

Confluence Lab, Partners Address Pacific NW Justice Issues with \$4.5 Million Grant

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MOSCOW, Idaho — Jan. 14, 2021 — The University of Idaho [Confluence Lab](#), University of Oregon and Whitman College were awarded a three-year \$4.52 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to launch the Pacific Northwest Just Futures Institute (PNJFI) that will address racial and climate justice issues.

As part of PNJFI, the Confluence Lab will create a virtual “Stories of Fire: A Pacific Northwest Climate Justice Atlas” that illustrates people’s complex relationships with fire. In this context, an atlas comprises maps, stories, images and other representations of data that bring insight to a specific issue.

Within the Confluence Lab, scholars in the humanities, arts, social sciences and sciences tackle Idaho environmental issues alongside community members using interdisciplinary approaches — especially related to storytelling, emotions and communication. The collaboration began in 2019 and was co-founded by Associate Professor [Teresa Cohn](#) from the [Department of Natural Resources and Society](#) and [English](#) faculty Associate Professor [Erin James](#) and Professor [Jennifer Ladino](#).

“We came together to think about ways we can address and explore environmental issues in Idaho and in the region in more interdisciplinary, creative and community-based ways,” Cohn said.

James, Ladino and Cohn are partnering with Associate Professor [Stacy Isenbarger](#) in Art and Design on the “Atlas of Fire” project. The atlas will focus on the connections between fire, social justice, environmental justice and traditionally underrepresented communities, drawing on the environmental humanities to tell stories about the changing region. The atlas is one part of a larger suite of projects associated with the PNJFI.

“Wildfires highlight some of the social crises we are facing,” Ladino said. “By focusing on people’s personal experiences with fire, we can better listen to a diversity of rural voices and address social justice issues like settler colonialism, environmental racism and socioeconomic inequities.”

In addition to a digital atlas incorporating geospatial technologies, the project will result in a traveling teaching toolkit, art exhibitions and storytelling workshops across the region.

To create the “Atlas of Fire,” the team plans to incorporate GIS as well as a tool called photovoice, which invites community members to show and tell their own stories of fire using photography. The Confluence Lab plans to use photos and photovoice artifacts to spark conversations at the storytelling workshops.

“A moment captured in a photograph tells us much more than just what’s in its frame. The rich experiences of those who take them will be threaded into the collection of these visual narratives,” Isenbarger said.

The [Northwest Knowledge Network](#) will act as the “Atlas of Fire” repository, and the U of I Library’s [Center for Digital Inquiry and Learning](#) will help the team develop and present data in accessible ways.

For more information, visit the [University of Oregon website](#).

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Media Contacts

Erin James

University of Idaho

Associate Professor, Department of English; Affiliated Faculty, Environmental Science

775-527-7019
ejames@uidaho.edu

Leigh Cooper
University of Idaho
Science and Content Writer
406-781-4969
leighc@uidaho.edu



University of Idaho College of Natural Resources students participate in a prescribed burn exercise in 2019. As part of Pacific Northwest Just Futures Institute, U of I's Confluence Lab will create a virtual "Stories of Fire: A Pacific Northwest Climate Justice Atlas" that illustrates people's complex relationships with fire. Image Credit: University of Idaho Photo Services

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