alex Peters, Nov. 9, 2008).

Since the establishment of Bak Lake, Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters has also undertaken another initiative in step with the vision of the Elders. Immediately following the opening of Bak Lake in 2001, OMNR extended the opportunity for Pikangikum people to fill positions on Unit Crews to cover this expanded area within the Whitefeather:

Randy: Yeah there was a...when we developed and established the Bak Lake Forward Attack base to provide a higher level of protection for the Whitefeather Forest, we made a commitment because at the time when they, the government, approved the forward attack base - and a higher level of protection - it also identified that we would need more fire crews working out of Red Lake. So at the time they funded for an additional six fire crews out of Red Lake. Since then, it's been recalled. We lost those six crews a number of years ago, but initially, what we said was: of those six crews, we would give the opportunity for Pikangikum people to fill twelve positions and, umm, the first year I think we were able to fill seven. The numbers progressively just dropped off every year after that. A large part of the reason, umm, I think was the individuals weren't prepared or didn't care to live away from home for the course of the summer; whether it was here in Red Lake or traveling on a fire assignment. Umm, so it, you know, even the first year, I think it was, and again I'm just guessing that the number was around seven. You know, we felt that was a pretty good success. But, like I said, even though we maintained our efforts and/or increased them in the subsequent years after that, we couldn't get individuals to, A) either apply on the position, or B) complete the mandatory training to, you know, to be... that was required just to be able to bid on the jobs.

Mike: OK. And sorry, what year was that?

Randy: That started in '01. Yeah. 2001.

Mike: And so that would have been just around the same time Bak Lake opened or?

Randy: Yeah. We cut our first tree in the construction of Bak Lake I think in the fall of 2000 and we were operational in the summer of '01. Now interestingly enough there was one individual; he didn't start with us in '01. But, through that commitment that we made, even though we did wind up losing those six crews, I think two years ago, he was one individual that came out of that original program that's still with us today.

(Randy Crampton to M. Sanders, Oct. 2, 2008)

As President of WFMC, Alex Peters has spoken to me on a number of occasions regarding the community's strong interest in fulfilling a lead role in the operations of Bak Lake. However, while Bak Lake has stood as a site for tremendous opportunity, it appears that past paradigms existing both within and outside of the fire program have resulted in a substantial lag in the community's capacity to realize the kind of vision that was commensurate with Bak Lake's initial establishment. Although the retention of one individual from Pikangikum within the crew system for about eight seasons represents a success story, other youth have not been as persistent in occupying seasonal positions in light of Bak Lake's development.

6.6 Summary

This chapter explains how a transition in Ontario Fire Control from the DLF to the OMNR spurred a restructuring of the practice of firefighting during the early 1970s. The accounts of Anishinaabe and non-Native research participants who were involved in firefighting during this time shed light on how these changes came to bear on Anishinaabe roles and presence in the Fire Program. The transition from DLF to OMNR was quickly followed by the establishment of a technocratic approach to firefighting. This approach involved formal classroom fire training, an increased use of novel equipment and a crew structure with a more systematized chain of command. Recording, reporting and tracking of fire line activities and suppression progress became more central to the task of firefighting, as did guidelines and policies meant to contribute to fire line safety in practice. While it is clear that the main goal was to secure increased efficiency and safety in fire

suppression, these changes created challenges for Anishinaabeg who had built up their roles in the institution on the basis of their own language, culture, mentorship systems and fire line practices. Elders have explained a growing cultural divide in firefighting during the 1970s by way of a simple distinction: Anishinaabeg had fought fires according to the ‘old-fashioned’, ‘bush’-based system they had improvised over several decades. The ‘book’-based system of firefighting brought in by the OMNR was foreign to the way they had previously operated and did not provide a space for their continued involvement on Unit Crews.

As the ‘book’ way of firefighting came to predominate, Anishinaabe Unit Crew presence decreased. Since the late 1970s to the present, Anishinaabeg have most often fulfilled reduced roles as EFFs and Type 2 firefighters rather than entering into the Unit Crew system. At various points since the 1980s the OMNR has been active in attempts to incorporate northern community members into fire protection. Moreover, community-based initiatives undertaken by First Nations themselves have sometimes attempted to address the issue of firefighting participation. Most recently, land use planning and anticipated forestry developments in the Whitefeather Forest have spurred new agreements and dialogue centered on fire management and firefighting. However, to date, it appears that an underlying cultural solitude remains present. Pikangikum and OMNR have not yet witnessed a high level of success in reviving a fire suppression role for community members.

Chapter Seven

7.0 Distilling the Story and its Lessons

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on frameworks of analysis that are useful to distilling the essential lesson of the story. Two key theoretical frames are important in this regard. First, the ethnographic work of Desmond (2007) on Arizona firefighting crews and the associated interpretive lenses of Bourdieu (1990) help us understand the essential process of *becoming* a firefighter. These two researchers offer a basis from which to identify how this field of practice is structured both by the institution and by workers at the ‘ground’ level through their terms of logic and competency. Desmond (2007) helps us reconstruct and trace an Anishinaabe firefighting habitus in relation to the institution of firefighting. Therefore, following the second objective of this work, he allows us to understand the unique contributions and experiences of Pikangikum Anishinaabeg within the Fire Program. In addition, White’s (1991; 2006) Middle Ground theory provides a model for understanding Native-newcomer relationships in firefighting have been formed in historical settings through changing circumstances of cross-cultural exchange. White’s Middle Ground offers perspective on how Natives and newcomers have both worked together and worked apart within the institution of firefighting as power dynamics have shifted. Following the third objective of this work, it helps us understand how a unique Anishinaabe firefighting habitus has stood in relation to changes occurring within the institution over time.

