Ohio Country Episode 4

Neenah Ellis [00:00:02] Hi there, I'm Neenah Ellis, and thanks for listening. This is episode four of The Ohio Country called Fire.

Chris Welter [00:00:10] And I'm Chris Welter. In this episode, we'll hear about the Shawnee and Miami practice of intentionally burning land, which over the centuries created a sustainable mosaic of ecosystems in the Ohio River Valley. But when the settlers came to the Ohio Country, they did not embrace that practice. And today, some researchers want to bring it back, saying it would improve Ohio's soil health and ecological diversity.

Neenah Ellis [00:00:32] So stay with us now for episode four, called Fire. From public radio station Wyso in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Chris Welter [00:00:44] A 12 foot tall Smokey Bear is in the outdoor section at the Ohio State Fair every year.

Smokey Bear [00:00:49] How are you doing, sir? You going to get your picture back and move to the literal the fence?

Chris Welter [00:00:54] Oh, no. No, I just want to record you.

Chris Welter [00:00:56] Smokey is next to a living stream, a pond with a kayak demonstration area, and a booth where you can learn about recycling. Millions of people visit him annually. Smokey plays a game with the crowd. He learns everyone's name secretly using his team of interns with whiteboards. They whisper with parents to find out kids' names; they write something like 'Allison, blue shirt' on the board and hold it up so the person operating the smoky loudspeaker.

Chris Welter [00:01:28] Then he has them recite the Smokey Bear pledge.

Smokey Bear [00:01:31] Raise your right palm tree. Repeat after me like I promise I promise I will never, I never, never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever ever playing with matches. Lighters or any fire. Arcade fire. Fantastic job. Awesome. I'm proud of you.

Chris Welter [00:02:01] Seeing Smokey has become a tradition for countless Ohio families.

Chris Welter [00:02:09] His message seems important and kind of like a no brainer. Maybe similar to something like don't litter or throw your fish back into the pond if you're not going to use them. But by the end of this episode, we hope you'll see why Smokey's message should be more nuanced, and that the way the Ohio Department of Natural Resources presents it to the public is deeply connected to how settlers and their governments changed the land in the last 250 years in the region we now call Ohio.

Neenah Ellis [00:02:36] The United States Forest Service invented Smokey Bear in the 1940s. By the 70s, he was an iconic pop culture figure and his commercials were seen across the U.S..

Smokey Bear [00:02:50] Hello, I am Smokey Bear. This is my friend thumper. He lives here in this forest. Bambi's family lives here, too. It's their home. But sometimes people

come here and they get careless. Please don't be careless. Remember, only you can prevent forest fires. Only you.

Neenah Ellis [00:03:19] Smoky is a symbol of the fire prevention and suppression program that's existed in the United States in some form since its founding. At its root, fire suppression is a settler colonialist policy that's been resisted by nations like Lenape, Miami, Ojibwe, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Seneca-Cayuga, Shawnee, Wyandotte, and other tribes we've discussed in this podcast. They've resisted. That's because banning fire completely changed how they lived.

Neenah Ellis [00:03:58] You're listening to The Ohio Country from the Eichelberger Center for Community Voices at Wyso.

Neenah Ellis [00:04:04] Let's go back 220 years. Settlers are flooding the lower Great Lakes region that the United States government has labeled the Northwest Territories. The land is being systematically surveyed into private, often fenced in plots, and the economy is rapidly changing from one based on the fur trade to one based on commercial agriculture, the kind of agriculture that requires lots of flat, cleared and tilled land. Tension is high between people from nations like the Shawnee and Miami and the settlers living in these regions. Partly because people from those nations are setting fires in forest prairies and the areas in between, as their ancestors had done for tens of thousands of years. Historic documents show that the settlers and the U.S. leadership did not appreciate those fires. They alleged that the fires had burned down their livestock fences and, in the worst of cases, their homesteads. It's hard to say if those fires were intentionally lit or if they were accidental. In December of 1803, three Kickapoo leaders, a nation closely related to the Miami and the Shawnee, wrote to the Governor of Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison. It was the middle of deer hunting season, and the Kickapoo urged Harrison to let them burn prairies to make hunting easier. The animals would be drawn to the area because they could eat the new growth generated after a burn. Here is an excerpt of their letter read in the Shawnee language by Eric Wensman, a citizen of the Shawnee Tribe.

