

Foreword to J. Metcoff, *Firelines* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017).

Jill Metcoff and I share a landscape: the matrix of woodlands, savannas, prairies, wetlands, bluffs, and farms of south-central and southwestern Wisconsin.

Jill and I also share the experience of working with friends, neighbors, and colleagues to restore the ecological health of these places and sustain the diversity of life that they hold. One of the methods we use to do so is prescribed burning. In our country, fire (both lightning-set and human-ignited) was one of the primary agents of change in our native ecosystems. With accelerated European settlement in the mid-1800s, the ancient regimes of burning faded across the Midwest, and fire ceased to play its regenerative role. Just as fire had historically altered our plant and animal communities, so now did the lack of fire. Now the return of fire, borne in the hands of landowners and conservationists, allows us to reclaim at least some of the ecological values and legacies inherent in the land.

I have participated in a few of the burns that Jill has photographed, and whose images she shares here. Prescribed burning is all about careful diligence and responsibility. Out on the fireline when attending the flames, attentive to wind, water, smoke, fuel, firebreaks, and your burn-crew mates, one has scant chance to rest in appreciation. But in the course of almost every burn comes a moment when one does pause to take note: there is profound beauty in change; there is fascination in transformation; there is wonderful renewal in the consuming flame. Amid the sweat and smoke, a spirit leaps with the flames, and hope comes covered in black ash.

While we on the firelines have matter-of-factly gone about planning and executing the burn, Jill has stood at attention nearby, watching the process with care, capturing the ephemeral sweep of the burn. As flame hones the concentration of the crew, it likewise focuses the eye and

lens of the photographer. We are all on call, responding to the intimate here and now. We are all present, converting the past, creating a future, in partnership with everything in our place.

Through the images in this book, we welcome you to our place—our corner of the Midwest, our space of rejuvenation. Amid these licks of flame, veils of smoke, and smoldering cinders, we renew our land, ourselves, and our connections. We burn with possibilities.

Curt Meine