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### 9-24-2018 Cariboo Fires, 2017

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# SUSAN McCASLIN (POETRY) AND MARK HADDOCK (PHOTOS)

## CARIBOO FIRES, 2017

In July 2017 one of the many raging summer fires in the Cariboo Region of BC swept north from Ashcroft, eventually forcing many residents to evacuate the area. My husband's family has had a cabin at Young Lake since the early sixties. Our cabin was spared due to the valiant efforts of firefighters, but the boathouse, dock, motor boat, and canoe were demolished, along with many of the trees on the property, and 192,000 hectares of surrounding forests. In October of that year, we came back to survey the damage. This photo-poem sequence is our collaborative reflection on the devastation of the natural beauty of the bioregion due to the effects of human carelessness, land management, and climate change.

"The increase in forest fires, seen this summer from North America to the Mediterranean to Siberia, is directly linked to climate change, scientists say. And as the world continues to warm, there will be greater risk for fires on nearly every continent."

- Nicola Jones, science journalist, Pemberton, BC<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jones, Nicola. "Stark Evidence: A Warmer World Is Sparking More and Bigger Wildfires." Yale Environment 360, October 2, 2017.



before Heraclitus sang the world is fire

fire honed the words we breathe

flame, again we meet you but what a sharpening edge

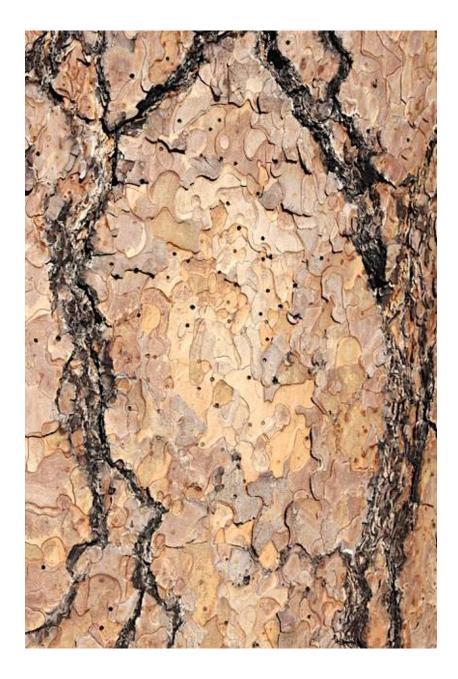


charcoaled matchsticks clutched in wildfire's wake

lone pine's Jean d'Arc curves staked against a furnaced sky

blackened trees, some standing one half fallen

against a backdrop of burnt limbs filigree



pine beetles gathered on warming winds inscribed pinpoints in ponderosa pine bark

nineteen million hectares of forest died in stages—green, red, grey, gone



a transfiguring wind quick-piercing

fanned astonishment through skinned stick-limbs

our human ways hapless, malformed

infernoed the common air



a sizzling forest across the valley

heaved heat waves far to make tinder of a forest here—

death by long-distance scorching



near our spared cabin melted boathouse flattened

odd paraphernalia strewn oxidized roofing, nails

hacksaw blades composed

as a Jackson Pollock abstract



at lake's edge the boat's wrack

a shattered coracle bears no passengers

to loon's spellbinding cry



monkish cow sentinels a spindly grove

not much to munch against a stark blue sky

passerby stares cow stares back



ragged sylvans never signed up for this gig

in a land of ruined choirs dirges instead of hymns



soon after flames died loggers came scavenging

ghost wood for profit freebies for companies

all in the name of cleaning up



tender crestfallen trees play airs in A minor

burnt orange patches scribbled on pine bark

imitate autumn leaves such wild colour in an ashen world



city slickers in camo gear rifles slung across backs

stride dirt roads scanning for moose

no camouflage for critters

hunters scrutinize moose tracks in needle-strewn ash

back tomorrow



fireweed will regenerate but the forest?

controlled burns help by devouring kindling

yet what of woodland Caribou lichen-starved

snakes and frogs scrambling?



picnickers who once fingered mysteries of pine's puzzle bark

now enter strange new saturnalias singing a forest's darkened beauty



as when Dante heard the whoosh of dark wind

knew fire inverted cut from Imagination's flames—

so here a severed music

ice below wincing flames above—

a dis-unity of elements



return, first fire you who cannot singe a single hair—

hone our bones in regeneration's choir Poems by **SUSAN MCCASLIN**, poet and author of *Into the Open: Poems New and Selected* (Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2017).

Photographs by **MARK HADDOCK**, who has enjoyed the beauty of the Cariboo region since childhood.