Eric Wensman (Shawnee Tribe) [00:05:58] [Shawnee translation of excerpts from the letter]

Chris Welter [00:06:12] He that made us, made us and made fire. The deer was put on the earth by the master of Life. And we endeavor to make our wives and children live. And if we are not permitted to set fire, we cannot live. You then want us to die more. It's impossible to hunt without setting fire.

Chris Welter [00:06:30] The whites arrive every day, and they settle. Why do you reproach us for setting fire? You're glad to receive our skins, without which we would have none. We're not the only ones who set fire. The Shawnees and the Miamis have set fire as well as us.

Chris Welter [00:06:53] The letter didn't change Harrison's mind, and the Kickapoo were prohibited from setting fires. Within 30 years, they were forcibly relocated west from their homelands in this region.

Chris Welter [00:07:04] For those of us who have grown up hearing Smokey the Bear's warnings, it's hard to imagine how setting fire to the landscape would be beneficial, not destructive. But it comes back to what we learned in the last episode, episode three, where we learned about how people from tribal nations are experts at harnessing natural

processes to create diverse, sustainable ecosystems that support the practices that maintain their communities, like hunting, maple sugaring, and agriculture. Fire was one of the primary tools they used to manipulate the environment. Before European contact, Ohio was a region with a diverse mix of prairie, barrens, woodlands, wetlands, savannas, fens, and bogs. All were created and maintained by anthropogenic or human caused fire. Protein rich animals like elk and wood bison roamed the prairies and savannas in the western part of the state. Creating traces or roads that could be traveled across the region. Bears and panthers hunted in open sunny forests. Plum bushes, hazelnut shrubs, blueberry patches, and other edible plants thrived in these fire dependent ecosystems. The Indigenous people who oversaw this burning system created conditions that produced enough food for their communities to have a diverse, healthy diet. But most of those plants and animals were extirpated from the state or became extremely rare. Within 100 years of the founding of the United States, and most of the ecosystems where they lived were also destroyed, either turned into farmland or, in the case of forests, harvested for lumber. But if you look closely enough, you can still see where the land looks like it once did.

Neenah Ellis [00:08:42] In southwest Ohio. One person who knows where to find those places is Dave Nolin. He grew up in Greene County and became a field botanist. We met him on a sunny, crisp fall day. It was windy.

Dave Nolin [00:08:57] Well, we are standing in the Huffman Prairie State Natural Landmark, which is a 115 acre piece of land on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base that is a tallgrass prairie, and it's been here for thousands of years, albeit it was damaged somewhat by early farmers and then the base itself, but it was never destroyed the way most of the rest of the prairies were destroyed in Ohio. They became farmland because of their rich soils, but this one because it became an air base early on in 1917, it wasn't subjected to modern equipment and chemicals.

Neenah Ellis [00:09:40] If you were here with us looking across these tall grasses, you'd also see a replica aircraft hangar and signs with black and white photos of planes flying overhead more than 100 years ago. That's because the Wright brothers once rented this land and perfected the airplane here at Huffman Prairie.

Dave Nolin [00:10:02] So really, the plane was invented right here. The airplane, as far as you know, a lot of people are concerned.

