

Knowledge All Around You: Cultural Landscapes Management from a Landscapes Point of View (Session Introduction)

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Introduction

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES ARE EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING AND CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN particular landscapes and the inhabitants of those landscapes. Within an ethnographic approach to cultural landscapes management, landscape use can inform personal and cultural identity. In large part, we get our identity from place, from the landscape. Think about the landscapes in which you live—where do you feel you belong? What elements in your environment give you cues as to who you are, where you fit, and to what community you belong? By asking these kinds of questions, we can develop an understanding of how people derive their identity through interaction with landscape. Race, ethnicity, class, and gender can also influence personal and cultural identity. As relationships between people and places grow and change, cultural landscapes provide information about race, class, and gender (Vivien Rose, pers. comm.).

In this session, we explored how individuals and communities have derived, and continue to derive, their identities from places in which they live, the landscapes they revere. The issue of landscape and identity has important ramifications for inter-community negotiations around race and gender, for international politics, and for the preservation of parks and protected areas. In addition to looking at how we relate to landscapes and the associations we give to landscapes, we considered how the landscape itself—as a living being, as a character in a story—can communicate with us and influence our concept of who we are.

This session included papers from Elizabeth Goetsch, Park Ranger at Stones River National Battlefield in Tennessee, Laura Schuster, Chief of the Cultural Resource Division at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, and Jill Cowley, Historical Landscape Architect at the National Park Service Intermountain Region Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico (this volume). Thanks go to Vivien Rose, Historian at Women’s Rights National Historical Park, for initiating and contributing to this session.

Conclusion

All three papers addressed how landscapes can influence personal and cultural identity. Elizabeth

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showed how a community retains ties to their home landscape after it has been established as a battlefield park, and how using the landscape as a character in the story also helps maintain objectivity in relating the story. Laura described how the key to managing an active volcano is ongoing consultation and an increased understanding of how Pele, the goddess of fire, is considered by Native Hawaiians to be the living landscape of Hawaii. And my visitor study explored how gendering landscape can influence creative responses to that landscape.

After the presentations, the audience discussion ranged between the broad and the specific, and a number of questions and comments were addressed. One question asked what federal preservation mechanisms are available to ensure the protection of ethnographic landscapes. In response, the National Register of Historic Places traditional cultural places category was discussed. Tribal perspectives, including the need to consult with associated tribes, were discussed. And, the question was raised: How might a belief that the landscape is a living being, able to communicate with us, influence land management? One objective of the papers and discussion session was to explore how an understanding of the landscape as a living being can help land managers appreciate tribal perspectives.