

# Cultural Resource Management and Planning for the Impacts of Climate Change

*Shaun Eyring and Brian Goeken, guest editors*

## Foreword

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ACROSS THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, from War in the Pacific National Historical Park in Guam and American Memorial Park in Saipan to the National Mall in Washington, DC, from Sitka National Historical Park in Alaska to Death Valley National Park in California and Nevada, from Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site in New Hampshire to Everglades and Dry Tortugas national parks in Florida, we are seeing the effects of climate change on the natural and cultural resources we are charged with protecting. The threats—melting permafrost, retreating glaciers, increasing intensity of storm surges, rising sea levels, changes in precipitation patterns, migrating pests—are as diverse as the resources we manage.

These impacts are also being felt in communities across the nation, posing threats to the natural and cultural resources that represent the fabric of these special places and our shared heritage. Whether inside our parks, or beyond them in the cities, towns, and rural areas that the National Park Service also serves through a variety of programs, we face common challenges of planning for the preservation of the country's heritage resources.

Since the mid-2000s the National Park Service, as one of the leaders of the national historic preservation program working with many partners, has undertaken an aggressive interdisciplinary program to develop a Climate Change Response Strategy that addresses both our responsibilities for stewardship of park resources as well as for providing guidance and support for the nation's cultural resources.

I want to emphasize the word interdisciplinary. Much of the research we hear and read about is focused on the impacts of climate change on natural resources—for example, the development of migration corridors for plant and animal species reacting to a changing climate. Our intention is to expand this focus. We want to ensure that we not only plan for the protection or sometimes unavoidable loss of assets due to changing climates, but also that

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*The George Wright Forum*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 35–36 (2015).

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we understand the historic and prehistoric information that may be lost and the community values and practices that will be adversely impacted. We want to learn from the study of past cultures who have responded to climate change, to understand what makes a culture resilient, and what increases its susceptibility to a changing environment.

Our strategic planning efforts are focused on the basic tenets of resource management: knowing what our resources are (significance, materials, and condition), the vulnerability of those resources to different threats, the options available for addressing those threats, the feasibility of those options, and, finally, the options for dealing with loss.

As the impacts of a changing climate become more evident and complex, we are facing many tough decisions, the difficulties of which are compounded by the multiplicity of decision-makers. Thus, in developing our management strategies and our guidance, we are focused on providing park and program managers with the policy framework and the questions that must be addressed in order to make informed and often difficult decisions. In addition, we have embarked on an aggressive interpretation and education strategy to use park experiences to educate visitors about climate change.

The essays that follow represent only part of this larger initiative of the National Park Service to address climate change and its impact on the nation's cultural resources—an effort in which we all must be engaged for it to be successful. I thank the George Wright Society for dedicating this issue of *The George Wright Forum* to this important topic.

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