Neenah Ellis [00:10:08] Nowadays, you're more likely to see giant military planes wooshing overhead as they leave Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Nolin rediscovered this prairie in the 1980s while working on a statewide inventory. Prairie loss was leading to a biodiversity crisis in Ohio. Huffman Prairie wasn't open to the public then, but Nolin's dad worked on the base, and he got in. The fact that the land was intact was serendipitous. The farmers who owned it after their tribal people were removed decided not to till, probably because they used it as pasture for livestock. 100 years later, Nolin found that the Air Force was mowing the prairie, which mimicked the effects of fire by not letting it grow into forest or shrubland. And that was good news. The soil and deep prairie plant roots were still mostly intact. They hadn't been burned in at least 150 years, so Nolin convinced the base to resume burning the prairie annually. And the results were astonishing. Rare native plants, insects and birds who had adapted to regularly burned ecosystems started to thrive again.

Dave Nolin [00:11:27] The flames can be really high, you know, they can be over 20ft high. And what do you call a head fire? You know where the flame is roaring down wind. It's pretty spectacular to see.

Neenah Ellis [00:11:41] So now, 35 years later, Huffman Prairie is one of the few places where you can get a sense of what the prairie land would have looked like in our region before settlement and colonization. Nolin is especially interested in that topic. What the land use to look like. He's retired now and has recently had time to review land survey records conducted by settlers in 1802 and 1803, as they prepared to privatize and divide the state. Those surveyors made extensive records of the plants and animals they encountered during their surveys, and they noted lots of fire dependent plants. Plants whose seeds germinate best after they're exposed to fire. From those notes, Nolin created a colorful digital map that shows what the land in southwest Ohio used to look like, and he described how often fire would have had to be used to maintain the different ecosystems like here at Huffman Prairie.

Dave Nolin [00:12:49] I think it burned more often than we're burning it because, you know, some of those early surveys describe these giant prairies without one stick of woody vegetation in it, none of that. So that means they're burning it pretty much every year, at least some of them. You know, I think it was an annual event. And it wasn't just prairies, you know, they would burn the forest, the woodlands. They had a lot of good reasons to do it. And that's what kept this landscape. The pioneers got here, they, I guess, they thought it was just always this way. Like, a lot of people still do. But if you don't burn this prairie or move it, boom, it will. It won't be a prairie for very long.

Neenah Ellis [00:13:33] We go deeper into the prairie, walking down a mowed path with an ocean of golden grasses on both sides. You forget you're at an Air force base. In some places, the grass is taller than us. Nolin points out patches of purple plum bushes that have returned to the prairie since fire was reintroduced. He says it's also important to notice what's happening to the soil underneath regularly burned prairies like Hoffman. He kicks the dirt to reveal a layer of dark, moist soil.

Dave Nolin [00:14:09] This is the corn Belt right here. That's why we get all the corn in the Midwest. The rich soils of the prairies made for us.

Chris Welter [00:14:18] Because of fire?

Dave Nolin [00:14:19] Yeah.

Chris Welter [00:14:24] Five months later, we returned to the same spot at Huffman Prairie for a spring prescribed burn. Dozens of fire professionals from across the United States were there to burn half of Huffman Prairie, around 50 acres. Nolin said the Air Force, the entity overseeing the burn, brings in their A-Team for operations like this. The highly trained firefighters are riding around on off road vehicles with jugs of water, leaf blowers and gasoline containers. Those are the tools they need to control this fire and keep it contained. The fire starts at one end of the prairie, and flames are shooting up 20ft in the air when it makes its way toward Nolin and me in the middle.

Chris Welter [00:15:08] So it is really hot right here. Almost too hot to stand. Really? Wow. That's amazing. You can definitely feel it on your face. I'm assuming the firefighters just get used to it.

Chris Welter [00:15:28] Before he retired. No one would sometimes be the burn boss for fires like these. But now he's watching from afar with his camera.

Dave Nolin [00:15:36] Yeah, yeah, that looks like a little autumn olive tree there. That's smoking. Smoking ruin.

Chris Welter [00:15:43] Yeah, I'm sure as someone who's fought these invasives for a long time, this is good to see.

Dave Nolin [00:15:47] Yeah, yeah. Very good.

Chris Welter [00:15:50] Just before the flames hit one section of the prairie, a huge owl shoots up into the air, escaping just in time. It had been burrowing in its nest in the prairie but will now have to find a new place to live for a few months.

