California wildfires are destroying homes, taking lives, and suffocating airsheds with smoke. The prominent discourse is that global climate changes are the cause, yet this glosses over the contribution of rapid cultural and ecological changes that occurred in California coincident to settler-colonialism. Timber extraction and conservation projects supported policies of fire prohibition and suppression that replaced the frequent subsistence and cultural burning by Indigenous Californians. These exclusionary measures contributed to unprecedented accumulations of dead wood and exurban sprawl in California’s forests. To remedy this tinderbox, Northwest California Indians are re-introducing prescribed burning to reduce wildfire severities and revive Indigenous cultural practices. They are asserting their autonomy through the formation of alliances with supportive non-Indians to develop collaborative fire management efforts that expand “good” fire on the landscape. These projects are pressuring government agencies to change fire policies and may foreshadow novel fire resilient landscapes that support Indigenous livelihoods.

Monday, February 11th, 2019, 12:30 - 1:20pm
Building 50, 51A