This chapter also contains some recommendations for PFN and OMNR that may help improve upon the level of Anishinaabe participation in provincial firefighting. Overall, these recommendations espouse the importance of creating settings in which Ontario can collaborate with Anishinaabe people, through dedicated dialogues and combined efforts, to restructure the field of firefighting, reinvigorate a Middle Ground of cross-cultural exchange and work to reconstitute an Anishinaabe firefighting habitus.

7.2 Building a Firefighting Habitus

Desmond (2007) indicates that the first order of understanding that is relevant to explaining the process of becoming a firefighter rests in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, both in its general and specific forms. General habitus represents the set of embodied dispositions that are learned, instilled and reinforced in an individual through their background; upbringing and rearing within a specific social or cultural structure (Bourdieu 1990). These dispositions create a set of competencies that may, or may not, be easily translated to the *specific habitus* of firefighting. By extension, the specific habitus of firefighting is formed through a convergence between an individual's embodied dispositions, their general habitus, and the sphere of dispositions, requirements and organizational culture of the firefighting institution itself. Becoming a firefighter involves a successful marriage of one's pre-existing competencies and skills together with an ability to absorb the rules, norms and requirements set by the institution (Desmond 2007). Desmond argues that the majority of firefighters who have secured a place within the organization have done so by amalgamating relevant aspects of their cultural and social background with "...the organizational common sense of the U.S. Forest Service..." (Desmond 2007: 12).

7.2.1 The General Habitus of Firefighting in the U.S. Forest Service

Within Desmond's ethnography, a majority of his crewmates held a very specific, shared upbringing that contributed to their development as firefighters. Many were locals raised in a rural, country setting, from lower-to-middle class backgrounds, with parents who had worked as foresters, firefighters, loggers and in other jobs in the backcountry. Several of his crewmates were directly familiar with the land area under their charge, having camped and fished, hunted, cut firewood and engaged in recreational activities in these areas during their formative years. By extension, many held a familiarity with certain parts of the landscape and its various features; the hills, creeks, trails and forests of the area. Moreover, most had already developed some experience with the kinds of equipment common to both a general country rearing and the

specific practice of firefighting. Many had used chainsaws, axes, camping equipment, all-terrain vehicles and small engines and had the capacity to maintain and repair these kinds of tools and machinery. Arizona firefighters shared a common general habitus as 'locals' from the region with a developed sense of 'country competence'. This kind of general habitus meant that Desmond's Arizona Fire Crew Members often held a high degree of readily transferrable skills significant to firefighting prior to their entrance into the program. They had internalized a common logic of practice. They deeply embodied a measure of currency or social capital, which directly coincided with the same kind of raw abilities that could be harnessed within the occupation of firefighting (Desmond 2007).

Do you know how to tie a slipknot? Do you know the difference between four-low and four-high? Can you drive an ATV? Can you weld? Do you know what poison ivy looks like? Do you know how to pick up a snake? Can you hike fast without wasting your energy? Have you ever slept in the woods without a tent? Do you know what a cotter pin is? Most of my Crew Members could answer yes...most of them came to Elk River with a refined and well-developed set of country-masculine skills.

(Desmond, 2007: 51-52)

Interestingly, while Desmond's U.S. Forest Service crewmates came from different ethnic backgrounds; Hispanic, Euro-American, Native American, etc., the existence of a general habitus of 'country competence' across these lines was a binding factor that allowed them to both improvise a shared identity and embody an almost subconscious cohesion of practice within the crew setting. Individuals knew, in a bodily sense, how to work on a crew because there was an agreement, both spoken and unspoken, among Crew Members. They recognized how to carry out certain tasks, operate different kinds of equipment and coordinate their efforts in a virtually 'innate' manner. By way of a shared general habitus, they shared a logic of practice that allowed individuals to work as an effective group. Desmond highlighted the durability of this crew dynamic in the face of an especially contentious fire situation that neither he nor his crewmates had faced before:

We knew the language of firefighting, so to speak, because we shared a linguistic disposition formed (and informed) by a shared country-masculine history. Because we possessed a similar history, we also possessed a common code that allowed us to communicate meaningfully and seamlessly even though we had never been in a situation like the one we faced that night.

(Desmond, 2007:170-171)

Desmond (2007) maintained that a country-masculine general habitus was significant in terms of raw firefighting competency. He also perceived it as part of a harmonized social performance through which individuals were able to quickly and smoothly act as a team. Arizona fire crews were capable of fast, effective, coordinated fire line actions because they already understood one another in terms of a common embodiment of practice. Moreover, social positioning within the crew system was also mediated by one's ability to demonstrate a general habitus as a 'country' person. This involved both a measure of healthy competition and a pecking order in almost every aspect of the job; from sharpening an axe to digging a fire guard. Importantly, a country habitus was not tested for through institutional structures. It was proven according to terms of competency that were improvised within the social setting of crews vis-a-vis its members.