Dave Nolin [00:16:03] Oh, some animals will be killed. I mean, you can't...but the thing is, if you don't manage their home, then they won't be there in the long run. So, it's, fire is essential to their habitat, so, they recolonize it quickly.

Chris Welter [00:16:22] Nolin has read a lot about Indigenous burning practices, and he's actively working to develop relationships with people from tribal nations whose homelands are in modern-day Ohio. He has accepted the idea that fire shapes the landscape. He thinks his maps prove it, and he would like to see what would happen today if fire was more widely used and accepted by modern day conservationists. But not all of his colleagues agree. Some don't believe fire should be used at all. It's too dangerous, they say, and isn't compatible with today's highly developed landscape. Others still believe the myth that the land in North America was a wilderness before European settlement. That it wasn't shaped by the people who lived here.

Dave Nolin [00:17:04] A lot of good naturalists that are my friends still don't believe it. You know, I think they believe the pristine myth. It's kind of an interesting discussion to get in. People have a hard time accepting new ideas, like continental drift. You know the geologists didn't accept that for a long time that the continents actually float around on the surface of the planet. Now they all do. But those that advocated for it were, you know, that concept wasn't well thought of for a while. I think really, if you look at the evidence, it's fairly overwhelming. It's not really that debatable.

Neenah Ellis [00:17:45] Some American Indian nations still use fire as an ecological tool today, based on how their ancestors used it before. George Ironstrack, a scholar and citizen of the Miami Nation of Oklahoma, researches his tribe's fire practices. He works at Miami University at the Myaamia Center, a collaborative academic initiative started by his tribe. Ironstrack says knowledge about fire became dormant for almost all of the American Indian nations with roots in the Midwest because of forced removals and assimilation by the U.S. government. And even though some of that knowledge was shared with settlers and used by them before the Miami Nation was removed, fire as a management practice is not used as frequently or with the same expertise by landowners in the Midwest today. Ironstrack says we're seeing the effects of losing that kind of fire stewardship.

George Ironstrack (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma) [00:18:51] There's no way that humans could disrupt an ecological system that included humans, utterly and totally upend it, a system that had been running for, you know, we say from time immemorial and that not have long-term ecological consequences, you know, whether those consequences

surfaced within a year, you know, most of them don't. They take sometimes generations to surface.

Neenah Ellis [00:19:23] Ironstrack says those ecological consequences can be seen in many different ways today: in depleted soil health from monoculture and over-farming and in flooding and poor water quality due to a lack of fire-dependent prairies and wetlands that filter out and absorb the water.

George Ironstrack (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma) [00:19:45] Myaamia people, I don't think, find that surprising that in the end, the upending of that system leads to the edge of ecological collapse. And many folks would say writ large what we're seeing with climate change is the potential of a much larger ecological collapse caused by the same systems put in place by settler colonialism: the transformation of homelands into resources and then the thoughtless consumption of them, leading to the degradation of all the places where we live in a variety of different vectors.

Neenah Ellis [00:20:24] The transformation of the land in what we now call Ohio into a resource was largely a result of the economic shift to commercial agriculture in the early 19th century that came in with the waves of settlers. Commercial agriculture is still a huge industry in Ohio today. Just drive down a highway in rural western Ohio and you'll see endless acres of almost identical corn and soy row crops. But it wasn't always that way. Fire shaped landscapes are extremely diverse, a mosaic of ecosystems all burned at different frequencies and times of year. Ironstrack says this sort of diversity leads to ecological resilience, which is lacking in Ohio today as the state deals with the harmful effects of climate change.

George Ironstrack (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma) [00:21:23] From my community's perspective, we have this strong emphasis on strength coming through diversity, because diversity allows you to respond as a human group to the natural fluctuations that occur in the universe around you. And anytime you take that diversity and you flatten it down to things like, you know, monoculture agriculture. There's a reckoning coming. How long that reckoning takes varies. I don't think it's surprising at all from a cultural perspective that we're arriving at this point.

