The Challenge of Ethnography

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Ethnographic resources in national parks

The National Park Service often shares stewardship responsibility with indigenous people and cultural groups who have cultural, spiritual, and subsistence connections to park resources. These resources—known as *ethnographic resources*—include both the cultural and the natural features in a park that are assigned significance in the cultural system of a people traditionally associated with parklands before their designation as a national park. Ethnographic resources can include extant features, such as structures, archaeological sites, wildlife and other natural features, sacred or ceremonial locations or landscapes, and the material culture preserved in park museum collections, as well as intangible features, such as cultural values and traditions.[1]

Various legislative mandates require the National Park Service to work with traditionally associated peoples in an effort to include their perspectives in the planning, management, and interpretation of ethnographic resources. Mandates for working with traditionally associated peoples are rooted in the National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act of 1916, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). However, guidance for the implementation of an NPS ethnography program—so created in 1981 to distinguish the applied cultural anthropology program of working with living populations from the discipline of archaeology—first appeared in 1985 in Director's Order no. 28, *Cultural Resource Management,* which required parks to include ethnography in general management plans in order to understand how contemporary communities are traditionally associated with a park's lands and resources. Specific policies for ethnography were further instituted in the 1988 NPS *Management Policies* (most recently revised in 2006), in which ethnography was first included as an individual cultural resource category in 2001. These policies, in addition to the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline* (*NPS-28;* revised 1997), require consultation with people that have traditional associations with parklands. Beyond these guidelines and policies for all traditionally associated peoples, legislation such as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (AIRFA), the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), require research, consultation, and action to protect the interests of indigenous people.[2] But while policies are in place, the continued lowering of the ethnography program's overall visibility, a lack of servicewide commitment to and understanding and implementation of the program,

and an overall lack of funding and staffing of the program are realities that prevent the National Park Service from managing ethnographic resources at the levels as prescribed by its own management policies. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) notes that despite the plethora of legislation mandating that the National Park Service (as well as other federal agencies) carry out tribal consultation, "there remains a significant problem with implementation."[3] In 2003, the ACHP wrote an action plan for consultation with traditionally associated peoples. In this plan, the council states that consultation is particularly susceptible to lack of consistency, which "has culminated in misunderstandings, recriminations, increasing litigation and, more recently, in nationwide attention on the shortfalls of existing consultation efforts."[4] Consultation is a major component of the NPS ethnography program.

NPCA's Center for State of the Parks

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), founded in 1919, is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advocates for the health and preservation of the national park system, with a mission to protect and enhance America's national parks for present and future generations. In 2000, NPCA initiated the Center for State of the Parks (CSOTP) program with a goal of developing the first complete, comprehensive, and informed understanding of natural and cultural resource conditions in our national parks. With a standardized cultural resources research methodology based on Director's Order no. 28 and the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline,* as well as other legislation and Park Service policies, CSOTP cultural resources staff conduct a process that includes examining available NPS and outside research on the parks, and engaging in discussions with park and regional staff in order to assess the condition of cultural resources in individual park units.[5]

Like other cultural resource categories, the condition of ethnographic resources is assessed on a park-by-park basis by examining information available on completed research and its inclusion in park planning, staffing levels and access to needed expertise, interpretation, and threats to the resources.[6] To date, the CSOTP program has completed 70 assessments of individual park units, with several more under way. Specifically, the ethnography section of these assessments addresses questions meant to illustrate the visibility of individual parks' programs, identification and understanding of the program and of ethnographic resources by park staff, availability of needed expertise and management, and engagement of traditionally associated peoples. Data synthesized as a result of these 70 assessments overwhelmingly indicate a significant lack of consistency in approaches to ethnography programs, including addressing traditional uses of parklands, working with communities of traditionally associated peoples, and preserving and interpreting the ways in which parklands are held sacred or otherwise significant by different cultural groups.

As ethnography is a relatively new commitment for the National Park Service, a limited number of parks are mandated by their enabling legislation to fulfill the requirements of an ethnography program (e.g., Nez Perce National Historical Park, Big Hole National Battlefield). In addition, while park managers often have determined that potential connections to traditionally associated peoples do exist, the funding and staffing needed to address these

additional areas of park history often do not fulfill the need. Other parks have not yet conducted the research necessary to determine if ethnographic resources exist. Some park staff have attempted to cultivate ethnography programs but have received no response from the traditionally associated peoples contacted, while other park managers are the heirs of past tensions created through a variety of means, including the creation of the parks themselves and the subsequent removal of their previous inhabitants. Essentially, ethnography is a challenge for park managers because it can refer to a wide variety of resources and cultural groups, as well as require additional management, research, funding, and staff.

