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Integrating Cultural and Natural History in State Park Management

There is a persistent dissonance in the dialogue between those who work to protect important *natural areas* and those who work to protect significant *cultural resources*, that is, those human-made elements on or of the landscape that are associated with important aspects of human history and prehistory. This inability to work together effectively is curious because, historically, natural and cultural resources have been linked together in protective laws since Congress passed the 1906 Antiquities Act, which enables the president to set aside as national monuments public lands with significant prehistoric, historic, or natural features.

Long considered the cornerstone of cultural resource law in the United States, the Antiquities Act is the product of environmental thought that flows from the German naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt, whose holistic concept of the universe was widely influential. As Humboldt's thinking evolved in his lectures, essays, and books, he integrated human geography, political economy, and ethnography into his studies of physical phenomena. He employed the term *Naturgemälde* ("painting of nature") as a metaphor capturing a holistic concept of natural phenomena in a societal context (Rupke 1997). Humboldt's five-volume

Cosmos, published serially between 1845 and 1862, was considered the standard encyclopedia of science in the nineteenth century (Worster 1977). It can fairly be said that the comprehensive language of the Antiquities Act reflects another concept closely related to *Naturgemälde*, that of *denkmal*, which refers to things, both human-made and natural, established in commemoration (Conwentz 1909; Wonders 2000).

By and large, natural scientists and conservationists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not disassociate natural resource protection from human activity. However,

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another concept of environmentalism also took shape in the United States, one that eventually crystallized around Henry David Thoreau's now-famous declaration, "In Wildness is the preservation of the World." The concept of "wildness" became a passion for wilderness preservation, and the environmental politics of wilderness preservation has only increased in intensity in recent decades. "For many Americans," William Cronon has observed, "wilderness presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet" (Cronon 1996). Paradoxically, the social construct of wilderness places human beings entirely outside the natural environment. This is best expressed in a mind-set rooted in twentieth-century natural resource management which relies on trained specialists and has compelled federal and state park managers to draw lines of distinction between natural and historical parks and to minimize traces of prior human activity from "natural" parks.

The segregation of natural and cultural resource protection is thus a phenomenon of twentieth-century public land-management practices that have been influenced by differing—some would say competing—philosophies of environmentalism and that are now embedded in a progression of inconsistent laws. Many federal and state laws recognize the inter-relatedness of natural and

cultural resources, including the 1916 National Park Act, the 1917 Iowa State Park Act, the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act, the 1972 California Environmental Quality Act, and 1980 Alaska National Interests Land Act. At the same time, many other laws focus exclusively on protecting natural resources *or* cultural resources: the 1891 Forest Reserve Act, the 1935 Historic Sites Act, the 1964 Wilderness Act, and the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, to name only a few. As a result, we have developed a fragmented way of thinking about environmental stewardship. Even so, the Antiquities Act still serves its intended purposes, evidence not only of its legal soundness, but also that a holistic concept of environmentalism still has merit in the modern world.

While there is increasing recognition that "the bios" and "the cultural" must work together, it is still difficult to engage in more than dialogue. In addition to philosophically inconsistent legislation, professional specialization has bred institutional segregation, competition for funding, and a tendency to associate only with those of similar training and interests. Specialization thus tends to keep professionals of diverse expertise from collaborating even when it would be of mutual benefit. Ironically, one of the things lost in the modern university is the very notion of *universe*. As a result, entrenched philosophical differences about what

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resources should be preserved, protected, or restored make collaboration a true intellectual challenge.

For instance, the National Park Service has developed an extensive protocol for studying and evaluating historic and prehistoric resources in their environmental settings—cultural landscape studies—the objective of which is to protect or restore human-made resources in landscapes that evoke an appropriate sense of time and place. Although historical botanists and other naturalists may participate in the process, the central focus remains on things made by people. The natural environment, even though it may be an environment that has been manipulated by humans for agriculture or other purposes, often is treated as setting (McClelland 1998; National Park Service guidelines). Conversely, a prairie ecologist wrote in a recently published book that “...just as important as reestablishing native vegetation is restoring the structural integrity of the prairie landscape, in other words, removing everything that is not prairie, such as buildings, rock piles, old machinery, wells, shelterbelts, and other human-made features” (Licht 1997, 143).

