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Developing Sustainable Design Guidelines for a Dynamic Landscape

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To implement a meaningful and appropriate treatment for the rehabilitation of the Dyea historic townsite, sustainable design guidelines must be developed through an interdisciplinary approach. Resource specialists, park managers, and facility designers must find productive ways to work together that will result in the balance of resource conservation and visitor satisfaction. To date, much of the planning work has dealt with the proven methods and techniques used to construct infrastructure, but the challenge is defining the ongoing process needed to find common solutions to the varied perspectives on design guidelines for a dynamic cultural landscape. Dyea historic townsite, located in Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, poses serious contradictions to traditional preservation and park management methodologies due to the scale of its dramatic landscape, which is a tapestry of natural and cultural resources, often with conflicting protection strategies. Although Dyea resides within a historical park, the three categories first recognized in Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall's 1964 policy objectives for the National Park System, those being *natural*, *historical*, and *recreational*,¹ all apply here.

Situated within an active glacial watershed and with a historical record barely visible in archaeological remains now cloaked by emergent forest, Dyea represents a formidable challenge in developing a functional master plan that addresses overall patterns of change. Nearly two years ago, the effort to preserve the historic townsite of Dyea was innovatively taking form through the collective talents and dedication of resource specialists and designers. A sustainable design approach for interpreting and developing this rapidly evolving landscape meant to re-define the traditional National Park Service (NPS) paradigms used to create park facilities. It was George Wright who cited the need for master plans to include natural resource information—rather than “contemplated and completed physical development only.”² Taking this approach one step further, the cultural landscape treatment of Dyea called for consultation and involvement from all resource areas and programmatic teams. While the technical methodology seemed logical and flawless, the melding of the NPS Cultural Landscape Program with the agency's standard design process has been challenging, yet productive.

Park employees are dedicated to providing the best possible management for the historic townsite, which is a part of the Chilkoot Trail Unit. However, the composition of the staff evolved from the management and maintenance needs of developing the Skagway Unit (a twenty-block municipal downtown revitalization) and improving recreational use of the Chilkoot Trail (one of two historic corridors within the park that link to Canada and the gold fields of the Yukon River drainage). Anything truly creative results in change, and if there is one thing a well-run bureaucracy or institution or major corporation finds difficult to handle, it is change.³ Until the most recent effort to give proper recognition to the cultural land-

scape of Dyea, the park has endeavored to inventory and monitor archaeological features (including the few remaining visible structures), maintain basic public access, and provide a law enforcement presence. The introduction of minor visitor amenities and traffic control devices has been necessary and installed with the best of intent, but these improvements have been implemented without design guidelines emanating from a comprehensive cultural landscape treatment. The general management plan's (GMP's) preferred alternative recognized that the cultural landscape of Dyea has changed. "Selected townsite streets and ruins, now overgrown with trees and brush, would be cleared..."⁴ Since the park has decided to utilize the specific proposals found in the cultural landscape report (CLR) in a public review process to reaffirm the acceptable development of Dyea, a grudging acknowledgement to such change has begun.

The implementation process from this point on must attempt to keep the park staff attuned to a new order of development. Minor improvements will continue to be scheduled annually as part of the seasonal maintenance work plan, but more significant construction projects have been coordinated to align with the anticipated form of the cultural landscape treatment. Resource specialists responsible for the preparation of the CLR have gone on record recommending the park consider all improvements to be temporary until the final planning document, presumably a type of development concept plan (DCP), is approved. Because it could still be a number of years before the public planning process can be funded, a decision rendered, design work completed, and construction begun, interim planning tasks will maintain momentum while supporting any ongoing maintenance projects and management initiatives. A simple linear process has been depicted to provide sequential guidance to the park.

Essentially, the CLR sets the parameters for each successive step. The park has yet to decide the extent of public input into a visitor experience and resource protection (VERP) document, but its results, when combined with the CLR, will formulate the basis for the DCP. A DCP process will utilize the CLR recommendations as one of a number of concept alternatives presented for public comment. Just as the original 1996 GMP for the park offered planning alternatives for each of the park's four units, the DCP will suggest a full spectrum of development specific to Dyea. This action will be significant for the park, because it will enable park management to make its decision based on (1) a comprehensive set of scientific data that did not exist at the time the GMP was written, and (2) a formal recognition of the cultural landscape as a framework for any development.

Even before the DCP is started, the task of developing a comprehensive program will ensure that the overall needs of the area are defined. This program will serve to specifically identify facility descriptions, intent, quantities, and requirements to designers in the later stages of this process. As a part of this program development, resource specialists and park staff will mutually develop *design guidelines* that will provide direction and influence to designers with regard to selection of materials, construction techniques, product selection, massing, form, and appearance. These design guidelines are currently being developed by the park staff with the guidance and technical assistance of the NPS Alaska Regional Office and are intended to provide specific reference to management personnel who are administering programs and activities; architects, landscape architects, and engineers who are

designing facilities; and maintenance and construction staff who are purchasing, fabricating, and installing improvements specified by the agreed-upon treatment plan. Only when all projected uses have been brought into consonance with the character of the land will a sound master plan be produced. This is, of course, a continuing process, requiring constant reappraisal, adjustment, and readjustment.⁵

The development of design guidelines with respect to meeting *sustainability* standards set by NPS will not be done in spite of Dyea's needs but instead give special recognition to the place and to the intended interpretation to be provided to the visiting public. Dyea offers the opportunity to test "the springboard from which a new ethic of combined environmental protection and landscape design must emerge...."⁶ Conservation of existing cultural resources, rehabilitation of current transportation corridors, re-use of vegetation and other natural resources for infrastructure, and construction sequencing to minimize physical disturbance are some of the goals intended to have Dyea represent a sustainable approach to cultural landscape treatment. Sustainable methodology must also speak to the selection of construction materials, their placement in an evolving landscape, and the routine maintenance that will need to be responsive to change. The cumulative effort should focus on a consistent interpretive message to visitors that the NPS has chosen to develop Dyea in a sustainable manner so that this historic and yet dynamic place can be better appreciated and understood.

Endnotes

1. George B. Hartzog, Jr., *Battling for the National Parks* (Mt. Kisko, N.Y.: Moyer Bell, 1988), 102–103.
2. Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 102.
3. Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York, New York: Dell Publishing, 1989), 33.
4. National Park Service, *General Management Plan, Development Concept Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park* (NPS Document D-68A, 1996), 2.29
5. John Ormsbee Simonds, *Landscape Architecture: A Manual of Site Planning and Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 299.
6. Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 485.