

Forest fires in the cultural landscape of Eeyou Istchee among Nemaska and Wemindji Cree land users

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Introduction

Wildfires in boreal Canada

- More frequent hot and dry conditions during wildfire season: ↗ frequency, size, severity
- Megafires in the last decade in SK, AB, BC, NWT and QC

Wildfires in Eeyou Istchee James Bay, northwestern Quebec

- Annual burn ratio over 2% since 1840
- Land use change since the 1970s
- ↗ of the exposition of new infrastructure

Consequences

- Damage to infrastructure
- Frequent evacuations
- Threat for emergency routes
- Vegetation change and habitat loss

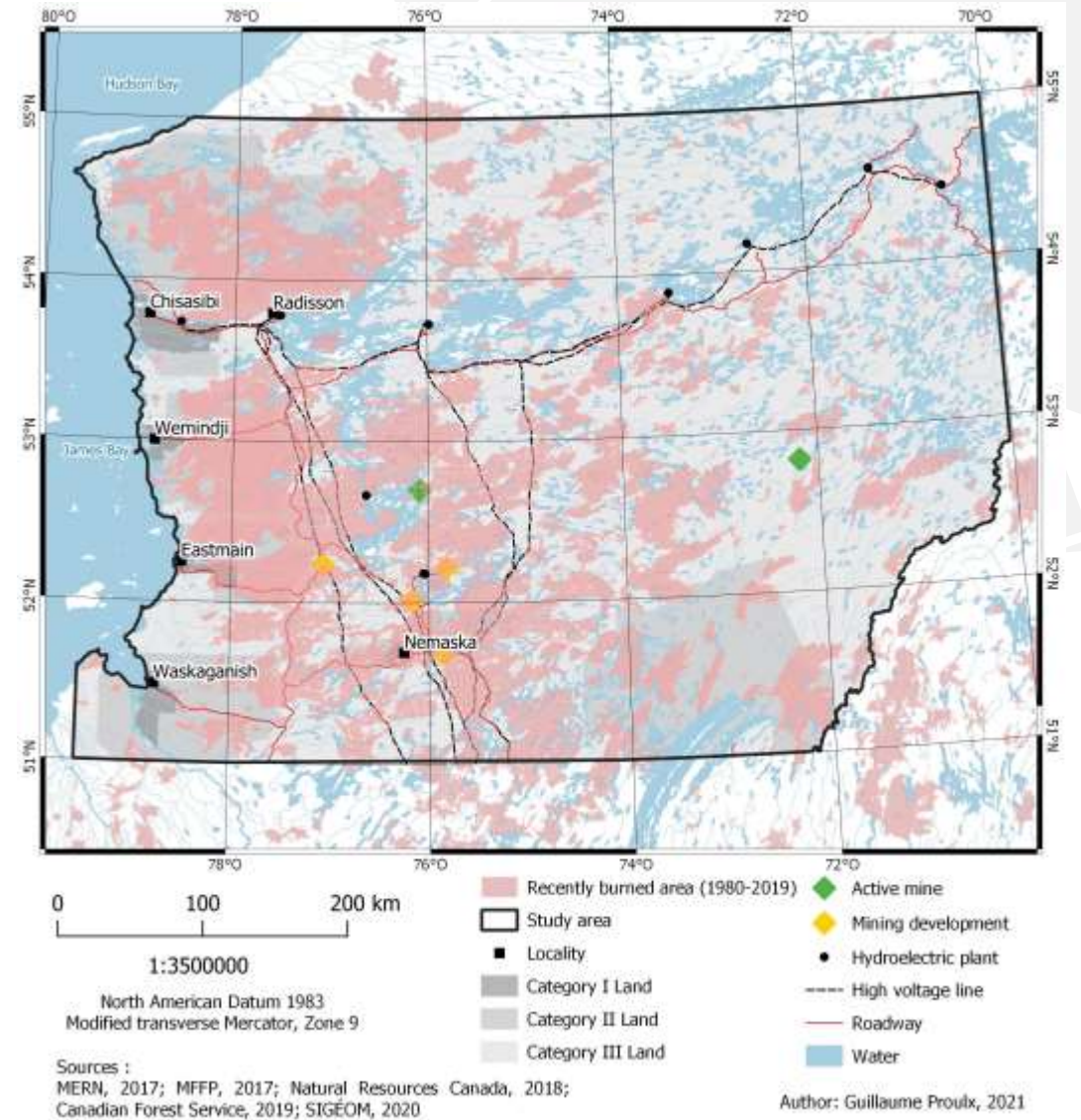


Objectives

Main objective: to assess wildfire risk in Eeyou Istchee James Bay and propose mitigation strategies

- No mitigation out of fire suppression close to communities north of the commercial forests
- Intercultural context: differentiated vulnerability and relations of power
- Settler infrastructure is known, localized and characterized
- No knowledge of Cree valued places out of physical infrastructure
- Need to consider Cree knowledge and use of the land for risk assessment