It is time for a serious dismantling of obstacles that prevent greater professional collaboration. There are compelling reasons to do so. First, the pressures to intensify land use will continue unabated, and, as a result, will continue to erode or degrade

open space, threaten more plant and animal species, and rip up more of the historic fabric that, in many ways, defines the diverse cultures of America. Second, regardless of which professional line we walk as environmentalists, there is a common cause that unites us: to inculcate in our fellow human beings a greater respect for the environment that sustains us physically and nurtures our spirit.

It is difficult to overstate the centrality of professional deference in the search for collaboration among professionals. Nora Mitchell and Susan Buggey recently explored the potential for convergence of the nature–culture dichotomy in the proposed anthropological approach for the World Heritage Committee’s Global Strategy. This approach would combine existing criteria for evaluating the natural and cultural resources of potential World Heritage Sites to “facilitate recognition of the diverse values of both cultural landscapes and protected landscapes” (Mitchell and Buggey 2000, 43). On the surface, this seems like an eminently sensible proposition, but it also has an unmistakable reinventing-the-wheel quality, albeit on a global rather than national scale.

Twenty years ago, folklorists and cultural anthropologists argued persuasively for the inclusion of “cultural conservation” in federal historic preservation guidelines. The result was a set of special guidelines for

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evaluating “traditional cultural properties” (Parker and King, n.d). It is true that these guidelines have resulted in some notable resource studies, mostly documented in the technical literature, but they have not stimulated any appreciable degree of communication, let alone collaboration, among historians, folklorists, and cultural anthropologists—and these are supposedly sister disciplines. Guidelines alone will not produce collaboration.

While the intellectual dissonance can be alternately ironic, amusing, and frustrating, there are other signs that we are capable of overcoming our institutional and intellectual handicaps. An increasing number of instances of professional collaboration have produced new models for resource protection and environmental education. The National Park Service represents perhaps the best institution where the “bios” and “culturals” *can* collaborate to achieve common as well as separate goals. Certainly, there are many stories of failed cooperation within the ranks of the National Park Service, but its organic mission remains the same today as when it was established: “to conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (16 U.S.C. 1; Brown 2000).

It is more difficult for state park agencies to forge teamwork. State laws authorizing park systems vary widely. Most of them were passed between 1890 and the early 1930s, when, by today’s standards, the professional establishment, then in its infancy, took a very narrow view of history and American culture. Even so, some of the earliest state parks were historical parks established to preserve Revolutionary War sites, Civil War battlefields, military forts, and Indian–white battle sites, but land acquisition and state park management was and remains focused on promoting outdoor recreation and protecting natural areas. In addition, the structures of state government vary. Typically, state park functions are administered separately from historical and cultural affairs, which tends to reinforce the notion that historic sites and state parks should be distinct entities. Relatively few states—Alaska, Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Tennessee—house their State Offices of Historic Preservation with the same agency that has jurisdiction over state parks. Simple administrative proximity, however, has not fostered a widespread sense of common mission or collaboration among the professional ranks.

In some ways, the Iowa state park agency exemplifies both the norm and new directions. Authorized by the state legislature in 1917, the crea-

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tion of Iowa's state park system was placed in the hands of a commission that had a broad mandate to acquire lands with scientific interest, historic association, or natural scenic beauty. The board also was charged with investigating potential forest reserves, wildlife preserves, and places valuable for archaeology or geology (State of Iowa 1917). Despite a clear mandate to incorporate both natural and cultural resources into the state park system, the latter did not receive serious attention until the 1940s when the state's approaching centennial (in 1946) gave rise to a short-lived Historical Program. Even then, official interest in historic and prehistoric resources waned again in the 1950s, and cultural resource protection remained an administrative shadowland until the 1990s.