7.2.2 A Specific Firefighting Habitus: Institution, Structure and Field

Desmond (2007) points out that this 'country masculine' general habitus had to be carried forward in combination with a pre-existing ability to comprehend and recite a logic of practice that was specific to the indoctrination structures of the institution itself. In this sense, the institution explicitly created structures that formed a specific *field*, a social space or domain through which forms of capital are negotiated and acquired (Bourdieu, 1990). Performance as a rural, country individual carrying a certain general habitus was half of the equation. It provided the raw material. The other half of the equation was satisfactory performance in the field of firefighting as explicitly structured by the institution. Arizona firefighters had to learn and recite an organizational language of firefighting that fulfilled U.S. Forest Service standards in terms of procedure, protocol, safety and fireline conduct. Crew members had to demonstrate reading, writing, comprehension and communication abilities in this regard in order to qualify for the position. While Desmond (2007) is not explicit on the point, this involved an upbringing within a Euro-American cultural and educational structure embodying the deeply embedded social norms of this society. The higher the degree of agreement between socially and culturally-based logic, concepts, ideas and

sensibilities shared between the institution and the individual, the greater the success in producing a firefighter who held a specific habitus of firefighting.

7.3 Habitus and Anishinaabe Capital in Firefighting.

Desmond's research is greatly analogous to the historical narrative of Pikangikum Anishinaabe firefighting participation laid out in this work. To begin with, there is a strong correlation between Desmond's understanding of country competence and the extensive 'bush' competence of Pikangikum people. In the very same sense that Arizona firefighters embodied a general habitus as 'country' people, Anishinaabeg firefighters who were active in the program from the 1930s onward held a general habitus that was thoroughly built upon a boreal forest, 'bush' livelihood. Anishinaabeg fought fires within the very same ecological setting in which they had learned to survive from an early age. They understood the terrain and features of the 'bush'; they could navigate through it with ease, and they were familiar with the minutiae of practical aspects pertaining to safe and efficient movement and performance in this setting. Many participants provided statements that describe how Anishinaabe firefighters were veritable 'naturals' at the task. As Ooweechcheh Alec Suggashie stated, Anishinaabeg had known how to fight fires because their people had been present on the landscape for 'millions and billions' of years. By virtue of this, they had been born into the occupation at their very core. As Jake Siegel noted, forest fires burning in the remote backcountry around Red Lake were called 'Indian Fires' because Anishinaabeg had a unique upbringing that facilitated their success in reaching and fighting them. Anishinaabeg held a virtually innate knowledge of the lakes, creeks, rivers, hills valleys and swamps of a boreal forest setting. They understood the tools and equipment that were significant to 'bush' survival. They held a very deep general habitus which pre-disposed them to the specific habitus of firefighting that was required during the early days of the DLF in Red Lake.

As in Desmond's ethnography, the existence of a shared general habitus within an Anishinaabe crew setting also supported the fluidity with which the task of firefighting was carried out. This is due to the fact that shared social norms, life histories and values contributed to a common code of communication that structured the field of practice. Anishinaabe people held a general habitus built upon common knowledge, values and language as organizing principles that translated to the specific habitus of firefighting. As Joe Paishk pointed out on a number of occasions, Anishinaabeg already knew exactly what their fellow firefighters were going to do and how they were going to do it.

For Anishinaabeg who embodied a general 'bush' competency during the DLF era, acquiring capital as a firefighter did not involve the same level of 'paper' or 'book' based institutional knowledge as is required today. A standardized language of firefighting involving training, testing, classroom instruction and certification was largely absent from the Ontario Fire program until the early 1970s. The institutional structure that governed how firefighting was carried out during the early days of the DLF fell under the charge of a small group of Chief and Deputy Rangers who were largely left to their own devices in putting the fires out. What minimal reporting and paperwork was involved was mostly handled by the Anishinaabeg's non-Native partners and Fire Bosses. Within the DLF, there were few centralized requirements that uniformly dictated certain actions on the ground in a technocratic manner. The basic questions for a Deputy Ranger who hoped to organize Anishinaabe firefighting resources were; do they know how to dig a trench? Do they know how to start a pump and lay hose? Is their fireguard solid? Are they working the right sections of the fire? Once this knowledge had been demonstrated by Anishinaabe crews, the Fire Bosses were satisfied that they could fulfill the basic organizational requirements of the DLF

Pikangikum Anishinaabeg had a very favorable reputation among provincial workers due to their unique brand of competencies. As Anishinaabe firefighting participation evolved from an EFF to Unit Crew context of involvement during the 1950s and 1960s, a strong general habitus of 'bush' competency remained a central component in firefighting. By this time, Pikangikum people had

also built up knowledge that was central to the specific habitus of firefighting. As many joined Unit Crews with an EFF background, a number of Pikangikum Anishinaabeg were already proficient in various firefighting tasks; setting up a pump, working around aircraft, digging fire line, etc. They demonstrated this operational knowledge to the Fire Bosses through hands-on rehearsals, simulation training and crew competitions. Anishinaabe capital in firefighting, as built on cohesion between their general habitus and the organizational common sense of the DLF, reached its strongest value during these decades. A seasonal, Unit Crew context of participation was formed through a maximum payoff between the logic of practice held by the DLF and Anishinaabe people themselves. Anishinaabe people quickly stepped up to fulfill Initial Attack operations. They served Crew Bosses, trainers and supervisors by employing their specific knowledge on the fire line. They were an important and valued component in constructing the field of firefighting

7.3.1 Changes in the Field and Anishinaabe Firefighting Capital

The ‘book’-based system developed since the 1970s has created a thoroughly different field of firefighting practice under the OMNR. New leadership, a new forestry landscape and a number of intense fire seasons were factors leading to an overhaul of the system that had previously existed under the DLF. From water bombers, to helicopters, to Fire Danger Rating and computerized detection systems, the underlying impetus within the Fire Branch has been to increase safety and efficiency through a technocratic approach. Firefighters need to be trained, tested and certified to prove they have internalized this standard logic. They have to work in the field according to the formal directives and protocols that are enshrined in OMNR policy. They have to demonstrate a standardized knowledge of the equipment at hand; they needed to be certified, or ‘signed off’, to use a chainsaw, work around a helicopter or operate a motorboat.

