

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

David Louter and Lisa Mighetto, guest editors

Introduction

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IN HIS RECENT DOCUMENTARY “THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA’S BEST IDEA,” Ken Burns explored the unique role of the National Park Service (NPS) in preserving the nation’s past. The National Parks Second Century Commission Report, released in 2009, also highlighted the important connections between the places managed by the Park Service and key stories of US history. Yet one important question remains: what role do environmental historians play in the interpretation and management of these sites? In March 2010, the American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) and NPS examined this question during a full-day workshop on the relationship between environmental history and the agency. More than 80 people, including academics and Park Service employees, participated in the discussion and activities.

The following essays resulted from the presentations and conversations at this workshop. Generally, the authors examine ways in which environmental history can inform and influence management decisions and, specifically, how environmental historians can participate in decision-making processes. They ask how environmental history can advance the NPS role, as the nation’s lead preservation agency, in interpreting environmental history for the American public.

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