The 75th anniversary of the Iowa state park system and a coincidental environmental and institutional history of the state park agency had the effect of awakening an institutional memory and recapturing the agency's sense of mission to include a concern for all resources under its jurisdiction. Among other things, this led to Restore the Outdoors, a \$15 million dollar program to restore and rehabilitate Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) structures in state parks. It also influenced a more comprehensive approach to evaluating the resources of and designing management plans for designated state

preserves, which since 1965 have been managed under more restrictive guidelines and which now contain the most significant historic and prehistoric sites under the agency's jurisdiction.

Another example comes from South Carolina. The South Carolina Heritage Trust, created in 1976, is a state-funded program to acquire natural and cultural resources for the public (State of South Carolina 1976). At present, the Trust owns more than sixty heritage preserves totaling more than 75,000 acres. The goal of the Heritage Trust Program is not only to protect these public lands, but to make them available to state agencies, educational institutions, and public and private groups for research and teaching (Stroup 2000). South Carolina's heritage preserves, like Iowa's designated state preserves, are managed by an advisory board comprising professionals who represent a wide range of disciplines.

Currently, twelve of the sixty heritage preserves are classified as cultural sites; an additional eight have a cultural resource component. For the most part, these are prehistoric or historic Native American archaeological sites, but they also include an eighteenth-century town site, an early-eighteenth-century British fort, a mid-eighteenth-century farmstead, Civil War fortifications, and the ruins of an important nineteenth-century pottery works. As the cumulative acreage has climbed toward a

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100,000-acre cap imposed by the state legislature, it has been possible to shift more attention and funds to developing research and educational programs. For instance, the Trust now sponsors an annual archaeological excavation, four weeks in duration, at the site of a Native American village at the Great Pee Dee Heritage Preserve. Related public programs are designed to promote public awareness of archaeological, ethical, and preservation issues in the region. At some preserves, stewardship committees have been established, and their functions are to monitor preserve activity and provide interpretation of both natural and cultural history for school groups and at public events (Stroup 2000).

This brings us back to the underlying theme: that human actions are a factor in ecological processes and environmental change and that, at heart, environmental problems really are people problems. Perhaps, then, we could foster a greater sense of environmental stewardship by integrating the professional staff people who manage parks and by integrating the interpretation of cultural and natural history for people who visit parks. The previous examples reflect a relatively recent trend, not just in park and recreation agencies, but throughout natural resource agencies as well. Several factors have combined to signal the potential for greater dialogue and integration of natural and cultural resource man-

agement.

As state park systems mature, many agencies have taken stock of their physical assets as historic and cultural resources. In part, the new interest in historic park buildings is a result of surveys begun in the late 1980s to identify park structures built during the Great Depression under the auspices of the CCC and other New Deal work-relief programs. At least sixteen states have completed comprehensive surveys and listed hundreds of Depression-era park structures on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register of Historic Places 2000). As is true of Iowa, interpretive histories of several state park systems, most published in the last decade, also have focused new attention on the mission of state park agencies (see Authors' Endnote). As a result, state agencies have discovered important stories that are of interest to the public and that represent new opportunities to develop and deliver engaging interpretive programs to park visitors, who increasingly seek education and entertainment as part of their outdoor experience. Many park systems have always contained historic and prehistoric sites as part of their assets and generally have done a good job of protecting them. However, viewing other park assets, namely those built in the past century to serve park visitors, as culturally significant has fostered a greater interest in and understanding of

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cultural resource management in general.

Along with this new way of viewing park assets comes increased emphasis on developing appropriate interpretive themes, as well as managing those assets so as to preserve their historic integrity. A natural outcome of this is for park professionals to seek advice and support from cultural resource managers. Iowa, like many other states, through collaboration between park and historic preservation agencies, commissioned the evaluation and nomination of assets built as part of the New Deal public works programs with an eye toward listing them on the National Register. While listing offers a pragmatic benefit of raising awareness and public support to protect and enhance such assets (most frequently expressed in funding from legislatures and others), it also reflects a growing desire to act according to professional precepts. This is an outcome of the growing emphasis throughout the nation on park management as a science.