For Anishinaabe people, the processes and structures through which firefighting conduct, leadership and tactics became enshrined in a ‘book’ context created a field of practice that was foreign to their general habitus. As certain requirements and practices became more central, their agency and level of capital within the program were placed under significant stress. The formal

parameters of firefighting conduct that made up the ‘book’ way of firefighting were beyond their sphere of language, culture and sensibility. While we may appreciate the underlying motivations of upper-level OMNR personnel in composing formal training and testing, it must be admitted that these concepts, understandings and practices were formulated almost exclusively from Euro-Canadian contexts of thought. Those in the position to make changes at the provincial and regional level were non-Anishinaabe. They decided how firefighting was to be carried out on the basis of a different cultural experience and in a different language; that of the so-called ‘dominant’ Euro-Canadian society. Although the OMNR never directly enacted policies that were designed to exclude people such as Pikangikum Anishinaabeg, the changes that were introduced to the program during the 1970s eventually had that effect.

Anishinaabe capital in the occupation of firefighting diminished significantly as the field of firefighting practice was recast under the OMNR during the early 1970s. Although Anishinaabeg held a wealth of firefighting knowledge, they did not hold the same inclination as southerners in passing written tests. Although they knew the ‘bush’ like the back of their hand, they didn’t hold the same propensity to fill out the fire reports and other paperwork that came to be required. Although they knew a lot about fire behavior, they didn’t model it based on mathematical calculations. Although they knew perfectly how to drive a truck down a bush road, some didn’t have a driver’s license. For Anishinaabeg, some of the ‘book’ methods of firefighting were also thoroughly inconsistent with their experience and approaches. Despite the fact that they had used certain tactics time and time again to successfully fight fires, it became evident that the institution was operating more and more according to its own exclusive logic of practice. Anishinaabeg were much more inclined to note that a code of practice written down in a book could not fully encompass what actually needed to be done to safely fight and control a forest fire. They fought fire using an adaptable, contingent firsthand experience and, as the late Norman Quill remarked, they simply didn’t trust the way the newcomers fought fire, as based in a realm of static problem-solution relationships that were applicable in almost every case.

Non-Natives with a Euro-Canadian educational and cultural background could fill out fire reports, resource orders, etc. and they were more readily able to memorize and demonstrate knowledge of standard fire line protocols and practice. For this reason, the more that the firefighting capital demanded by the institution came to involve these capacities, the more the field of firefighting shifted from one in which Anishinaabe felt comfortable operating in to one in which they felt themselves unwelcome. As the Fire Program was slowly populated by non-Natives who held this kind of capital, a field of practice underpinned by an entirely different general habitus and organizational culture became predominant in the program. The pre-existing level of fluidity embodied in Anishinaabe crews through a shared parcel of language, values and concepts was replaced by a new context of crew operation that was written ever more exclusively along Euro-Canadian lines, according to the language, values and concepts of the newcomers.

Because power was vested in the OMNR at the upper levels of the institution in a thoroughly Euro-Canadian cultural and governmental context, the institutional restructuring of the field was carried out with little or no attention being paid to the specific habitus of firefighting that had been cultivated by Anishinaabe people. Again, OMNR never set out to maliciously and deliberately exclude Anishinaabe people from firefighting. However, Anishinaabe firefighting habitus and capital was, for all intents and purposes, invisible within the institution. From an institutional perspective there was only *one* way of knowing and thus only *one* way to fight fires. As Euro-Canadians gradually and increasingly staked their claim within this field of practice, Anishinaabe people were slowly squeezed out. Anishinaabeg did not hold the same measure of agency and power as government institutions in creating and changing the field of firefighting practice. Thus, their culture, general habitus and agency in firefighting was more readily muted and overlooked.

7.4 Forest Firefighting and the Middle Ground

In describing the Middle Ground, White's (1991) central thesis is that interactions between Natives and newcomers in colonial New France often operated on partial understandings, or creative misunderstandings, that were built through the cultural perspectives of each group as it

encountered the other. In some circumstances, a partial knowledge of the cultural ‘other’ in both parties could nonetheless secure certain cross-cultural arrangements. In other circumstances, the cultural distance, or magnitude of misunderstanding, proved too insurmountable to maintain relationships for mutual ends. White’s historical analysis shows how French colonists and Indigenous Great Lakes First Nations interpreted and employed the perceived cultural logic of the other to reach functional agreements. White also explains how this Middle Ground of cultural exchange, which was sometimes tenuous under the French Regime, was undercut as Britain assumed colonial control of the Great Lakes region. While the French had relied on Indian nations to maintain their presence in New France, the British operated much more independently and dismissed Great Lakes nations from the kind of partnership roles they had previously forged with the French. As forms of effective power shifted, the Middle Ground of cultural exchange broke down.

