**Burning Margalla**

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Large-scale wildfires and increasing temperatures are also a global phenomenon now. A new study by the University of California, Riverside shows that soot from large wildfires in California traps sunlight, making days warmer and drier than they ought to be. Many studies look at the effect of climate change on wildfires. However, this study sought to understand the reverse — whether large fires are also changing the climate. And it concluded, “It appears these fires are creating their own fire weather.” Therefore, facing a surge in wildfires, the US Government turned to native wisdom and advanced archaeology. After a sharp increase in uncontrollable wildfires across the northern U.S. and Canada in recent decades, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Forest Service have been open to new approaches and ways to address the inherent weaknesses of their bureaucracies. Due to their lack of historical understanding of past fire management methods, they turned to archaeologists, who have collected information on more than 10,000 years of human activity. For their approach, these government agencies studied the perspectives and wisdom of Indigenous peoples offered through shared oral histories.

The arrival of European settlers to the North American continent brought about a turning point in the relationship between people and fire. While North American Indigenous groups viewed fire as a great assistance to landscape management, the Europeans only saw it as a destructive force that needed to be avoided at all costs, and this led them to implement policies that suppressed all fire. The shift in attitude within the continent and suppression of Indigenous culture caused a significant loss in traditional fire knowledge and practices, leading to ecological consequences and large wildfires. Red pine forests, like those found in the Border Lakes area, especially benefit from this use of fire as their seeds require exposed soil to grow. Moreover, a greater balance between woody and grassy/ herbaceous plants improves food availability for livestock, wildlife, and pollinators. Clearing dead or dry vegetation in this manner also allows for fire-dependent species and important food sources to grow, such as the blueberry in the Great Lakes region. Blueberries used to proliferate in the region due to fire-based interventions from the Ojibwe community, who cleared patches of the forest floor and made them conducive to berry bush growth. In addition, reducing the amount of dry vegetation on forest floors also limits the potential severity of future wildfires by minimizing the available fuels. The resurgence of cultural fire practices, stemming from the initiatives started by the People, Fire, and Pines project, underlines the value of combining Indigenous and archaeological knowledge. By reclaiming controlled burns and implementing centuries-old fire practices to support effective forest management today, the relationship between people and their surrounding environments can be re-established. Analyzing prehistoric data to better understand the root causes of modern issues that originated in the greater global past, like human contributions to climate change, conflict, and disease, can be used to facilitate solutions to current issues and avoid greater ones in the future.

The Government of Pakistan and especially the forest and ecology departments need to learn a lot from such advanced studies rather than just being onlookers. The focus has to be on ending deforestation, significantly promoting afforestation, making use of ancient practices, reviving the old culture of making planters or available small land-based patches into kitchen gardens, turning all rooftops, balconies, and all open areas green with free delivery of suitable plants and pots to the public by the government in every nook and corner of the country. Taking a start from educational institutions shall greatly help. The digging of water catchment holes, and wells, expanding ancient Karez system, and building maximum small dams must be undertaken on priority as a survival obligation. The Burning Margalla Hills must be taken as a warning by the Almighty to the Government and the People to do everything possible in collective and individual capacities to overcome the uncontrollable wildfires and heatwaves scorching the earth.

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The writer is a retired senior army officer with experience in international relations, military diplomacy and analysis of geo-political and strategic security issues.