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Sabbatical Report, Spring 2025

I am pleased to provide an overview of my sabbatical activities in Spring 2025. This sabbatical work, for the reasons outlined below, diverged a bit from my initial plan; however, it was a highly productive semester.

Initial plan

My stated goal in my sabbatical application was to work on my book manuscript and to complete fieldwork that would add another robust case study to the book. I accomplished this goal, but my fieldwork *topic* shifted significantly. In Summer 2023, two colleagues and I were planning a collaborative research project on haaf net fishing in the Solway Firth, a tidal estuary that sits on the border of England and Scotland. Unfortunately, in the months after I submitted my sabbatical application, both colleagues went through devastating life events that made them, quite understandably, unable to commit to travel in Spring and Summer 2025, and it changed the course of each of our sabbaticals.

Revised plan

Since at least 2022, I had been conceptualizing a research project on the ecological knowledge and forest stewardship practices of people who *physically* manage landscapes for fire resilience (e.g. through prescribed burns or forest thinnings), so I was able to pivot fairly seamlessly after my initial plans fell through. This new project would contribute a robust, relevant case study to the book *and* speak to a critical (and fierce) debate in forest science about whether—and where, when, and how—to manage forests for fire.

In Spring 2024, I applied for and received a RSCAP Mini-Grant to complete the following fieldwork during my sabbatical: (i) site visits to prescribed burns, thinnings, and other fuel management activities, where I would observe and, where possible, participate in management; (ii) informal interviews with land resilience workers during and after these site visits; and (iii) semi-formal interviews with relevant stakeholders (e.g. forest and fire ecologists, resource and conservation directors at state agencies and NGOs). I proposed hiring a student researcher, and I planned to complete the fieldwork in January through May 2025.

Scholarship Outcomes

- I. **Fieldwork:** I was able to hire and begin mentoring a student researcher early in the Spring 2025 semester. The fieldwork itself, however, had to wait until late March because of federal funding uncertainties.¹ Since that time, I have completed: (i) participation observation at 7 fuels treatment sites in Northern California; (ii) 11 semi-structured, recorded, and transcribed interviews, including 4 conducted in and translated from Spanish by my student researcher; (iii) many informal interviews with land resilience

¹ Many fuels treatment projects in Northern California are funded by federal grants, and, in the early weeks of the Trump presidency, it was unclear if these grants would be fulfilled, so projects were put on hold for approximately two months.

- workers during site visits; and (iv) textual analysis of news articles, scientific journal articles, etc. Additionally, I was able to extend my RSCAP grant through July 2025 because of the impact of federal funding uncertainties on my research, and I have at least two more fieldwork trips planned for June and July 2025. All fieldwork thus far has been very fruitful.
- II. **Research dissemination:** Two presentations have come out of this new research project already. First, in April 2025, my student researcher Cristal Martinez presented a poster, *Trabajadores de la Tierra: Reclaiming Indigenous Mexican Power through Land Work*, at the SSU Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Symposium. Second, in May 2025, I gave a juried presentation at the 46th Annual Conference of the Society of Ethnobiology. My talk, *Incorporating the Ecological Knowledge of Land Resilience Workers into the Wildfire Science Debate*, generated a great deal of discussion and quickly resulted in planned collaborations with researchers at Washington Division of Natural Resources and the University of British Columbia. Going forward, I intend to present at next year's SSU Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Symposium, and, if our travel funding is restored, the 2026 Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting. I also plan to publish this research both collaboratively in an academic journal article and independently in an article for *The Conversation*.
- III. **Manuscript preparation:** Perhaps most importantly, I have been able to make a great deal of headway on my (untitled) book manuscript, which focuses on the ecological knowledge and environmental politics of rural American communities built on natural resource use and extraction (e.g. logging, fishing, wildcrafting). I have been able to do much of the planning work that goes into writing a book (e.g. researching the publishing process as well as potential publishers; finalizing the book's outline and each chapter's argument; researching, reading, collecting, and organizing sources and quotations; and connecting with scholars who are willing to provide feedback on drafts). And I have done a lot of writing. Currently, over 10,000 words are drafted, and my goal is to have at least three of the five chapters fully drafted by August 2025. I'm aiming for, at the latest, a Summer 2026 manuscript completion date.

In conclusion, this sabbatical has been highly productive, and I am grateful to Sonoma State University for this time to focus on scholarship.