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### Forest Essay

Mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes are some of Idaho's greatest qualities. You could easily claim that those are what make Idaho, Idaho. But one of the most breathtaking natural wonders we have here, are our forests. Even when you look up Idaho on Google, the first five pictures that show up include images of our state's forestry. However, within recent years and specifically within the past couple months our valued forests have been threatened by the destruction of fire, along with many other states' forests, greenery, and grasslands. Our forests in Idaho are increasingly being threatened by uncharacteristic wildfire, and the growing effects of climate change; but what can we do to protect our forests, our wildlife, and the characteristics that make Idaho what it is today?

Within just the past five years, the United States has experienced 100 more wildfires than it did the year before. And every year we have a longer fire season than we did the previous year, with more wildfires, more land burned, and increased intensity. Idaho is among the top 15 states with the most wildfire exposure. In just the year of 2018, almost 605,000 acres of land including forests was burned, with nearly 70% of southern Idaho's forests being burned in the last 30 years.

Climate change has become and will continue to be our forests' largest enemy. With almost a 2 degree increase in annual temperatures, the snow melts earlier in the year leaving the

forests more vulnerable to wildfire due to their dry conditions. In turn the burning of forests releases copious amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, worsening climate change.

But what can we do to protect our forests here in Idaho, and prevent the uncharacteristic wildfire that has occurred year after year? My answer would be to utilize the practice and art of cultural burning. Cultural burning is a form of traditional fire management that has been passed down generation to generation among Indigenous people located in fire-prone areas. Cultural burning is executed through the process of burning areas during the wet season to prevent the flammability and vulnerability of the land in preparation for the upcoming fire season. This burning additionally improves the quality of the soil, and can even encourage the growth of specific plant species.

To conclude, our Idaho forests should not only be a priority to our state legislature but they should also be a priority to us. Climate change is here, climate change is real, and climate change could easily take everything from what makes Idaho such a breathtaking place. Remember you can do your part by learning more about the prevention of wildfires in Idaho, reducing your carbon footprint, and going to the polls to vote for those who will prioritize the environment!

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