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November 2, 2026

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference

e-Bulletin

Providing bi-weekly communication for PNMC



Shaped by Fire

by Liam Elias, Camp CAMREC

Gathering around a campfire is one of my favorite things. There's something about watching the flames that is so captivating, even magical. This fire fascination most of us feel is likely due to our species' long relationship with it. Fire provides so many comforts and safety, yet it can also be painful and destructive. Our human ancestors have been engaging with fire for two million years and we have evolved significantly because of it. It all started when a lightning strike would ignite somewhere. Our ancestors took the burning sticks back into their caves for its incredible power providing heat, light, cooking, and protection.

Later we started burning grasslands, prairies, and meadows after noticing the gifts that followed in the flames' wake. For those living here in the Pacific Northwest, lower intensity fires stimulated the edible, utilitarian, and medicinal plants like camas, fireweed, and stinging nettles, and kept fuel levels from building up too high which prevented the hotter wildfires.

These disturbances stimulate new tender green shoots to emerge, producing food for elk and deer to browse closer to the villages. This regular periodic burning discouraged the encroachment of trees and larger shrubs that threatened to shade out the fields of wild berry patches.



When they first saw indigenous people starting and maintaining these fires, European settlers and loggers were horrified. Later in 1850, the US government set laws to prevent the forests from burning. The Smokey the Bear campaign established the public view of fire as “bad” and spread fear around the idea of letting fires burn in the woods. Over the last few generations, our perspective of a healthy forest has morphed into a scene of a shady, densely wooded place.

By outlawing fire, settlers could preserve the valuable timber for future harvesting, which has led to forests growing overcrowded leaving just the dominant species. When healthy disturbances like fire are taken away, the diversity of plants declines which causes declines in specific insects, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

But the impacts of fire suppression go much beyond the neglect and impacts to ecosystems. Strategic laws were enacted to effectively stop indigenous cultural burning. For many native groups, fire was seen as a tool for ecosystem management, food production, and a connection to the land. Over time, these colonial laws created food insecurity which effectively broke down indigenous social and family structures.

Camp CAMREC is fortunate enough to be partners with the Cascadia PBA, the Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service, and Cascadia Conservation District who all provide the structure and support for landowners like us to conduct safe burns. In October we burned another 10 acres on the North and Eastern sides of camp for the primary purpose of creating more defensible space, renewing habitat, education, and cycling important nutrients. By burning up the excess fuels on the ground, we are able to slow down a hot wildfire that might come our way in the future.

When you visit, you can walk through these places to see land that was burned this year, one and two years ago, and land that was just mowed or thinned. Then you can compare these with areas nearby that are thick with trees and dense undergrowth and imagine how a wildfire might behave in each place.

What we must realize and keep teaching one another is that we need regular, gentle fires in our lands. The multitude of gifts that fire provides us in ecosystem services is impossible to measure. Let’s celebrate life together and the fire that makes it possible.

