

Creating Policy for the National Park Service: Addressing Native Americans and Other Traditionally Associated Peoples

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IN 1987, A DOCUMENT TITLED “NATIVE AMERICAN RELATIONSHIPS MANAGEMENT POLICY” was released for public comment by means of a *Federal Register* notice. This document was precedent-setting because it articulated the National Park Service’s (NPS’s) responsibility for addressing issues involving Native Americans and national parks. For the first time, NPS personnel were provided with direction to effectively recognize and consult with Native Americans who had connections to parklands.

Muriel (“Miki”) Crespi, the NPS chief ethnographer, finalized this groundbreaking document. Portions of this policy were included in the 1988 NPS *Management Policies* to formalize the agency’s official position regarding Native Americans, which became the catalyst for the NPS ethnography program.

This essay focuses on the development of the NPS ethnography program, taken from Crespi’s own documentation (Crespi 2002) and the recollections of the authors, who are anthropologists employed within and outside the NPS. It is a retrospective of how Crespi came to write that policy and develop further practices within NPS regarding not only Native Americans, but other people traditionally associated with park lands whose multiple heritages are now increasingly recognized and interpreted in NPS units throughout the USA. We conclude optimistically that the program will be re-energized in the 21st century to preserve for future generations the resources important to people traditionally associated with park lands.

In the late 1960s, two sweeping pieces of legislation—the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 1969) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA; 1966)—required federal agencies to actively seek public involvement in agency decision-making processes for natural and cultural resource management. NHPA authorized the National Register of Historic Places that, in turn, provided further impetus for the emerging ethnography program. In 1978, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) was enacted. This act reaffirmed American Indians’ rights to exercise traditional religious practices. While NPS began to consolidate its many disparate policies into a single document, Crespi and others found that there was “no explicit attention to local communities or the public in general” in NPS guidance. Further, “American Indians, who are culturally and historically connected to over 40% of the national park units, were only mentioned a few times, mostly in regard to hand-craft sales and exhibit materials” (Crespi 2002:32).

Federal agencies responded to AIRFA with a review of their policies concerning management of resources with cultural significance. If existing policies were found to be inadequate, agencies were required to formulate new policies for American Indian access to and ceremonial use of traditional spiritual or ceremonial places on federal lands. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) called for consultation between representatives of federal agencies and the Alaska Natives whose lives would be affected by creating new parks and preserves in that state—in effect requiring the agencies to address living peoples. These legislative drivers for policy change (NEPA, NHPA, AIRFA, ANILCA) led to the creation of a position of cultural anthropologist in the NPS Program and Policy Development Office in Washington, D.C.

In October 1981, Doug Scovill, then chief anthropologist in Washington, hired a chief ethnographer: Muriel Crespi (Figure 1). She was given two tasks: one was to complete the Native American Relationships Management Policy that had been started in 1978 with the implementation of AIRFA, and the other was to design, initiate, nurture, and develop a program in applied anthropology (Crespi 2002).

The introduction of the ethnography program responded to the need for guidance in implementing various aspects of the relatively new pieces of legislation. Since NPS did not have any agency-specific legislation requiring the use of cultural anthropology, Crespi looked to NEPA, which instructed federal agencies to pay attention to the sociocultural environment; it also reminded agencies of their explicit obligation to incorporate consultations with federally recognized American Indian tribes into the planning process (Crespi 2003:23). Additional justification came from AIRFA, which instructed federal agencies to report back to Congress within one year on their new programs, policies, and procedures for working with American Indians whose sacred places had been incorporated into federal holdings.

What became evident to Crespi was the need to make NPS more responsive to and aware of the broader range of human communities who place cultural significance on resources within national parks, beyond the conventional associations of famous individuals or military battles. Crespi sought to democratize NPS management decisions by directing its attention to people who were “traditionally associated” with park lands and resources and to provide them with a voice through planning and consultations. She envisioned managers making informed decisions based on knowledge of people whose interests and cultural

Figure 1 Miki Crespi at Aspen, Colorado. Photo by Shirley Fiske.



and historical connections to park lands and resources had not been visible before (Crespi 2003:31). Crespi discovered that even though NEPA and NHPA directed agencies to involve the public, NPS managers were reluctant to consult outside agency boundaries (Crespi 2002:25). Managers tended to think of park-associated people as either (a) connected to the archaeology of past cultures, or (b) visitors to parks. Instead, Crespi insisted on focusing on contemporary living communities with histories, cultural identities, spiritual values, and symbolism attached to park landscapes, buildings, sites, and even natural resources with cultural value.