7.4.1 The Changing Middle Ground of Firefighting in the Red Lake Region

When I first started my research, I didn’t anticipate the degree to which the occupation of firefighting, or Forestry Point itself, would represent such a unique and rich Middle Ground of cross-cultural exchange. At its very core, Forestry Point is a monument to both Native and newcomer presence in the Red Lake area which has been built through the occupancy and interactions between these two groups on an initially equal footing. Forestry Point was a site of longstanding Aboriginal occupancy and, as such, it remains a very significant locale within the psyche of Anishinaabeg who still recall its pre-gold rush context of use as a ceremonial gathering site. For Anishinaabe descendants who have looked upon it with a certain gaze, the spirits of ancestors are still present there. Forestry Point is equally representative of the establishment of newcomer presence in the Red Lake area after the gold rush. It is a site which represents the Euro-Canadian socio-economic processes that comprise the current character of the region. Most importantly, its dual origins exemplify the strong partnership between DLF Fire Bosses and Anishinaabe workers that were forged during the 1930s towards the building of fire management in the region. Natives and newcomers worked and lived side-by-side as part of the same ‘fire

'family' in the early decades of Forestry Point. In fact, the Middle Ground of cross-cultural interaction involved Fire Bosses actively working to welcome Anishinaabe people and their skills at a time when encounters between Natives and non-Natives in the Red Lake region were sometimes difficult and tenuous for the original inhabitants. Moreover, Anishinaabeg themselves became active in contributing to the development of the base and endeavored to interpret and fulfill the operational goals of the DLF in good faith. Just as early French-Algonquian relations were built on an equal footing, the early years of fire control in the Red Lake/Pikangikum area involved rich sets of interaction on a functional Middle Ground.

While Pikangikum people came to be known as valuable, competent workers in their own right, the active agency of individuals such as Nishki'aa Isaac Keesic, as one of the few Anishinaabeg who navigated the upper ranks of the organization, was surely important in negotiating the role of Pikangikum people within this Middle Ground. Nishki'aa was a friend and relative to many in the Pikangikum community and likely occupied an important intermediary position between the Bosses and Pikangikum people. Through his supervisory role in work projects around Forestry Point and on the fire line, Nishki'aa served as a conduit through which the organizational goals and concerns of the DLF were passed on to Pikangikum workers, translated into the Anishinaabe language and communicated according to their cultural sensibilities.

To an extent, it is amazing to think that people who sometimes shared very little functional knowledge of each other's language and cultural upbringing could form such strong partnerships in fire control. Individuals such as Jake Siegel and Art Larsen probably never understood ninety percent of the Anishinaabe language or culture. However, they both understood what truly mattered in terms of Pikangikum participation: Pikangikum workers were good at what they did. While a lot of the teaching, instruction and coordination that took place between them and the Anishinaabeg occurred in the context of substantial linguistic and cultural difference, they nonetheless established enough of an understanding to work together in the field of firefighting, and achieved a functional degree of communication. It was a partial, incomplete understanding.

Nevertheless, it was enough to support an ability to work together. Concomitantly, Pikangikum Anishinaabeg understood enough about the Fire Bosses' motivations and goals to accept the basics of instruction and authority accorded to them by their position. The basic goals and fire line teachings of the Bosses were interpreted with enough clarity to allow Anishinaabeg a capacity to carry out the job. Again, probably ninety percent of Anishinaabe firefighting practice was in fact developed and facilitated among the Anishinaabeg themselves. Moreover, the Fire Bosses who were most respected were those who were not overbearing and who expressed faith that the Anishinaabeg could fight fires successfully in their own way.

Young newcomers who entered the program during the early 1970s and Anishinaabeg veterans were able to secure a certain level of partnership and camaraderie to some extent. The dynamics of working on mixed crews benefited young, inexperienced southerners as they came to appreciate Anishinaabe firefighters' tremendous 'bush' competence. For Anishinaabeg, working with people from these backgrounds equally resulted in friendships and bonds. Sometimes the Anishinaabeg were also satisfied to rely on the English language education of their non-Native counterparts to fill out certain field reporting forms and other paperwork.

As White (1991; 2006) stressed, the Middle Ground generated cross-cultural agreements only as long as an equal balance of power between the two cultures was upheld. Once the specific cultural logic of one group or the other began to dominate the proceedings, mutually beneficial agreements were not easily produced. Likewise, the introduction of formal firefighter training and mixed crews under the OMNR created a situation in which the cultural background and logic of practice held by one group in particular became more central than that of the other. Anishinaabeg slowly came to encounter an occupational culture that was ever more foreign as it was reformed according to dominant, Euro-Canadian sensibilities. As Anishinaabe Elders have stressed on a number of occasions, the 'book' and 'old fashioned' Anishinaabe ways, borne from the culture and habitus of Newcomers on the one hand and Natives on the other, became mutually exclusive and the two sides could not find enough of an agreement or understanding to perform in concert.

The Middle Ground of firefighting involving the two cultures broke under the stress of the growing inability of either group to understand and compromise with the other.

