

Gaining and Understanding Tribal Perspectives: Olympic National Park's Applied Anthropology Program and its Recent MOU

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There are more than 570 federally recognized tribes and Alaska Native groups who have unique political status as sovereigns, and National Park Service (NPS) managers must recognize and respect this relationship. The status is based on a government-to-government relationship with the NPS, the direction for which is required by the U.S. constitution, treaties, statutes, and other court decisions, all spelled out for park managers, as the care takers of numerous aboriginal homelands, in the NPS 2006 Management Policies.

Legislative drivers justified creating a position for a cultural anthropologist in the NPS Washington, D.C., Program and Policy Development Office in 1987. Especially important at the time were the National Environmental Policy Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Each called for consultations between representatives of Federal agencies and the tribal government whose lives were affected by agency decisions. As a result the NPS hired Dr. Muriel Crespi as Chief Anthropologist. Dr. Crespi wrote the first NPS management policies (in 1988) that addressed the official NPS position regarding Native Americans. These became the foundation for the NPS applied anthropology or "ethnography" program.¹

The next decade brought a sea-change with respect to recognition of American Indians and other traditionally associated groups in park management decisions. The requirement to consult Native Americans was reiterated throughout the NPS management policies and other policy documents. The management policies explicitly acknowledged a relationship that continued to exist between the integrity of park resources and the integrity of tribal life that required consultation with associated contemporary Native Americans when NPS actions might impinge on them. Concomitantly, the Service obligated itself to protect resources in ways that reflected "informed concern" for the contemporary people and cultural systems traditionally associated with them. Soon after, NPS regional offices began to hire anthropologists, as did a few parks, such as Olympic.

As anthropologist at Olympic National Park for over 20 years, I began working with eight peninsula tribes (Elwha Klallam, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Skokomish, Quinault, Hoh, Quileute, and Makah) to ensure that the park had an accurate understanding of the basis for the relationship these tribes have to the park, such as the treaties that protect tribal rights. I wrote the park's Ethnographic Overview and Assessment in 1997 and identified aspects of tribal culture so that park staff, such as the resource education division, could accurately interpret tribal culture, and I pointed out ways that the park could carry out consultation when park actions might affect one or all of the eight associated treaty tribes.

In the process of consultation for the park's five year General Management Plan, I met with the eight tribes on numerous occasions with two succeeding superintendents. At each meeting the same comment came up. "These meetings are great, because we really never

hear what's going on at the park," and the park felt the same way. "Let's have more meetings, but not necessarily when something needs to be resolved." Everyone felt it was important to meet on an annual basis to share information about what each other was planning in the upcoming year.

As a result of this desire and some specific fishery and flooding issues, the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) assisted the tribes in putting together the very first meeting with the park to discuss a Memorandum of Understanding that would address laying out the framework for annual meetings. Pat Parker, from the NPS American Indian Liaison Office brought in Charles Wilkinson, Native American Law Professor to facilitate the meeting, and we began the process of identifying what we wanted the MOU to say to guide us in our commitment to meet annually and how to conduct our communications. We set up a committee with a representative from each tribe. Bill Back of the DOI solicitor's office was elected to take on the duty of ensuring the language was legal, Fran Wilshusen from the NWIFC, Gary Morishima from the Quinault Indian Nation, and I worked on the drafts, distributed them for feedback, edited them, and redistributed them prior to each meeting. Within one year we had a document that everyone approved and we held a signing ceremony in July of 2008, at Ocean Shores.

The MOU created a commitment for meaningful tribal consultation and highlighted some areas where we could work more collaboratively. The agreement didn't change the park's responsibility; it just strengthened the desire proclaimed by all parties to work together. As someone said during the process, the real value was in the process we undertook, the time and commitment to work together, and the great communication required to write the MOU.

There is fairly frequent change in tribal chairs and park superintendents, so each successive leader will now know that we are all committed to this process, and they can refer to the MOU to create individual agreements between the park and a specific or several tribes on individual issues. Each division within the park, and the corresponding tribal office, can now be expected to work together much more in their research and fieldwork, and share results.

Olympic's new superintendent, Karen Gustin, started work the day of the signing ceremony. She believes the MOU is seen by all parties as a very important anchor. There will be tiered-off agreements with individual tribes, based on initial issues that are attached to the MOU as an appendix, which we had prioritized in the first work group session. She sees the park and tribes having regular team meetings, she has already committed herself to meeting with all of the tribes, and is gearing up for the first annual meeting in August.

This MOU will have longevity beyond the turnover of park and tribal employees for decades to come, and stands as a guidepost for a future of meaningful collaboration and shared understanding.

Endnote

1. Unfortunately there is currently no lead for the ethnography program in Washington, D.C., as Dr. Crespi passed away in 2003 and the chief ethnographer position remains vacant.