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Restoring Relationships and Beneficial Fire to Great Lakes Forests

Evan Larson, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin - Platteville

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Restoring Relationships and Beneficial Fire to Great Lakes Forests

Societal perspectives on how best to protect, restore, and even think about natural areas is evolving. Our collective relationship with fire embodies this change. In this talk, I will share emerging research weaving tree-ring-based fire history information with Indigenous Knowledge to tell a more complete and accurate story about the role of people and fire in shaping the forested landscapes of the Upper Great Lakes, and in particular the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, a landscape that helped justify establishment of the 1964 Wilderness Act. In the context of this story, notions of wilderness dissolve while ideas of reciprocity bring people squarely into the community of life as active participants and co-creators, rather than separate individualists. In particular, fire and forest demographic data illustrate that the fates of people and red pine are intertwined and moderated through flames, and that this relationship serves as a flagship for myriad other fire-dependent species. The stories of fire held in the rings of trees are a vital catalyst to this effort, enabling cross-cultural conversations and collaborations among a growing network of stakeholder groups engaged in land and fire stewardship across the Great Lakes Region.



Evan Larson, Ph.D.

Professor & Chair, Environmental Sciences & Society, University of Wisconsin - Platteville

Evan Larson is a father, husband, teacher, scientist, and enthusiast of wild places. Evan's childhood took place in the woods of central Minnesota, helping his parents tend 80 acres of mixed hardwood forests. Drawn by mountains, oceans, and forests, his formal education includes an Environmental Science bachelor's degree from Willamette University, degrees in geography from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (M.S.) and the University of Minnesota (PhD), and a Faculty Fulbright fellowship to Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall. Less formally, Evan's philosophy of life has been informed by significant doses of reflection, books, chainsaws and firewood. Evan has 23 years of experience using tree rings to investigate environmental history including past patterns of climate, disturbance, and forest change. As a Professor and Chair in the Department of Environmental Sciences & Society at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Evan

teaches courses that blur the lines between physical and cultural geography and that are infused with undergraduate research in search of transformative learning experiences.

The work that is currently at the center of Evan's thoughts and energy is fueled by the enthusiasm of amazing collaborators who are together working to re-story the interwoven relationships among people, fire, and pine in Great Lakes Forests. You can read more about that collective effort here: <https://go.uwplatt.edu/greatlakesfire>

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