Over nine years and 70 assessments, CSOTP has documented ratings for parks' ethnography programs ranging from an overall high of 98 ("excellent") to a low of 18 ("critical"; see explanation of rating system under endnote no. 5), and seen the sunset of the effort to inventory and document ethnographic resources with the gradual disappearance of the Ethnographic Resource Inventory. Just nine parks rated a score of "good" score or better, with a single park demonstrating ethnographic resources in "excellent" condition. These ratings indicate not only that there is active engagement by traditionally associated peoples, but also that the parks and park staff are invested in creating and maintaining relationships with these groups in order to best protect ethnographic resources. Across the 70 parks, however, the average rating for the condition of ethnographic resources is "poor," or a rating of 55, while 30% of parks rated "not applicable" for ethnography due to a lack of research available to determine if the park even had ethnographic resources (just nine definitively did not). Overall, 62% of parks assessed to date demonstrated ethnographic resources in "poor" or "critical" condition, challenged by an overall lack of research and management capacity.[7]

Below, a brief summary of CSOTP's research findings to date—outlining some of the most pervasive challenges inherent in preserving, managing, and interpreting ethnographic resources in the national park system—indicates that the ethnography program is often the least straightforward and the most challenging undertaking of all cultural resource programs.

The success of an ethnography program begins with research

Gathering the information necessary to determine the extent of traditionally associated peoples' connections to parklands and park resources—such as through an ethnographic overview and assessment or a traditional use study—depends on the allocation of funding and ethnography positions or access to universities or other partners to conduct research. Of the 70 parks assessed by the Center for State of the Parks, 30% did not have enough research or other information available with which to conduct an assessment of their ethnography programs—though for over half of these, evidence indicated that a program might be applicable and that additional research was warranted. Overall, 66 percent of parks where an ethnography program existed or might apply had no ethnographic overview and assessment or any other research identifying traditional uses and significance of the park to traditionally associated populations. Furthermore, documentation of ethnographic resources can bring additional challenges; in the views of some traditionally associated people, making culturally privileged resource knowledge known is not always regarded as the best protection for the

resource. For example, conducting research on and interpretation of sacred sites is often not considered culturally appropriate.

Staff presence is paramount and institutional memory is key

Attention to an ethnography program requires staff, funding, and time. The ability of a park to cooperate effectively with traditionally associated peoples and conduct the research necessary to identify, protect, and interpret ethnographic resources, where appropriate, calls for the dedication of professional staff time and energy to the facilitation of relationships, as well as continued staff tenure at the park to maintain relationships and retain institutional memory. In addition, though the tasks of identifying and documenting ethnographic resources in park units often fall to the regional anthropologist (ethnographer), the responsibility for managing and protecting those resources rests with the individual parks and their staff.

Each of the nine parks rating "good" (81–90) or "excellent" (91–100) in a CSOTP assessment had three key things in common: a cultural anthropologist (ethnographer), tribal liaison, or other staff members currently located at the park who are dedicating significant time to facilitating relationships; completed research, conducted by those dedicated staff members, upon which to build and expand an ethnography program; and high engagement of identified traditionally associated peoples. Each park in the next tier, those in the "fair" (61–80) category, had either the same staffing situation at some point in its recent history or access to specialized regional staff. For example, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area employs a cultural anthropologist at the park, and when a grave site was inadvertently discovered during a construction project, Chumash groups were brought together and reached agreement on reburial within 21 days. Santa Monica Mountains has a variety of ethnographic research completed, and relationships with traditionally associated American Indians are strong. Overall, CSOTP research indicates that existence of dedicated staff time at the park level is vital to the success of an ethnography program.

