

Managing a Park without Knowing What Your Visitors Know is Like Driving Blind: Visitor Impact Sessions

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THE WORKSHOP I ATTENDED was a Cultural Resources Toolkit for Marine Protected Area Managers. This was led by Valerie Grussing who is a cultural resources coordinator for the National Marine Protected Areas Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA is a government agency focused on the wellbeing of the oceans and atmosphere. Their mission is to create ecosystems, communities, and economies that will sustain their prosperity and possible change in the future. NOAA's National Marine Protected Areas Center's mission is to use science and technology, in the planning, management, and evaluation of the nation's system of marine protected areas. Marine protected areas (MPAs) were created to conserve marine habitats and resources. Examples of MPA's include national marine sanctuaries, national parks, wildlife refuges, state parks, conservation areas, as well as fishery management closures. Conservation focuses are natural heritage, cultural heritage, and sustainable production.

This workshop explored one aspect of MPA's focus; techniques using cultural and national heritage of indigenous people to sustain the ecosystems. We took a look at places that would be included in this idea of cultural importance. Shipwrecks, indigenous sanctuaries, historic tribal destinations, and cultural landscapes were some areas of importance. The issue was how to work with indigenous people to create an environment that would still manage the habitat, instead of relying on restrictions and regulations of an area. Some restrictions include no impact, no access, no take, or zoned areas. At the moment, when a location is chosen to be a protected area management puts restrictions on fishing, hunting, hiking. These are western ideals that create abundance of wildlife. Her topic was to work with indigenous from the beginning, to create these rules. Traditional cultural resource management allows management to still create this abundance of flora and fauna, while sustaining cultural views and identity. While working with indigenous people, they can come up with innovative ideas to protect the area. Using traditional knowledge of area was key including taboos on fishing, blessings, and oral stories that command when to fish and when not to fish. These are some of the ways to manage the protected areas through a cultural construct.

Valerie continued to talk about how locations are chosen to be considered as cultural marine protected areas, as well as a new management tool kit that helps define and sustain this. This toolkit is still being formed. National Marine Protected Areas Center has developed a way to classify

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these places using five characteristics. This includes conservation focus, level of protection, permanence of protection, constancy of protection, scale of protection. There are nine topics on this cultural resource guide and all are variations of ways to incorporate cultural heritage into MPAs.

Reflection

This was a very interesting experience for me. The conference gave me a chance to see a variety of protected areas and parks that are being reached out to. I went to a night workshop so because of this there were only four of us in the room. It was a very intimate setting so we all sat at one table. The presentation was short and sweet, and it gave us lots of time to have a more detailed conversation about the topic at hand. Another professional attending this session was Cliff McCreedy. He is a marine resource management specialist of the National Park Service. He had a lot of knowledge on the content of this workshop. It was definitely hard to keep up with them! They all knew the same professionals and current events that were happening on this topic. I had no previous knowledge on the subject and was not sure what MPAs do or even what NOAA is. This gave me the opportunity to do some research. I took what was discussed during the workshop and later went online and researched all the organizations that were mentioned. I learned about a whole other area of conservation and project implementation. At the end of our discussion they offered me a lot of information on internships that have to do with MPAs and other organizations that deal with the same issues. I am very interested in cultural resources after attending this workshop.