From the early 1970s onward, the Middle Ground of cultural exchange in firefighting gave way to a separation between Natives and newcomers; one comprised of a substantial measure of distance. Anishinaabe Unit Crews eventually dissolved and, by the 1990s, a two-tier system, comprised of predominantly non-Native Initial Attack firefighters and predominantly Native EFF/Type 2 crews, was created. This bifurcation was reinforced as formal training became even more central to the occupation. While the OMNR has endeavored to enact some policies and programs to increase levels of Anishinaabe participation, such as expanded fire coverage systems, Northern Fire Tech. and Community Fire Officer Programs, this underlying distance has not been addressed. For the most part, Anishinaabeg have been found on the losing end.

7.5 Recommendations

I mean that...you can see how it kinda went in stages from full participation on Initial Attack crews to...we used to call them Auxiliary Crews and we kept the system going in Red Lake. And from there, like I said, to contract crews. So it's been not a progression, but a digression kind of experience. And I don't know if part of your thesis is how to change that...but I don't know what would be the recommendation.

(Paul Fazekas to M. Sanders, Nov. 12, 2008)

As the OMNR came to assert itself in the field of firefighting through technocratic, Euro-Canadian management structures, this structuring of the field undercut the general habitus, agency and social capital once embodied by Anishinaabe firefighters in past decades. A rebuilding the Middle Ground of cross-cultural exchange could have a reverse effect and result in a gradual increase in Anishinaabe firefighting participation. It is along these lines that the following recommendations are put forward. I cannot claim that the following suggestions will magically 'solve the problem' outlined in this work. Nor can I maintain that I have a perfect knowledge of what is appropriate from the perspective of various parties. I can only suggest that, if increasing Anishinaabe

firefighting participation is a priority, then some of the following actions may hold the possibility to support that development.

7.5.1 Create a Pikangikum Type 2 Contract Organization

The administration of Type 2 crews is currently done by a third party external to the community. This means that the agency of the workers is also modulated through a foreign entity. If the Pikangikum Band or the Whitefeather Corporation creates its own Type 2 organization, community members may be able to secure an increased degree of ownership and decision-making in the structures that decide their context of participation. A Type 2 organization built by and for the community could mean that benefits would accrue more directly to them; and relationships with the OMNR can be cultivated more directly as well. The benefits of creating a system of this nature would be that Pikangikum might be able to pair these contract services with other aspects of forestry, including wood harvest, post-harvest site treatment, reforestation and even prescribed burning. A contract service organization that focused on these multiple aspects of forestry, centered within the community, may be a viable option. Companies that specialize in forestry services, ranging from tree planting, to bush camp services, to slash-pile burning, are an important component of the management landscape in Ontario. For Pikangikum, the development of a forestry services company might be a way to build their own management institutions for their traditional territory. By assuming a direct role in the development of community firefighting capacity, Pikangikum people could, by extension, work to redevelop a specific firefighting habitus on their own terms.

7.5.2 Prioritize the use of Community Members in Firefighting Within the Whitefeather

While the suggestion to form a community-based fire services enterprise may hold merit, it does not address the frequency with which certain firefighting resources are actually used. At present, Type 2 resources are mainly employed in mop-up duties once Unit Crew resources have been exhausted. Therefore, the creation of a Pikangikum Type 2 company may not lead to a

heightened context of deployment in and of itself. A commitment to prioritizing the use of Pikangikum members on fires within their traditional territory can address this issue. Fire dispatch is now mainly focused on crews stationed out of Forestry Point; however, more active emphasis could be placed on dispatching local community resources to either lead or assist in firefighting efforts in certain pre-defined forest areas, such as the Whitefeather.

Prioritizing the use of Pikangikum members in firefighting within the Whitefeather is consistent with the community's vision to take a lead role in fire management in their homeland. Given enough impetus in the right circles, a system could be composed that would see fires in the Whitefeather or Bak Lake Subzone handled more centrally by Pikangikum people. Within certain areas of interest, Pikangikum People, perhaps through their own Type 2 company, could take on responsibilities beyond a mop-up/sustained attack and demobilization role. A heightened level of deployment, based within their local area, could help reinvigorate Pikangikum Anishinaabe participation in a meaningful way. This would require that both the OMNR and Pikangikum be willing to negotiate a working process by which to do so and reach a special agreement by which this can be actualized. A special agreement of this nature would likely need to be put into operation within Ontario's Fire Management Strategy (OMNR 2004) as it is periodically reviewed and refined at the provincial level.

7.5.3 Refine Formal Training to Reach an Anishinaabe Audience

The environment and the content of formal firefighter training are noticeably built upon an English-language classroom context through concepts and ideas that stem from a thoroughly Euro-Canadian set of sensibilities. While the underlying fire knowledge that OMNR is trying to communicate is not drastically different from how Anishinaabeg have understood fire themselves, the specific pathways through which knowledge is gained are much more foreign to Anishinaabeg than to the rest of the general population of Ontario. Pikangikum in particular, as well as other Anishinaabeg communities on the Upper Berens River, have retained the use of their language to a high degree. Along with this, aspects of their Indigenous culture; the terms of logic by which

information is conveyed, apprehended and used, also remain a central part of their upbringing. The faculties through which they encounter the world, their general habitus, is undeniably distinct from Euro-Canadian culture. Adapting the language and learning context in which firefighter training is currently geared into an Anishinaabe cultural context is key to delivering training to Anishinaabe people. This cross-cultural communication will help increase the number of qualified Anishinaabe individuals who come out of training programs. It can also help create a more culturally appropriate sense of firefighting knowledge in an individual and thus lead to a stronger confidence in this field of practice.