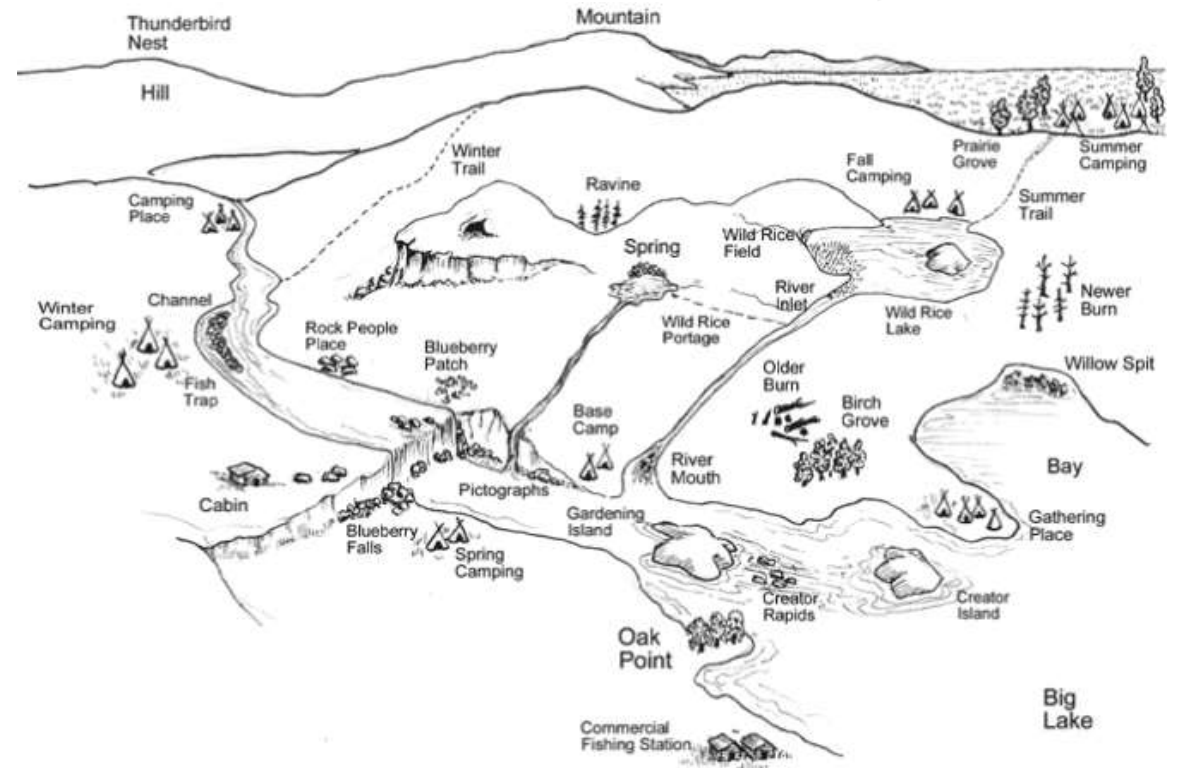
Specific objective: to understand the multiple set of relations between wildfires and the Cree cultural landscape



Theoretical framework

Cultural landscape

- Organized set of representations of the land by individuals or a community
- Based on past experiences, perceptions and practice of the present, and projects for the future
- Includes traditional ecological and geographical knowledge
- Useful to identify key places and activities for mitigation
- Holistic: adapted to Indigenous contexts
- Framework for forest management towards cohabitation and conservation



Visual representation of an Anishinaabe cultural landscape (Davidson-Hunt et Berkes, 2003)

Methodology: semi-structured interviews



Collaborative research in practice: co-constructing knowledge based on principles of respect, well-being and justice



Transmission of ecological knowledge by oral tradition
Records transmitted to the community



23 land users and Tallymen on record
Nemaska and Wemindji
July and August 2022

Methodology: semi-structured interviews

Experiences of wildfire

- Identification of key wildfires that threaten the communities and land activities
- Discussion about pre-fire landscape, response to wildfire and role during events

Ecological knowledge

- Post-fire vegetation succession
- Relation to traditional activities: hunting, harvesting, trapping, fishing
- Forest management practices

Risk perception

- From confidence to critics towards SOPFEU
- From fire brigades' formation to CTA insurance to Cree equivalent to SOPFEU
- From positive feedback to solastalgia

Beyond the proposed topics

- Cumulative impacts of industrial development
- Climate change



Further analyses

Next steps

- Thematic analysis: to be completed on NVivo
- Thematic regrouping
- Categorization based on multiple proxies: location, occupation, gender, etc.
- Quantitative and qualitative analyses
- Discussion on wildfires and the Cree cultural landscape based on past experiences, today's practices and future projects

Conclusions



Improve risk assessment research by providing a framework for intercultural contexts



Complement the Cree nation's efforts towards cultural securitization and climate change adaptation



Base for mapping valued places important to the cultural landscape in a participatory workshop

Contact information

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