

It's All in the Family: Recommendations for Cultural and Natural Resources Reconciliation

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Introduction

While diverse values attract passionate support, their combination in one park represents a considerable management challenge. Finding a balance among so many vital but tenuous links to cultural and natural history is complicated and often contentious. This paper will discuss methods for reconciling these interests and going forward with the critical work of preservation for all the cultural, social, and/or natural values associated with national park resources. The paper uses experiences from the Presidio of San Francisco and Golden Gate National Recreation Area to frame its recommendations.

The Presidio of San Francisco is a 1,490-acre unit within a national park located at San Francisco's Golden Gate. The area boasts a unique mix of cultural, natural, and recreational resources. First inhabited by the Ohlone, the Presidio was a seasonal village site until the Spanish came and claimed it for Spain in 1776. From this point until 1994, the Presidio was an important bellwether for the West's military history. First established to protect the San Francisco Bay under the Spanish Army, the Presidio was transferred to Mexico after it won its independence from Spain in 1822. In 1846, the Presidio was turned over to the United States Army, which developed and managed it as a military base until it was decommissioned in 1994 and incorporated into Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Due to its colorful and lengthy military history—it was the longest constantly running military base in the nation when it closed in 1994—and its remaining structural and landscaped resources, the Presidio is one of the United States's National Historic Landmark Districts.

Today, five federally listed plant species exist within Presidio boundaries, making their home among rare dune, serpentine, and wetland habitats that are quickly disappearing from coastal areas and are entirely gone from San Francisco. The park boasts historically

significant forest stands, the last free-flowing creek in San Francisco, and a majestic sand-and-bluff shoreline overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The Presidio is also home to Mountain Lake, one of two remaining natural lakes in San Francisco. Wildlife in the Presidio is plentiful and various, although becoming more rare due to loss of precious habitat.

Recommendations

These seven recommendations are meant to initiate natural and cultural resources reconciliation by promoting frank discussion and encouraging understanding and compromise between the disciplines.

1. Acknowledge the fundamental differences—and common ground—between natural and cultural resources. The fundamental difference between natural and cultural resource values is fairly straightforward: cultural resource values generally refer to the human influences that have changed natural systems, while natural resource values instead privilege the pre-European environment. Although pre-European ecology can sometimes satisfy both camps, the period of significance at the Presidio is the post-European contact period, which often conflicts with natural resource values.

Between the natural and cultural disciplines, subtle differences in understanding

can have a tremendous impact on the planning process. The most prevalent cause for misunderstanding is a difference in language. For example, historic resource treatment standards have distinct definitions for rehabilitation, restoration, and preservation, while natural resources policies define these terms with much more flexibility. For example, when natural resources professionals entertain the idea of “restoring” an area, the cultural professionals assume that this goal is strictly defined, when in fact it is quite elastic. Cultural and natural resource professionals must realize that these terms are not clearly shared across discipline lines, and openly clarify their terms before entering discussion. The first step in addressing a project conflict is to ask that the language be defined and interpreted.

While the differences are important to acknowledge, equally meaningful are the similarities that bind the two camps. The most obvious similarity is both natural and cultural resource professionals’ common goal to preserve the national heritage for future generations. The goal of any resource manager is to ensure that people can experience their country’s history and ecology for centuries to come.

2. Begin all projects with a mutual understanding of the basic cultural and natural resources laws and policies. Any resource management discussion should begin with an open recognition of the laws and guidelines that apply to the project. Laws and policies provide the backbone for resource work and the framework for associated decision-making. The effort taken to review and respect the other discipline’s guiding policies will greatly benefit joint projects. While it may be difficult to learn all the appropriate legislative acts and policy documents, requesting that a professional counterpart explain the basic elements of the law can help both groups understand the other’s knowledge, and respect their basis for negotiations. Examples of essential cultural resource laws and guidelines include the National Historic Preservation Act, Archeology Resources Protection Act, and the Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act, as well as fed-

eral standards on cultural landscape treatment and the State Historic Preservation Office review process. Guiding documents for natural resources professionals include the Endangered Species Act, the Wilderness Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act.