Neenah Ellis [00:21:59] Nations like the Miami are re-implementing burns in their homelands and beyond as a part of their broader mission to revitalize their culture. In June of 2024, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma announced that federal trust status had been approved for 45 acres of land it owns in Fort Wayne. It's the first official return of land to Miami control in the nearly 200 years since they were forced to relocate westward. The tribe called it another significant step in its cultural revitalization work, and it could make it easier for the Miami to resume cultural burning practices in Indiana. But the Miami will have to re-implement burns carefully. Drought, development, and climate change can make that tricky. Here's Ironstrack:

George Ironstrack (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma) [00:23:00] The folks working in these agencies at the state and federal level today are inheriting both a culture, Smokey The Bear's kind of normalized within American culture, and a series of practices and constraints that they didn't create. And so the reintroduction of fire is, I think, extremely risky when it hasn't been there for 100 or more years. And I understand the risks and fears that come with that. And yet, eventually, if the forest is big enough, if you do nothing, fire will eventually find its way in is what we're seeing in some places.

Chris Welter [00:23:46] Mike Gonella is a botanist from California who works with the Miami tribe to reintroduce and study fire in their homelands. He's done tests on milkweed and dogbane, two plants that have struggled to maintain their populations since the Miami were forcibly relocated from their homelands. In one study, Gonella conducted prescribed burns at a park in Hamilton County near Cincinnati on former grazing pastures recently converted into prairie (similar to the situation at Huffman). He wanted to see if the burns would help improve the growth rate of the milkweed and dogbane since they're both plants that are still important to Miami people for food and fiber today. The results were mixed. Milkweed production before and after the burn was about the same, but...

Mike Gonella [00:24:34] The burns benefit of the dogbane. It seemed like it cleared the brush. It took all that biomass that was dry and added to the soil, and gave more space and light and nutrients so the dogbane came back better. And this was harvesting the dogbane in a historic way that the Myaamia did it and then burning it too.

Chris Welter [00:24:54] Experiments like Gonella's are encouraging, as Oklahoma based nations like the Miami, Shawnee and Wyandotte and others have grown economically since the 90s. They're purchasing property in their homelands in places like Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and beyond. Ironstrack says he hopes that Miami will be able to reintroduce burning and other ecological practices on a larger scale on that land to revitalize native plants that are important to their culture. But because there hasn't been fire for so long, the land nations are purchasing has changed. Species have been replaced. So the Miami are adapting. Dani Tippmann is the Miami Tribe Community Food Program Director. She teaches Miami people how to find and use native plants in their homelands. And in 2024, part of that work includes contending with invasive plants that dominate parts of our region. She says she still hears the idea from non-native people that Europeans conquered a pristine wilderness when they settled in North America.

Dani Tippmann (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma) [00:25:53] This was not a wilderness. We were active within the landscape. We used fire to burn back in the fall. We used beavers to control the environment around us. All those things need to be put back in place, in my opinion, and used to help the plants that are native to reestablish themselves.

Chris Welter [00:26:22] Working with invasive plants is exactly what Tippmann was doing on the day I met her. I watched her lead a workshop in Indianapolis about applying Miami basket-making techniques using invasive plants like buckthorn and autumn olive. Tippman says they teach people how to make baskets using invasive plants because fire-dependent plants like elm trees that they traditionally use are so rare.

Dani Tippmann (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma) [00:26:46] For the elm especially, there was, the Dutch elm disease came through in the 1940s, and that really wiped out a lot of trees. The ones who are here somehow withstood that. And to take that down, maybe when in my parent's day, they would have taken down those trees and taught children how to make baskets. But now we have to think, 'Oh, let's make some invasive baskets first, and let's get really good at basket making before we take this tree and make baskets out of it because we want it to live a few more years and produce more plants. So yeah, there is that. And I try always to take a few of the seeds and make sure those get planted so that there are they're there for my great grandchildren. It's important for those kids to be able to make baskets though, because they gotta learn the techniques. You can be a little bit different with the invasives, but you're still learning, and your fingers will learn how to do it and know how to do it.