The ethnography program is in need of systemwide consistency and guidance

The definition applied by most parks to "ethnography" refers to an applied program of cultivating relationships and working directly with contemporary communities to document, interpret, and consult with people traditionally associated with parklands and park resources. However, some may approach an ethnography program as a way to acknowledge historical connections with different cultural groups, regardless of current recognition as "traditionally associated." The difference—determining whether or not living communities exist as a testament to the park's historic connections with cultural groups—can be difficult to determine and requires significant ethnographic research and consultation in gateway communities and other areas surrounding the park, or even in far-removed communities where people have resettled. Furthermore, while some parks work primarily with indigenous people, others face an expansive definition of "traditionally associated" that can include everything from European immigrants to the descendants of African slaves to third-genera-

tion ranching families. While there are illustrative examples, such as African American associations with Underground Railroad sites or Japanese Americans at Manzanar National Historic Site, discussed in the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline,* it takes a program where anthropologists can share their research and knowledge to identify who can be included in a community or group, or how to continue maintaining effective relationships with these groups.[8] Overall, ethnography in the National Park Service currently lacks someone to head the program who can coordinate information-sharing and ensure that policies and practices are kept current and consistent and followed by parks and regions. This guidance and dedication to the program was lost when the senior anthropologist, Muriel ("Miki") Crespi, passed away in 2003 and the position was left vacant. In a letter to the Department of the Interior, the American Anthropological Association raised concerns that the Park Service had not yet filled this position, stating that a chief ethnographer "insures that ethnography continues to play a critical role in the planning, management and design of national parks, recreation areas and heritage sites," and that without this leadership, NPS would be unable to fulfill its obligations under such legislation as NHPA, AIRFA, and NEPA.[9]

Because of the lack of guidance, who qualifies as "traditionally associated" is often fluid and unclear

Despite the fact that the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline* and CSOTP's assessments show that many nonindigenous ethnic and cultural groups could fall under the official definition of "traditionally associated," there is little guidance to address those that fall outside the current government-to-government model as actively used by the National Park Service. According to the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline,* cultural groups identified as "traditionally associated" with park resources include people and populations who assign significance to a park and its resources because those resources are "closely linked with their own sense of purpose, existence as a community, and development as ethnically distinctive peoples."[10] In addition, such people are those who "remain attached to the area despite having been relocated" and whose "associations to park resources will usually have endured for at least two generations."[11] This definition can extend well beyond the common category of American Indians.

CSOTP's assessments have shown that 37% of 70 parks studied have a capacity for an ethnography program involving nonindigenous peoples. However, 31% of those parks with such a potential have no research into this possibility and, therefore, their programs could not be assessed. In addition, of those parks with active ethnography programs involving nonindigenous peoples, 78% of these demonstrate ethnographic resources in "poor" or "critical" condition.

Some parks have shown considerable effort to include nonindigenous people in ethnographic relationships. At Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, park staff attempt to work with members of the Gullah/Geechee cultures to assure their cultural representation in the park (see cover photo). The site is now part of a new Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission that will work to preserve the culture, which is a unique blend of West African cultures formed among formerly enslaved peoples on isolated plantations along the

southeastern coast of the United States. The park and its relationship with this group were keys to the formation of a greater understanding of Gullah/Geechee history through a heritage corridor.[12] Members of this unique cultural group, in turn, provide dynamic and unique interpretive programs at the park, such as traditional basketry and musical demonstrations.

Other parks are making great strides to develop a more expansive understanding of ethnographic relationships. When Shenandoah National Park was established in 1935, almost 500 rural families of European descent were displaced to allow the Civilian Conservation Corps to re-establish what was then considered a "natural" landscape, devoid of human habitations. Once-inaccurate impressions of these "mountain people" have more recently given way to several ethnographic and archaeological studies about the people who once lived in several hollows and villages in the Shenandoah Valley. Despite the fact that the park has no official ethnography program, and despite a rocky history, both park staff and descendants of these displaced people are attempting to build a more positive relationship and to interpret this once-lost piece of history.

Generally, however, such parks as these are not the norm. The guidance for the utilization of this broader definition of "traditionally associated" is difficult for many parks to meet, and therefore there might be reluctance to explore possibilities that would not only enhance relationships with local communities, but would also improve visitors' experiences and their understanding of the local culture and history.

By the same token, addressing American Indian populations as "traditionally associated" can be equally challenging

Traditionally associated peoples may include groups who are nonindigenous, but it is first and foremost American Indians who have specific rights under federal laws enacted to improve federal responsibility. Though the more conventional definition of "traditionally associated" often refers to American Indians—including Native Alaskans and Native Hawaiians—and is most often implemented in national parks in this way, even those programs following this model have come across significant challenges. While an applied ethnography program might be more simply implemented in the West, where more parks work with American Indian tribes on a unique government-to-government basis, the success of the program and relationship-building is mainly dependent on a high level of staff time dedicated to facilitating relationships with traditionally associated peoples.