While terms such as atmospheric stability, precipitation and horizontal and vertical forest fuel arrangements are not always readily understood, Pikangikum people are nonetheless able to understand, just as anyone is, how things such as wind, rain and the composition of the forest will affect how a fire may behave. Given the gulf in worldview and language, substantial work has to be done to ensure that trainers and Pikangikum people both secure a thorough understanding of what the other party is actually talking about in the first place. However, if Anishinaabe participants were issued training material that was written or communicated in their own language, the understanding and retention of basic concepts would occur in a much quicker fashion. The core ideas of firefighting would be much more deeply inscribed in the core of an Anishinaabe participant as well.

If Pikangikum chooses to form a Type 2 company, it may be possible for key representatives to work with the OMNR to develop programs that encompass both the ‘bush’ knowledge of Elders as well as the ‘book’ requirements of firefighting. The training material could be adapted to encompass the knowledge and examples of Elders who retain a wealth of firefighting information, some of which in fact coincides with the general concepts outlined in the ‘book’. Elders understand the different ways in which forest fires behave; they know about forest tree species and composition; and they understand how to use the elements to stay aware and safe on the fireline. There are probably close to twenty Elders in Pikangikum who could speak at length to

Anishinaabe youth about their firefighting experience. As training material is adapted to an Anishinaabe language and cultural context, the Anishinaabe way of fighting fire and the ‘book’ way could reach a common ground. Elders’ practices in firefighting could be made applicable in training while preserving the underlying training requirements. Moreover, a component outlining the history of Elders’ involvement may also work to instill a sense of pride and agency for youth.

For Anishinaabe people who have retained competencies and sensibilities in line with the customary realm of land-based knowledge and livelihood practices, the style in which knowledge is conveyed is also distinct from the learning styles other cultural groups. Anishinaabe ‘bush’ knowledge involves a strong experiential, learning-by-doing component in which terms of ‘qualification’ in a specific task are gained almost solely through actual practice. In the customary Anishinaabe epistemological realm, it makes little sense to teach someone about hunting caribou by sitting down and verbally explaining how that is done. It is not very useful to teach someone how to build a trapping camp and run a trap line unless you actually go out on the land and show a person how to do it firsthand. Similarly, it’s not necessarily useful to have a four-hour classroom session on how to operate a power pump. In reflecting an Anishinaabe learning context, it would be much more useful to go right into the field to work directly with this kind of equipment; start the pump, learn how it runs, do a mock hose-lay, etc. Few people from any background really enjoy sitting in a classroom, and Pikangikum Anishinaabeg could see it as an almost complete waste of time. Those elements that fundamentally rely on competency in field operations should primarily take place in the actual field setting. In fact, some of the language barriers could actually be sidestepped through the same kind of practice-oriented training that was carried out by Anishinaabe Unit Crews and Fire Bosses during the 1960s.

The participation of specific individuals who have fire experience and hold an ability to communicate in both English and an Anishinaabe language is highly important. Whether employed to help translate the written training material beforehand, or to serve as translators in the classroom setting itself, individuals with a developed ability to coordinate with English-

speaking trainers and crystallize certain ideas for Anishinaabe audiences are crucial to communicating the training content more effectively. This requires Anishinaabe people's presence in some manner on the front end. Within either a Pikangikum Type 2 company or OMNR context, there is a need for dedicated Anishinaabe-speaking individuals who are qualified to administer training. OMNR and certain Anishinaabe representatives could find a way to collaborate in the development of new training delivery methods and materials in either a private or institutional setting. However, it must be noted that this may be a tall order. At present, there are few Anishinaabe individuals who hold the required SP-300 Incident Commander training required to teach an SP-100 course. Nonetheless, if an individual could be found to take on a role on par with that assumed by Deputy Ranger Isaac Keesic in the past, some crucial doors could be opened towards the re-invigoration of a Middle Ground and an Anishinaabe firefighting habitus.

A minimal level of restructuring would involve key Anishinaabe agents in the actual classroom/training session context. A maximum level of dedication, involving the most cost and legwork, would involve the creation of First Nations language-based training materials as developed at the upper reaches of the institution in partnership with community members. The extent to which fire training is recast into an Anishinaabe language and learning context is challenged by cost and time factors, but also by fact that OMNR requires a measure of English comprehension among its staff. Therefore, modifying training would produce some challenges that would have to be worked through in order to produce qualified firefighters. Nonetheless, the bottom line is that the more firefighter training reaches out to include the culture, language and sensibility of Anishinaabe people, the more they will come to hold agency and competence within the field of firefighting and contribute to the success of the work.

7.5.4 Some Final Thoughts on Recommendations

At present, Pikangikum and OMNR continue to collaborate with respect to forestry, protected areas and fire management within the Whitefeather. In fact, considerations and discussions with respect to increasing Anishinaabe firefighting participation are taking place. As forward-thinking, dedicated individuals on both sides of the table continue to work in partnership, new initiatives and endeavors may not be far off. In fact, while this research sheds light on the breakdown of the Middle Ground of past decades, Pikangikum First Nation is in a process of reconstituting its presence and agency in resource management on an equal footing with OMNR. As Pikangikum has worked through the Whitefeather Forest Initiative, it has begun to meet OMNR on a new Middle Ground of cross-cultural exchange in which its visions and goals are acknowledged. As these processes play out, the kinds of changes proposed in these recommendations will likely begin to take shape. At their heart, they can be seen as pathways towards the reconstitution of an Anishinaabe firefighting habitus that reflects the unique culture and identity of Pikangikum people while re-establishing a viable place for community members in fire management and protection.