Managers had to be “flexible, and responsive to external factors, especially as information enter[ed] from outside the system, through Native American consultations and studies of traditional resource users. Rather than rely exclusively on the established chain of command and organizational processes, decision-making necessarily becomes more democratized, user-oriented, and intricate, as data on contemporary people and behavioral systems join laws, regulations, and policies in driving management choices” (Crespi 2003:31).

The chief ethnographer’s role was to include anthropological approaches in NPS policies, and Crespi’s understanding of and commitment to that role gave her a broad vision in creating the ethnography program. She knew that she needed to encourage both *internal* and *external* cultural changes and alliances in order to promote the program within NPS. In reflections on her career written shortly before her death in April 2003, she described the major challenges and focus of her efforts. As she described it (2002:28), it was critical to the success of the program to:

- Create an identity for cultural anthropology—demonstrate its viability as a social science—and legitimize cultural anthropology in terms the agency would understand;
- Demonstrate its value to parks so that decision-makers, planners, and managers would perceive the need for it;
- Convince NPS associate directors and other top management of ethnography’s value and benefits to the agency, and get higher-level support so that budget allocations and formulations, and new policies, would be responsive;
- Get external allies: work closely with professional organizations, such as the Society for Applied Anthropology and American Anthropological Association for congressional support of the program; and
- Institutionalize planning and policy documents for ethnography.

Crespi went about creating a team of people within the National Park Service hierarchy who were supportive or could be supportive of what she was attempting, such as her supervisor, Doug Scovill, and his superior, Associate Director for Cultural Resources Jerry Rogers, the museum planning staff, the American Indian Liaison Office, the NPS Budget Office, the NPS Office of Planning, and the Office of the Solicitor. Crespi needed to demonstrate that the ethnography program was not a marginal program but one that has great relevance and importance to the NPS mission (Crespi 2002:28).

The mandate for ethnography needed to be *institutionalized*. Crespi used this word frequently and understood what it meant with respect to NPS management policies and guid-

ance. Crespi ensured that the policies spelled out the agency's requirements for attention to contemporary living people and to carrying out ethnographic research. Additionally, she ensured that NPS regional offices and some parks had anthropologists on staff. By the mid-1990s, almost every region had hired a regional anthropologist, as had a few park units (Figure 2). Crespi also built an *external team* to advocate for the program's importance on Capitol Hill and with top agency management by engaging national and local anthropological associations who were able to provide professional academic support for an applied anthropology program in the NPS (Fiske 2004).

Such support was forthcoming as early as 1987, when Theodore Downing, president of the Society for Applied Anthropology, wrote to NPS Director William Penn Mott, stating that Mott had "wisely determined that ethnographic research is a practical way to achieve a holistic perspective on the place of the National Park Service within the complexities of American culture and its subcultures" (Downing 1987).

The decade following the release of the 1988 NPS *Management Policies* brought a sea-change with respect to recognition of American Indians and other traditional groups in park management decisions. The 1988 policies mention Native Americans 35 times in reference to access to sacred areas and input into decision-making. Other innovations in the policy lexicon included frequent references to "local communities," "park-associated groups," and "contemporary people" (Crespi 2003:31).

The passage of the Native America Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 became a major impetus for NPS to conduct research on and consultation with American Indian tribes, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians. The act created the need to identify consulting parties and their "cultural affiliation," or the relationship of shared group identity that can be reasonably traced historically or prehistorically between a present-day

Figure 2 Crespi and her ethnography staff in 1994. Top row (l-r): Brent Stoffle, Rosemary Sucec, Dave Ruppert, Tim Cochrane. Middle row: Crespi, Ed Natay, Mike Evans, Becky Joseph, Phil Holmes, Fred York. Bottom row: Herbert Anungazuk, Helen Phillips, Jenny Masur, Allison Peña, Jacilee Wray.



Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an earlier identifiable group (25 USC §3001[2]). A *cultural affiliation study* is used by park anthropologists to acquire this information so that establishing links between present-day individuals and the remains of deceased people can be made to carry out repatriation. This is a crucial and time-consuming requirement of regional and park ethnographers (Crespi 2003:62).

Anthropologists must conduct credible applied anthropological studies that produce salient data for park management (Crespi 2003:38). One method used by the ethnography program to assist parks is the *rapid ethnographic assessment*, which can provide planning and site-specific information in an expedited manner for developing culturally informed alternatives. This study type can be used to respond to immediate needs for cultural information; for example, late in a planning process when a park realizes that it is lacking the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision, or when park interpretive programs need to address ethnographically meaningful places and customary uses people wish to have interpreted to visitors (Crespi 2003:62). The longer, more detailed *ethnographic overview and assessment* combines a literature review with ethnographic field work to provide parks with in-depth information about the relationships between park-associated cultural groups and park resources. Relationships may be based on treaties, traditional or oral histories, long-term residential patterns, and so forth, and resources with cultural value may include plants and animals, landscape features, archaeological sites, historic buildings, sacred places, and others. The goal of such assessments is to identify the values that park-associated cultural groups place on park resources and help the park make informed decisions about how to manage those resources, taking into consideration cultural knowledge, concerns, and sensitivities (Crespi 2003:62).

Early in its development, the ethnography program defined as “ethnographic resources” those sites, structures, objects, cultural and natural landscapes, and human dimensions that would be defined by contemporary people as being meaningful, significant, and crucial to their sense of their own past and who they are. The term refers to places and objects that could not be fully understood if they were disengaged from the people who made them or used them. “[W]e came up with this concept called ethnographic resources ... those sites, structures, objects, those tangible resources that are traditionally valued by present-day people because they contributed to their history and their life. So ... an archeological resource to which the Hopi traveled and where they pray is not just an archeological resource, we call it an ethnographic resource because ... present-day people value it in special ways and the park needs to have their attention drawn to that human dimension” (Crespi 2002:42). The concept of “ethnographic resources” piggybacked on existing, and familiar, concepts such as “archaeological resources,” “historic resources,” and “natural resources.” It was intended to bring visibility to the human dimensions of sites, structures, objects, and landscapes (Crespi 2003:42).

The 2001 NPS *Management Policies* included the new definition for park associated groups: *traditionally associated peoples*, a term which includes those cultural groups and people who have a connection to a park that predates the park’s establishment, whose association with the park has endured at least two generations, and to whom the park’s resources are essential for their continued identity as culturally distinct peoples. The goal was “to high-

light those people who had a long-term association with the park resources and who the NPS needed to seek out—not only American Indians but people who have traditionally lived in and around Parks . . . such as Hispanic Americans and African Americans with close connections to parks” (Crespi 2002:39–40). This language called park managers’ attention to traditionally associated peoples who might have legitimate concerns about the impacts that NPS actions could have on community lifeways, histories, and religions (Crespi 2003:27).

An important measure of change between the 1988 and the most recent (2006) editions of the NPS *Management Policies* is the increase in references to consultation with traditionally associated peoples, ranging from the informal exchange of information to the formal anthropological fieldwork necessary to understand the effects of proposed agency decisions and management actions on a group’s culture, relationships to culturally significant sites, and places with cultural meaning. The 2006 policies also reinforce Native American rights to pursue traditional cultural practices at parks.¹ The policies now acknowledge that special contemporary relationships exist between the integrity of park resources and the integrity of contemporary tribal life, which requires consultation when Park Service actions might impinge upon them. Concomitantly, NPS obligates itself to protecting resources in ways that reflect “informed concern” for the contemporary people and cultural systems traditionally associated with them (NPS 2005; Crespi 2003:20).