Of the 49 parks that had enough research to enable CSOTP to assess their ethnography programs, each had a program that dealt to at least some degree with American Indian, Native Alaskan, or Native Hawaiian populations. However, 43% of the ethnographic resources at these parks are in "poor" or "critical" condition. These include parks that have had little success in engaging those identified as having traditional associations with park resources, as well as those that have either no staff dedicated to the relationships or staff with higher priorities who can tend to these relationships and programs only as time allows.

Out of the 21 remaining parks that were not assessed for their ethnographic resources due to a lack of available research, 48% had the capacity for an ethnography program based on a government-to-government relationship model between national park units and Ameri-

can Indian tribes, but could not address these resources because of a lack of funding to conduct necessary research or a lack of staff dedicated to cultivating such relationships. Despite the fact that American Indian groups have a key interest in parks, many parks have found it difficult to develop or maintain these relationships and programs due, in large part, to the current lack of leadership, guidance, and funding within the National Park Service.

Additional legislation benefits ethnography programs

Of the nine parks rating "good" or higher for ethnographic resources, five have reference to a provision for ethnography in their enabling legislations. In Alaska, for example, ANILCA legislation requires each park unit to address subsistence practices within parklands by Alaska Natives. These parks are effectively paying attention to the lifeways and perspectives of Alaska Natives, and the Alaska Region's ethnography program is particularly well developed. In fact, two of the nine highest-scoring parks to date—including the single park to score an "excellent" in the ethnographic resources category—are Alaskan parks.

At Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, the park's long-tenured staff works together to incorporate the values and perspectives of the region's indigenous peoples and rural residents in community outreach, interpretation, and management practices, and boasts an extensive set of ethnographic and historic publications. At Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, park staff are working closely with Tlingit groups more and more in recent years. In 1995, the park participated in a NAGPRA repatriation of human remains and associated funerary objects with the Hoonah Tlingit. The tribe elected to rebury the remains inside the park, and both park staff and tribal members consider the objects and current burial site to be important ethnographic resources to be managed jointly. Each of these parks is guided in its efforts to work with traditionally associated peoples by the additional legislation ANILCA provides. Alaska, in short, is a special case because of ANILCA, the landmark legislation that requires each park unit to address subsistence practices within parklands by Alaska Natives.

The state of Hawai`i also has a legislative history that lends itself to the positive development of ethnography programs at the park level. As with several parks across the national park system, the creation and expansion of Hawai`i Volcanoes National Park in the 1930s resulted in the displacement of native peoples and the deterioration of relationships between the park and Native Hawaiians. This legacy of distrust continued until the 1978 Hawai`i State Constitutional Convention, during which Native Hawaiians pursued a program of ethnic preservation, including the adoption of traditional Hawaiian names for locations and the establishment of Hawaiian as the official language of the state for the first time since the overthrow of the kingdom in 1893. Another outcome of this convention was the creation of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, which helped to facilitate further relationships between Hawaiians and the government.[13] Less than 20 years later at Hawai`i Volcanoes, the establishment of the park's cultural resource program in 1994 allowed park staff to begin actively consulting with the *Kupuna* (Hawaiian elders) and other groups in order to develop more culturally sensitive management strategies and interpretive programs for Hawai`i Volcanoes. Park staff have put forth significant effort to include Native Hawaiians in park projects and deci-

sions and have paid particular attention to the rights to religious practices of Native Hawaiians under AIRFA (Figure 1). Key to this are meetings between the *Kupuna* and ethnography program and interpretation staff that keep communication channels open and Native Hawaiian points of view central in park decision-making. This is made possible primarily by the dedicated cultural resources staff at the park who are committed to these relationships. Furthermore, in addition to being cognizant of NAGPRA compliance, the park has also developed a plant gathering permit system, fairly unique within the National Park Service, that allows Native Hawaiians to harvest traditional plants. The park maintains a thorough database that records each permit issued, which has led to a greater understanding of native culture and greater cooperation between the park and Native Hawaiian groups.

Conclusion

When national park units actively work with groups of people traditionally associated with their resources, a unique story is created, one which can enhance the public's understanding and appreciation of landscapes, wildlife, and the multifaceted histories that are integral parts of our national heritage. By preserving and interpreting ethnographic resources through an active ethnography program, national parks enrich the park experience for visitors and add another dimension to the intrinsic importance of preserving these resources for future generations.

