

NPS Cultural Resource Challenge: Preserving America's Shared Heritage in the Twenty-first Century

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ON MARCH 31, 2015, the Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science of the National Park Service, Stephanie Toothman, spoke during “The Cultural Resource Challenge: Preserving America’s Shared Heritage in the Twenty-first Century” session. The main question she left fellow heritage and cultural lovers was, “how do we continue to be advocates?” The last decade has left cultural resource professionals and employees responding to budget cuts, leaving the community with a loss of expertise, 70% of parks lacking comprehensive documentation of their resources for over 27,000 historic/prehistoric structures, and over 120 million museum objects and archival documents. In 2010, the budget was in decline and between 2010 and 2011 Congress decided to cut trading stock and the \$10 million in the American Treasures Program became a big fat zero. With 2012 going into flat budgets and sequestration, cultural resources took a step behind leaving staff discouraged.

The big ask is five goals to achieve a standard of excellence for stewardship of the resources that form the history and culture of this nation, committing across the board a vision for the bright future. The National Park Service team of cultural resource experts developed 40 actions to complete the five goals with any kind of budget, supporting the spirit and direction of the nation. Collaboration with partners is critical in creating a vision that encompasses the responsibilities and essence of both the Organic Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Goal one provides leadership, support, and advocacy for the stewardship protection, interpretation, and management of heritage with proper research and science. Duties like proper documentation, backlog cataloging collections, preservation monitoring, and construction. Goal two recommits the spirit of the Organic Act, Antiquities Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act with actually funding the Historic Preservation Fund, upgrading NPS/State/Tribal/Local heritage entities, expanding official reports, supporting research, upgrading websites, and supporting urban revitalization. Goal three aims to connect Americans to their heritage, something that resonates with everyone’s life, telling the stories of national diversity. We can do this by engaging youth, supporting National Heritage Area legislation, sharing NPS research, and assessing programs for people to learn about their heritage. Goal four integrates values of stewardship into major initiatives and issues, cultivating science and technical preservation. By promoting scholar-

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ship, conducting research for critical issues today, and updating standards and guidelines, cultural resources can achieve excellence in science and preservation. The last goal attracts, supports, and retains a highly skilled and diverse workforce, creating experts within the NPS. Strategies include filling Cultural Resource Management vacancies, developing career academies, creating succession plans to attract and retain workforce, and support CRM networks.

The five goals now heads straight on towards twenty-first century challenges. They are created as an opportunity to prioritize and maintain National Park Service stewardship responsibilities for historic resources. Building upon existing programs, and adding critical new capabilities, will allow the National Park Service to meet the needs for preserving the historical and cultural foundations of the nation: an irreplaceable heritage.

Reflection

The challenges presented were eye opening to me. Today, we face issues like climate change and environmental existence, but what many people do not realize is our cultural heritage is at risk of existence as well. Of course, our national natural resources are completely worthwhile and need to be preserved, but as we learn more how much funding has been cut from these cultural resource programs, it is unsettling. Just like our natural world, the cultural world can disappear without proper care, appreciation, funding, and expertise. The five goals that were presented by Stephanie Toothman exemplified the importance of the American Heritage for the next century. It is my generation, the ones that are graduating in majors like history, public administration, social science, biology, communications, political science, and recreation that are contributing to the preservation of our own history. It is everyone's job to keep the diverse stories and millions of historical objects well kept. Cultural resources can provide employment to people interested in the history relevant to all our families and future livelihoods as we move into a new career. We all have a shared heritage and it is up to the future graduates to realize the importance of their culture's existence.