With the implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act (1993), managers were held accountable for their expenditures of public dollars by reporting annual measurable results of their management activities. The ethnography program quantified the results of its research and resources management efforts through a servicewide database called the Ethnographic Resources Inventory (ERI). The ERI was a tool developed to track the identification and management of ethnographic resources and document park-level progress in managing ethnographic resources. Parks found this resource database challenging to populate and maintain, however. While the database adequately tracked resources, it could not be used to document less tangible outcomes that the ethnography program was designed to promote, such as developing relationships and conducting systematic research.

Since the development and implementation of the ERI remained unfunded and it was not being effectively used in the field, its use was discontinued, contributing to a perception that the management of ethnographic resources could simply be accommodated by other existing resource management programs such as archaeology, history, and museum collections. As a result, the ethnography program declined. Since April 2003, when Miki Crespi lost her third battle with cancer, the position of chief ethnographer has remained unfilled.

In its 2001 report to NPS, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, the National Park System Advisory Board recommended that the agency “nurture living cultures and communities,” echoing a vision that Crespi had throughout her NPS career:

We are coming to understand that parks become richer when we see them through the cultures of people whose ancestors once lived there. . . . Throughout the national park system, this kind of knowledge may be lost as aging bearers of traditional culture die without the opportunity to fully share their deep understanding of the nature and spirit of place. Place

names, migration routes, harvesting practices, prayers and songs may be lost forever. These irreplaceable connections should be nurtured and conserved for future generations. . . . National Park Service's relationships with indigenous and local people must become steeped in understanding, patience, and mutual respect earned over time (National Park System Advisory Board 2001:22).

To address these and other recommendations, the NPS National Leadership Council met at Canyon de Chelly National Monument in May 2003, just one month after Crespi's death. There, the NPS's highest level of leadership was able to spend a week considering some of the fundamental issues to which she devoted her career. Indeed, many of the NPS's guiding principles at this important moment in its history embrace the National Park System Advisory Board's vision: to reach beyond our boundaries in promoting connections between parks and diverse communities, strengthen diverse representation in the NPS workforce, make parks relevant in the course of rapidly changing national demographics, and help instill in youth the values for preserving land, resources, and the lessons of history.

As stated by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan in their documentary series *National Parks: America's Best Idea*:

[T]he story of the national parks . . . is much more than the story of the most stunning landscapes and sacred places in our country. It is the story of people: people from every conceivable background—rich and poor; famous and unknown; soldiers and scientists; natives and newcomers; idealists, artists, and entrepreneurs. . . . [The national parks] remain a refuge for human beings seeking to replenish their spirit: geographies of memory and hope where countless American families have formed an intimate connection to their land and then passed it to their children (Burns and Duncan 2009).

In recent guidance about the use of the landmark film series, Acting NPS Director Dan Wenk reminded park managers that “every park was someone's home. The creation of parks was influenced by Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans. The stories of [these] and other minorities already exist in national parks and need only to be discovered or told.”

As the National Park Service prepares to celebrate its first one hundred years and position itself for the next, how will NPS discover these stories? What tools will we use to understand the deeply embedded cultural values attached to park lands and resources by generation upon generation of the diverse American cultural landscape? How will we steward resources with an informed knowledge of the many layers of cultural meaning they contain? How will we foster a connection between park lands and the complex cultural fabric of future generations? We believe that a re-energized, redesigned ethnography program is necessary to help accomplish these goals. With its emphasis on an understanding of cultural values, institutions, and complexities, the ethnography program may be the National Park Service's greatest asset in helping to develop systematic approaches to embracing a diverse America and connecting it with national parks for the next century and beyond.

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Endnote

1. The 2006 policies state that the AIRFA regulations (36 CFR 2.1d) are soon to be revised, and that NPS “policy is evolving in this area” (NPS 2005: §5.3.5.3.1). The authors are optimistic that the Park Service will pursue this “evolution” and that the regulation will be changed in the near future so that superintendents will have the latitude to permit Native Americans to gather specific sacred or traditionally utilized plants.

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