



Bananal Island in flames: the Karaja people and the fire management in their territory

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ABSTRACT – Bananal Island endures large wildfires every year. The most affected are the indigenous people of both the Karajá and the Javaé populations (self identified as the *Iny*), who live on the island ever since immemorial times spread along three Indigenous Lands. This action research has taken place on the Indigenous Land Araguaia Park, in the Fontoura Village, in which there are about 800 inhabitants. Since 2015 the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama)/Prevfogo in a partnership with the National Indian Foundation (Funai) execute the Integrated Wildfire Management (MIF) on the island. So that the MIF succeeds the engagement of the indigenous people is critical in every single step. Currently the volunteer firefighters are the Karajá people, which assures their participation on the planning and execution of the prescribed burning. One of the challenges is to engage the community beyond the volunteer firefighters group once all of them benefit from the territory. The goal of this action research was to amplify the understanding of the Karajá people about the MIF to qualify their participation to the same extent that I have sought information about the traditional usage of fire by the *Iny*. I have produced the video “Mifando a Ilha”, which brings the indigenous knowledge, from the elders and the volunteer firefighters, besides the government agents. The video was used in activities in the village in order to deepen the debate about the use of fire throughout history and in current times. The Karajá have separated the types of fire among those they have caused anciently (for the purposes of dealing with their crops and for communication while fishing), the ones that are happening currently (MIF, keeping wild animals away, opening paths and collecting honey) and the “fire from the others”, which is the burn of pasture areas so that the regrowth of grass feed the cattle. Almost the totality of the cattle on the island belongs to non-indigenous people, who use the native pasture under the payment of a monthly fee. The categorization of the types of fire made by the *Iny* reveals that they understand some occurrences of fire as positive and others as negative. The fire that affects the use of the territory by the Karajá could, under careful work, become the fire that favors biodiversity and the sustainable use of the territory. Thus, the fire would turn from villain to mediator of the socio-environmental conflicts on the Bananal Island.

Keywords: Karajá, Bananal Island, Integrated Fire Management, traditional knowledge.