Neenah Ellis [00:27:48] Invasive plants are just one problem in the Midwest because settlers changed the landscape drastically, and baskets made with invasive plants are one small solution. To give you a sense of scale. It's estimated that people started conducting burns close to 13,000 years ago, in what we now call Ohio. Fire has been mostly absent from the landscape in Ohio for just around 200 years. There may be no turning back from some ecological issues we face, but still, people are trying creative, fire-based, or fire-mimicking solutions to reshape the landscape to something more sustainable and closer to what it was before. State data shows that over 200 controlled burns still take place across the state every year, conducted mostly by trained naturalists like Dave Nolin, who we met at Huffman Prairie. In December of 2023, the Ohio Prescribed Fire Council held its annual conference in Columbus for the first time in four years. Over 100 people attended. Representatives from the Division of Forestry spoke about their prescribed fire management course. That takes place biannually, and it's growing in popularity. This shows that some non-native conservationists see fire as an effective ecological management tool. Jack McGowan-Stinski, who works with the Lake State's Fire Science Consortium, presented at the conference.

Jack McGowan-Stinski [00:29:32] I'm a firm believer that rare species that live in fire dependent systems are rare, because they're no longer fire-dependent systems, because we remove fire the way that they evolve. So if you exclude fire, you start splitting the habitat and then you lose this individual.

Neenah Ellis [00:29:53] Despite the increase in interest, though, people from nations like the Shawnee, Miami, Lenape, Wyandotte, and others are almost entirely missing from these bases in Ohio.

Eric Wensman (Shawnee Tribe) [00:30:06] Kind of sad in some sense, because this is the Western science we're talking about, because now that i'm working more with indigenous tribes, listening to the plants and animals. That was not an 'a-ha' moment for any of those folks.

Neenah Ellis [00:30:18] Traditional ecological knowledge, or TEK, is how some scientists refer to the distinct scientific reflection and inquiry used by Indigenous people developed over generations, like when to burn different ecosystems to get certain results. Conservationists like Gonella and Nolin have realized that traditional ecological knowledge is just as valid as Western science when it comes to grasping, describing, and understanding the reality that surrounds humans.

Chris Welter [00:30:57] The loss of fire from our landscape showed itself in a fascinating way recently at a construction site here in Yellow Springs. I'm sitting in the grass next to a rundown schoolhouse with a huge chimney. It's being renovated into our new Wyso radio station. A few birders, neighbors, and friends join me. We're here to see a bird called the Chimney Swift do its nightly ritual. Chimney swifts are native to our region, and as the name suggests, they live and raise their young in chimneys. They're medium-sized, cigar-shaped birds who fly erratically and eat thousands of mosquitos an hour. Right around dusk during summer, dozens of birds circled, opening at the top of their home chimney in a mating dance.

Chris Welter [00:31:28] One by one, they swoop down into the chimney like a funnel of water going down a drain. But tonight, there's a problem. The chimney on the old schoolhouse has been capped. It's being renovated into a skylight. The birds are confused. They've lived there for 50 years. Swifts migrate to the Ohio River Valley from

Central America, and their flocks come back to the same chimneys year after year. The location is hard-wired into their brains. So we've built a 30-foot replica chimney on the front lawn for them. That's why we've been here every night playing chimney swift mating calls from a speaker beside the replica. We're trying to convince the swifts to abandon their old home. And it hasn't been easy. It's taken months.

Chris Welter [00:32:32] We're about 15 minutes yeah, 15 minutes before dusk. And this is the time when the majority of them are kind of flying around. But they're yeah, they're they're really just not they're not coming over. They're not, you know, they're still just fixated on their old home, which is understandable. I mean.

Chris Welter [00:32:54] This isn't the first time chimney swifts have been forced to adapt recently. For thousands of years, they lived inside dead trees in the forest, trees that were left there after controlled burns. Jeremy Turner, whom we met in the last episode, is a historic interpreter and citizen of the Shawnee tribe.