3. Acknowledge that there is a history to natural history, and a natural history to history. Finding where resources overlap can be helpful for identifying common ground. One example of this beneficial overlap is what natural resource professionals call “type localities.” In natural history, a type locality refers to the very first place a species of plant or animal was discovered and described. Since the first ships into the San Francisco Bay stopped and collected plants, the Presidio holds many sites of type localities for plants and animals. Even California’s state flower, the California poppy, has its type locality at the Presidio. The cultural resource term “prototype” corresponds with the natural resource “type locality.” On the Presidio, an example of a prototype is an Endicott-era concrete battery, which served as the model for such batteries constructed throughout the country.

As type localities represent the “history of natural history,” the Presidio’s riparian oak woodland illustrates the “natural history of history.” This natural habitat was esteemed a contributing factor to the National Historic Landmark District designation, a symbol of great cultural import. The majority of the Presidio’s historic forest was planted by the Army, but natural forests existing at that time were retained by the Army and thus included in the historic designation. Using transferable examples such as type localities and the historic oak woodland may help bridge the gap of understanding between the disciplines.

4. Allow the resource experts to work through the balancing without mediation. It is beneficial for cultural and natural resource specialists to get together early in the planning process before lines are drawn in the sand. Holding an initial collaborative meeting among resource staff allows these professionals to focus on cross-resource education and value identification, without becoming adver-

sarial. The goal at this stage is for each resource professional to balance advocacy with inquiry.

Early discussion among the resource staff can build common ground for future coordination, but inviting non-resource staff to this initial collaboration can curtail necessary open debate. Decision-makers and planning staff have the important role of balancing not only resource needs, but also issues such as park neighbors, operational needs, and additional values such as recreation. These additional considerations tend to make resource professionals territorial. Further, planners can misinterpret the intensity of resource negotiations and start holding separate discussions with each camp, believing that this is the best way to mediate. In fact, it is crucial that both cultural and natural resource staff remain engaged in each step of the planning process in order to ensure the preservation of the resource.

5. Use a scientific approach to decision-making. Discussion of any individual natural and cultural resource overlap issue must occur in a framework of professional integrity built on a foundation of science, research, and policy. Passion about the involved values can be tempered with a more technical and integrated eye for park values. A design for guiding the process of integration could include conducting survey and identification work, consulting appropriate literature prior to planning, and exploring scientific validation.

In general, resource professionals should come to planning meetings prepared to quote the source or experience from which the professional opinion was drawn. This will strengthen the credibility of the information, and is especially helpful when new players are at the table. Ideally, the researchers themselves would be available to describe their findings. Independent researchers especially can help alleviate doubt regarding data interpretation. Resource management agencies should always document the researchers and the science that has helped inform the decision-making process.

The post-mortem review of the Presidio Crissy Field project revealed a lack of hard sci-

ence underlying early decision-making. The Crissy Field project included restoring a tidal marsh, sand dunes, and a historic airfield. Both archeological and hydrological information were eventually found to be inadequate. Having learned from this experience, detailed research, including aquifer studies, comprehensive archeological testing, and historic property identification is being planned for two adjacent resource projects.

6. Adopt an unwritten understanding to help each other. Whenever possible, resource staff should express the good-faith understanding that both cultural and natural resource values are important to preserve and protect. During the Crissy marsh restoration, a Native American midden was found in the area where the marsh was planned. Recognizing the discovery's blow to the natural resource objective, the cultural resource staff contributed additional space for the marsh to mitigate the loss. Similarly, when a new type of plant community (dune swale) was proposed in the Crissy dunes, the natural resource staff worked to finalize a cultural plant palette that would please the Native American community and satisfy a tribal agreement that basket materials would be planted for their collection and use.

7. Realize that a solution may not be available at that moment in time. The issues are often complicated and may need to be worked out over time. Projects that include cultural and natural resources tend to take a while to mature, and often undergo adaptive management during the planning, implementation, and monitoring phases. Often, a values trade-off may not be ideal for either resource, but may still be the best accommodation at the time. All projects are processes; they include successes and failures as well as outcomes requiring continuing study. The success of the existing vegetation and habitat value at the Crissy marsh may guide future decisions about expansion, and the success of the Crissy airfield restoration may depend on future decisions about possible "air museums." Creating a vision for resource preservation and keeping that vision in mind throughout the project process is the key to a successful

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resource project. By continually articulating a vision, it will be translated into action, even if it becomes modified in the translation.

Conclusion

Through years of experience, the authors have gone from dueling across conference

room tables to understanding how to work comfortably together. The hope is that these recommendations will help new professionals in resources management get to common ground even faster.