7.6 Conclusion

Anishinaabe participation in firefighting was highly significant to the operations and overall success of early fire control institutions in Red Lake. Firefighting in the Red Lake region has been historically conceived and refined on the basis of substantial partnership and cross-cultural interactions between Anishinaabe and Euro-Canadian people. Anishinaabe people have used their own Indigenous cultural strengths within the field of firefighting in unique and significant ways. Moreover, the DLF stands out as an institution that held a unique track record in reaching out and incorporating Anishinaabe people into the fold as part of a virtual ‘fire family’. Despite the fact that institutional changes, filtering down from the upper reaches of the Fire Program, have created a great distance between Natives and newcomers, both may claim pride in their underlying combined heritage in this occupation.

I believe that a revival of PFN participation in firefighting will come to fruition as the OMNR and Pikangikum Anishinaabeg once again reach out to create the kind of dedicated cross-cultural

bonds within the institution that are evident historically. Restructuring the field to create space for Pikangikum Anishinaabeg will involve dedicated policies and require agreements through which the community is equipped, mobilized and inspired to participate on an active basis. What is needed is the building of an organizational culture of firefighting in which Anishinaabe language, sensibilities and strengths find enough room to operate. The goal is a re-incorporation of Anishinaabe general habitus within the field of firefighting practice.

Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters retains a number of staff members who are cognizant of the importance of working with Anishinaabeg towards a common future. Moreover, the Elders of Red Lake and Pikangikum are actively looking to the future to realize these kinds of partnerships. Over roughly the last 12 years, Pikangikum and the OMNR have begun to forge these kinds of collaborative relationships in land-use planning in the Whitefeather. As this thesis becomes part of the knowledge-base for future dialogues and partnerships, these parties will continue to advance positive working relationships specific to the field of firefighting as well.

The late Elder Whitehead Moose (Sept. 12, 2008) seemed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this would occur. While it has taken several years to plan for the Whitefeather Forest, Whitehead saw that Pikangikum people and the OMNR slowly created a close, positive working relationship in resource management through this process. From his perspective, a central purpose of these partnerships was to reinforce the continuity of a rich land-based heritage, in which Anishinaabeg have acted as keepers of the land, for the benefit of youth in the community. Whitehead was strongly affirmative that OMNR and Pikangikum would continue to work closely together to extend this vision into the field of forest firefighting. I have faith that his projection is true.

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APPENDIX I: List of Interview Transcripts

Compiled by Michael R. Sanders:

000 Firefighting Interview – Alec Suggashie and Tom Quill – Jul 22 – 08.doc

Audio recording files: 000[a].wav; 000[b].wav

001 Firefighting Interview – Alec Suggashie – Jul 23 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 001.wav

002 Firefighting Interview – Whitehead Moose – Sept 4 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: none

003 Firefighting Interview – Tom Turtle – Sept 11 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: none

004 Firefighting Interview – Charlie Peters, Oliver Hill and Matthew Strang – Sept 12 – 08.doc

Audio recording file – 004.wav

005 Firefighting Interview – Lee Gerrish – Sept 29 – 08.doc

Audio recording file – 005.wav

006 Firefighting Interview – Joe Keesic – Sept 30 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: none

007 Firefighting Interview – Randy Crampton – Oct 2 -08.doc

Audio recording file: 007.wav

008 Firefighting Interview – Joe Paishk – Oct 17 - 08.doc

Audio recording file: 008.wav

009 Firefighting Interview – Norman Quill – Nov 5 - 08.doc

Audio recording files: 009[a].wav; 009[b].wav

010 Firefighting Interview – Peter Paishk – Nov 5 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 010.wav

011 Firefighting Interview – Alex Peters – Nov 9 - 08.doc

Audio recording file: 011.wav

012 Firefighting Interview – Whitehead Moose – Nov 12 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 012.wav

013 Firefighting Interview – Tom Quill (and Andy Miller) – Nov 21 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 013.wav

014 Firefighting Interview – Steve Toman – Nov 24 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 014.wav

015 Firefighting Interview – Murray MacQuarrie – Nov 26 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: none

016 Firefighting Interview - Joe Keesic – Nov 27 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 016.wav

017 Firefighting Interview – Joe Paishk – Nov 27 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 017.wav

018 Firefighting Interview – Jake Siegel – Nov 28 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 018.wav

019 Firefighting Interview – Paul Fazekas – Nov 28 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 019.wav

020 Firefighting Interview – Tom Quill – Dec 4 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 020.wav

021 Firefighting Interview – Jim Moorley - Dec 23 – 08.doc

Audio recording file: 021.wav

022 Firefighting Interview – Joe Paishk and Joe Keesic – Jan 27 – 09.doc

Audio Recording file: 022.wav

Transcripts are retained and available by request from:

Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation
Pikangikum First Nation
Pikangikum, ON P0V 2L0
Tel: 807 773-9954/5578
Fax: 807 773-5536

Transcripts provided by other researchers:

Alec Suggashie Interviewed by Heather Nikischer, Master's Natural Resource Management, University of Manitoba.

Audio recording file: none

Jake Siegel Interviewed by Michele Alderton, Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre

Audio recording file: none

Transcripts used with Permission