Other natural resource agencies have slowly embraced cultural resource management, and recent trends point in positive directions. Several factors have contributed to greater support for cultural resource management in agencies whose scope of work has been largely devoted to conserving and developing land, fish, wildlife, and forest resources. In many states, park and other natural

resource entities are tied together under a single, comprehensive resource administration. As resource divisions interact within their umbrella agency, they tend to alternately share, compete, and collaborate. One dynamic of such relationships is the diffusion of new technologies and ways of thinking throughout the divisions, regardless of how diverse their missions may be. Particularly, as park staff have focused on increasing professionalization, they have begun to adopt both natural and cultural core values in addition to the traditional values of park maintenance and providing recreation opportunities. To an extent, such values are transmitted to cohort divisions in subtle, yet effective ways.

As cultural resource managers have gained a louder voice in federal resource management agencies, that voice has begun to echo through the myriad state-federal relationships. Many of these relationships are forged through federal funding of state activities in areas such as park and recreation development, fish and wildlife management, and soil, water, and forest conservation. Early on, there was a trend toward exempting federally supported state projects from many of the requirements imposed on federal agencies by measures such as the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. For several reasons, not the least of which has been an increasingly

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sophisticated environmental constituency demanding that state activities supported with federal dollars be held to the same tests as federal agencies, states now comply with many of the same requirements as their federal counterparts.

When the environmental regulatory framework began to take shape in the 1970s, state resource managers often responded to such requirements with resistance, including those related to cultural resource protection. Over time, as they have become familiar with the protection goals and techniques of cultural resource management, many natural resource managers have developed greater appreciation for all cultural resources. Natural resource professionals who have entered the ranks more recently work side-by-side those who have memory of the time when their work was carried out unencumbered by cultural resource considerations, but increasingly both view cultural resources management as simply part of the regulatory landscape within which they work.

Doing so, however, is not the same as integrating natural and cultural resource management. An important factor in the Iowa story was the commitment of top agency leaders to cultural resource management as a core value. This commitment led to the adoption of a formal agreement between the state's natural and cultural resource agencies to consult and coordinate on matters related to his-

toric sites under the jurisdiction of the natural resources agency. This agreement, along with the example set by agency leaders, has created an environment in which staff in both agencies work in concert on National Register nominations, management and restoration of historic sites, and Section 106 compliance. It represents a cognitive shift that has opened the door for new programs to educate park visitors about natural resources, cultural resources, agency history, and site histories. Commitment on the part of leadership has been observed as a key element in other state natural resource entities that have begun to embrace cultural resource management as a core value.

There are other ways that park agencies can foster collaboration between "bios" and "culturals." They include more frequent use of interdisciplinary planning teams on which historians, archaeologists, and other cultural resource specialists are represented. At the policy level, cultural and natural resource agencies could cross-pollinate their boards and commissions. When policymakers commit to collaboration, it sends a powerful message to professional staff members.

In addition to dismantling barriers that impede communication and collaboration in natural and cultural resource agencies, we also need to consider the academic institutions that prepare professionals, for they are not without problems as well.

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Narrowly specialized programs of study, especially at the graduate level, do little to prepare resource management professionals for the diverse work environments in which they later find themselves. While this is a subject for another article, some guiding principles are readily visible. In colleges and universities, we could do much more to foster programs of study that cross the lines of history, geography, and cultural anthropology with those of forestry, wildlife biology, and botany. Equally important, we could seriously rethink the nature of scholarship, particularly in the humanities, to admit that there is intellectual merit in applied scholarship; and we could revalue the role of service in the holy trinity of the academic tenure and promotion system.

When professionals send frag-

mented and competing messages about resource value and stewardship, we should not be surprised by the confused echo. By reconciling our perceptions of the natural environment and the cultural landscape, we can provide more coherence to complex stories. When people, in the sense of common humanity, can find themselves in the story, there is a greater chance that a deeper understanding of the connections between human agency and environmental change will occur. If we can manage to do this with greater clarity and greater frequency, perhaps we can begin to foster in the public at large a greater sense of individual responsibility for environmental stewardship. And if we can do that, we will have rendered service to society that is without measure.

Authors' Note on Sources

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