Jeremy Turner (Shawnee Tribe) [00:33:10] Prior to contact, they would use a technique called burning. They would ring the tree with fire and basically kill it, but leave it standing so that It wouldn't grow foliage and allow the sunlight to come through. They could harvest the bark off of it if they were going to use that for their homes or canoes, but a lot of times they left those trees standing.

Chris Welter [00:33:32] By letting sunlight come through the tree canopy. Fruit bushes and nut trees grew on the forest floor. Native saplings, like the white oak and ash, had a chance to grow into full trees or to be used as flexible building materials if they were chopped down when they were still young. When the Shawnee and other tribal nations were forcibly removed, so too were their forest burning techniques and so much of the resulting biodiversity from the landscape. One more consequence is that the swifts had to find somewhere else to live, and they settled on chimneys attached to settlers' new homes that dotted the region's landscape. Fast forward to 2024, and the swifts are adapting again. That's because fewer homes have fireplaces and large chimneys. Scientists are concerned about what might happen to chimney swifts when they come back to their chimneys and find that it's no longer available. They could go extinct or be extirpated from the region. So conservationists across the region have designed replica chimney habitats that can be put in front yards, on top of roofs, or even in the forest. Passionate birders made a plea to our radio station to replace the old chimney we got rid of for our new office with a replica. So, we found a donor. And we did. And after more than a year of luring the birds to their new home almost every night with automated mating calls, it worked.

Chris Welter [00:34:54] Yeah, I'm feeling pretty, pretty speechless here. I've seen dozens of the birds go In, and it feels like a real, like a real victory, I guess. To me, it literally appears like it's a it appears like it's a successful transition. It's amazing. Wow. Oh my God. Yeah. Look at that.

Chris Welter [00:35:28] In this episode, we've talked to people who are trying to reinvigorate the environment in the Mid-West by reintroducing or mimicking Indigenous stewardship practices, especially prescribed fire. These strategies often take the long view, promoting a philosophy of sustaining resources rather than extracting them for short-term gain. As we move into an uncertain future, citizens of federally recognized tribes are sharing their ecological knowledge with universities, conservation organizations, and state agencies. Ohio, a state with a low American Indian population and no reservation lands, is pretty far behind when it comes to those collaborations. But that's what this podcast is

about: how those collaborations are starting to get underway in Ohio. Perhaps that collaboration could help the state deal with some of its most pressing ecological issues. Treating the land closer to the way it was for thousands of years prior to European contact could bring positive changes to the environment in the Midwest, compared to how settlers have treated the land in the past 250 years. In the next episode of The Ohio Country, we'll learn about what was happening in the region we now call Ohio just before and after European contact. We'll hear from a non-native historian who has spent the past 25 years working collaboratively in academia with the federally recognized Shawnee tribes.

Steven Warren [00:36:49] So they had a pretty effective life way, and as a means of maintaining peace so that they could continue to pursue, the subsistence economy.

Chris Welter [00:37:02] You've been listening to the Ohio Country from the Eichelberger Center for Community Voices at WYSO.

Mary Evans [00:37:21] You just heard episode four of The Ohio Country Called Fire. It was written by Chris Welter. Samantha Sommer is the series editor. Doctor John Bickers is the cultural advisor. He's an assistant professor at Case Western University and a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. Lela Troyer, also a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, designed our logo. Flawn Williams is the audio mixer, and the composer is Evan Miller. I'm the digital assets producer, Mary Evans. You can find photos and maps at wyso.org/podcast. This program is made possible through a partnership with Ohio Humanities, a nonprofit that shares stories to spark conversations and inspire ideas. And by the National Endowment for the Humanities, a more perfect union initiative. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of Ohio Humanities or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Chris Welter [00:38:36] To see visual content related to the Ohio Country, follow us on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube. And for a full transcript of every episode made by humans, go to Wyso.org