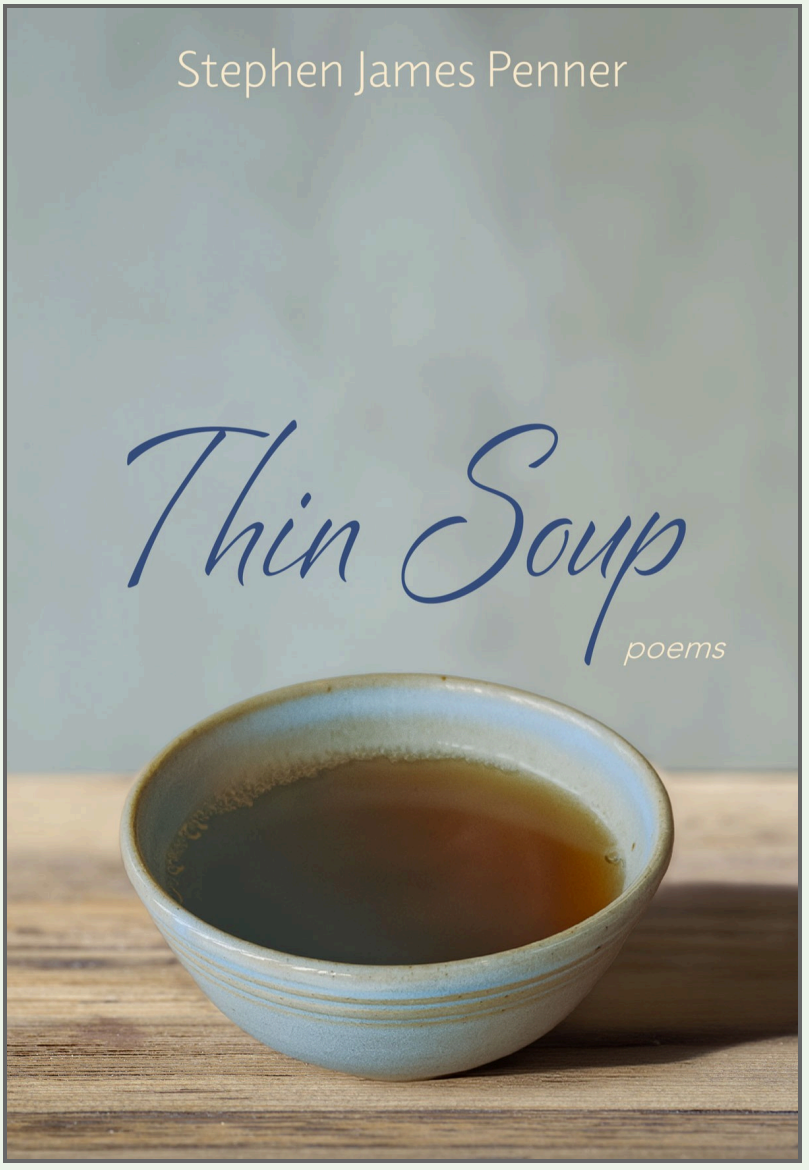


Visit CAMREC

Local author releases book of poetry

*We are excited to share that **Stephen Penner**, retired Mennonite pastor and member of Salem Mennonite Church, has recently published a collection of his poems, **Thin Soup**.*

You can purchase a copy of Steve's book here: **Thin Soup - The Poetry Box**



When asked about his writing, Stephen reflected:

"If you ask me what poetry is I will give a muddled answer. All I know is that I appreciate the labor of trying to say something with the words themselves, and in the spaces between and beyond the printed words. This poem, for example, is about a walk Glena and I took in the coastal Redwoods. But it is also about creation and contains echoes of Psalm 8. The poems in *Thin Soup* were written over the past several years. Readers who know me and my generation, the places I've lived and my family of origin, will recognize things others may not."



Redwoods Walk

We take a short walk
on damp trail
into the Redwoods.
We are quiet and
a few paces apart.
The air is cool and
pure, scented by
soft ocean breeze.
Surrounded by history
we feel the magnificent
mammoths thinking,
their ancient minds
murmuring how
these strange,
muy pequeñas
mobile creatures
can seem so proud
yet know so little.



Conference Communications Council

The next **PNMC CCC** is coming soon! Participants will gather on Zoom from 8:30am until 12:00pm on **Saturday, February 6, 2027.** We are excited to welcome guest speaker, **Iris de León-Hartshorn**.
Registration details coming soon.

Mountain View Mennonite Church

MVMC is in the process of looking for a pastor. In the meantime, the congregation is enjoying taking turns hearing from one another on Sunday mornings. Being quite geographically isolated from the larger PNMC and MC USA "family", the Montana church sees this time as an opportunity build broader relationships and open the door to speakers who would like to visit the beautiful area. MVMC is prepared to help offset the costs of coming for a weekend or longer to those willing to share in Sunday worship.

For more details contact call 406-755-8772 or visit the church website.

Changes Coming for Mennonite Church USA

The Mennonite Church USA Executive Board has announced that Executive Director **Glen Guyton** will complete his current term, on December 31, 2026, concluding

almost nine years of service, and will not seek renewal for a fourth term.

Guyton will begin a new role on Jan. 1, 2027, as president and chief operating officer of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Learn more here

MC USA Sensitive Location Suit Makes Progress

Mennonite Church USA and its 26 co-plaintiffs have won an important ruling putting them on the path toward injunctive relief in the "sensitive locations" lawsuit.

Read more here

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A Member Conference of Mennonite Church USA

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