But without both collective and individual initiative pushing the ethnography program forward, it will not survive. Adequate leadership, both at a national level and at the parks, is

Figure 1 Investiture of Hawaiian royalty, Hawai`i Volcanoes National Park. Photo courtesy NPS.

key to guiding the development of positive relationships with cultural and ethnic groups interested and invested in resource management. Ethnography programs must be staffed at the park and the regional levels in order to fulfill the Park Service's own mandates as defined by management policies. The experiences and efforts of those parks that have collaborated successfully with traditionally associated peoples—as well as of those that have attempted to do so—must be documented and shared, so that the National Park Service has the information and the tools to put into practice throughout the system what has been shown to work in parts of the system.

Without effective ethnography programs, interpretation in national parks lacks significant and culturally relevant aspects of American heritage. In the context of the recent push to increase diversity among visitors and employees in the national park system, the incorporation of ethnography and the perspectives of traditionally associated peoples into park management and interpretation can expand the audience for parks' exhibits and interpretive activities to a more diverse population. In addition, the US government requires the National Park Service, as well as other federal agencies, to consult with American Indian tribes for compliance purposes through various legislation. However, perspectives of American Indian tribes and other traditionally associated people can also increase Park Service understanding of management policy implications and can help build effective and lasting management strategies. With the engagement of traditionally associated peoples, park managers can efficiently manage resources, not just as isolated objects or strictly natural features, but as part of a larger, complex system that includes local communities and their cultural values. When the National Park Service and traditionally associated peoples are able to work together to create an avenue for shared experiences and ideas, not only can NPS develop more effective and culturally sensitive management strategies, it can also more richly relate America's stories while reaching a broader, more diverse audience through increased interpretation of the oft-forgotten aspects of our national heritage.

Endnotes

1. National Park Service, *NPS-28: Cultural Resource Management Guideline* (Washington, D.C.: NPS, 1998), 157, 181.
2. National Park Service, National Center for Cultural Resources, Archeology and Ethnography Program, *Legacy: Muriel "Miki" Crespi, National Park Service Chief Ethnographer—Her Professional Contributions to the National Park Service* (Washington, D.C.: NPS, 2003), 8, 11–12.
3. National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, *Tribal Consultation: Best Practices in Historic Preservation* (Washington, D.C.: NATHPO, 2005), 15.
4. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, *Action Plan on ACHP Native American Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: ACHP, 2003), 3.
5. CSOTP's cultural resource assessment methodology is based on the National Park Service's Director's Order no. 28 and its counterpart, the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline,* as well as federal legislation and other NPS policies requiring researchers to evaluate parks' cultural resource management practices against NPS standards. CSOTP

researchers gather information on research, planning, staffing, interpretation, and threats to cultural resources at each park (including history, archaeology, cultural landscapes, historic structures, museum and archival collections, and ethnography). Ratings are assigned for individual inquiries in each of these resource categories on a 0–10 scale, using best professional judgment based on the evidence available. Average ratings range as follows: 0–35, "critical"; 36–60, "poor"; 61–80, "fair"; 81–90, "good"; and 91–100, "excellent." Ratings are interpreted in professionally designed reports intended to educate the public about resource conditions and advocate for the needs of America's national parks. To view CSOTP's methodology and reports, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks.

6. Cultural resource categories as assessed by CSOTP's methodology as part of the *Cultural Resource Management Guideline* are as follows: history, archaeology, cultural landscapes, historic structures, museum and archival collections, and ethnography.
7. Of the 70 total parks assessed by CSOTP to date, 49 were assessed for ethnographic resources while 21 were not rated due to a lack of information available from which to generate a rating. Percentage rates in this paper were derived by examining the frequency of ethnographic resource challenges in each park unit assessed, such as lack of specialized staff or the absence of ethnographic research, and averaging accordingly out of 70 total park assessments and 49 total ethnographic resource assessments.
8. *NPS-28*, 158–159.
9. Damon Dozier, American Anthropological Association Director of Public Affairs, to Daniel Odess, National Park Service Assistant Associate Director for Park Cultural Resources, Washington, D.C., 12 March 2008. Letter in archives of the American Anthropological Association, on-line at www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/NPS-Letter-Ethnographer-Meeting-Request-031209.pdf.
10. *NPS-28,* 158.
11. *NPS-28*, 158–159.
12. A heritage corridor is a form of national heritage area, which is a place where there is a cohesive example of a nationally important landscape that shows patterns of human activity shaped by geography (refer to www.nps.gov/guge/faqs.htm).
13. Office of Hawaiian Affairs, "History," on-line at www.oha.org/.

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