

Applied Anthropology in the National Park Service's Second Century of Stewardship

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THE STORY OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY in the National Park Service (NPS) is multifaceted. We find application of anthropology in resource management, park planning, tribal consultation, interpretation and education, and in understanding the social and natural challenges facing the parks of today. In 2009, Jacilee Wray edited a series of articles in *The George Wright Forum* titled “Ethnography in the National Park Service: Past Lessons, Present Challenges, Future Prospects.” Other foundational pieces include the 2001 “Stewards of the Human Landscape” issue of *Common Ground: Archeology and Ethnography in the Public Interest*, and the 2001 “People and Places: The Ethnographic Connection” issue of *CRM*. Building on these and other early NPS ethnographic work, the authors offer a glimpse into the ways that ethnography (and cultural anthropology more fully) aids the National Park Service in its relationships with communities and with its statutory and regulatory responsibilities. In this issue of *The George Wright Forum*, we look towards the challenges of park management in our second century of stewardship following the NPS centennial in 2016. We consider the engagement of cultural anthropology in contemporary practices such as landscape-scale conservation and collaborative management, and offer examples and challenges for today.

Foundations of the NPS Cultural Anthropology Program

In 1981, the National Park Service hired Muriel “Miki” Crespi to complete a policy on Native American relationships and to establish an applied anthropology program. In 1987, NPS Director William Penn Mott wrote a lead column for an ethnography issue of *CRM Bulletin* welcoming ethnography and cultural anthropology to the National Park Service (Mott 1987).

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The new program was developed to provide information to the agency and its park units on the contemporary peoples and traditional communities associated with NPS cultural and natural resources. It was also charged with helping park units address requirements set forth in statutes such as the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the Alaska Native Interest Lands Conservation Act, and, later, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, to name but a few. Following Crespi's death in 2003, several professionals maintained the program in the national and field offices, and in 2012 NPS implemented a departmental reorganization. The supervisory cultural anthropologist position was moved within a new Office of Tribal Relations and American Cultures, under the management of Dr. Joe Watkins. A bureau cultural anthropologist, Jennifer Talken-Spauldning, came to the national office in 2015. The program coordinates with anthropologists and tribal liaisons in parks and regional offices to meet the needs of NPS.

The Cultural Anthropology Program continues to sponsor and conduct several kinds of research in order to identify traditionally associated groups and ethnographic resources in parks. The NPS *Cultural Resource Management Guidelines* define *ethnographic resources* as "a site, structure, object, landscape, or natural resource feature assigned traditionally legendary, religious, subsistence, or other significance in the cultural system of a group traditionally associated with it" (NPS 1998: Appendix A). A group is traditionally associated if: (1) its members regard the park's resources as essential to their group's development and continued existence; (2) the association has endured for at least two generations (40 years); and (3) the association began prior to the establishment of the park (NPS 1998: Chapter 10). Three useful research tools employed by the Cultural Anthropology Program include the ethnographic overview and assessment, traditional use studies, and rapid ethnographic assessments.

Ethnographic overview and assessment. The ethnographic overview and assessment is the most comprehensive background document for NPS managers. Aimed at existing information on resources traditionally valued by associated communities, the ethnographic overview and assessment may be derived entirely from existing documents, but it is often fleshed out through interviews with community members and other groups. The ethnographic overview and assessment may identify many groups associated with a park, and include recommendations for further in-depth research.

Traditional use studies. Traditional use studies fill in the data gaps identified by the ethnographic overview and assessment and satisfy the requirements of Alaska Native Interest Lands Conservation Act in relation to the traditions of Alaska Natives. This research typically requires a year of archival and field work with the collaboration of the traditional community. The anthropologist uses standard methodologies of ethnographic interviewing, participant observation, and seeking to understand the community from its own perspective.

Rapid ethnographic assessment. A third useful tool of many in the anthropologist's professional toolkit is the rapid ethnographic assessment. It employs interviews, observations, engagement of focus groups, mapping, and other documentary analysis techniques to provide information in advance of specific actions that have the possibility of impacting a group's

resources and traditions. A rapid ethnographic assessment may be completed where ethnographic data are needed to meet requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act. It is a focused tool, best completed in a matter of months.

Resonance of ethnographic landscapes and resources

The overview and assessment, traditional use study, rapid ethnographic assessment, and other baseline research provide an ethnographic foundation that still resonates today. In defining *ethnographic landscapes* as distinct from *cultural landscapes* and *landscapes of significance* as evaluated for National Register of Historic Places eligibility, Michael Evans, Alexa Roberts, and Peggy Nelson laid a foundation upon which many have added over the years. “Ethnographic landscapes within the NPS context” they note, “do not depend on National Register of Historic Places eligibility criteria for their existence, and importantly, are identified and defined by the cultural groups associated with them” (Evans 2001: 53). Whether it is an oral history project with Alaska Native elders in Denali National Park and Preserve that revealed previously unrecorded place names and historic hunting routes over a traditional landscape, or the identification of blended natural and cultural indigenous landscapes along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, our understanding of place-based significance has only grown over the years.

In 2001, NPS Northeast Regional Ethnographer Rebecca Joseph wrote about a particular type of ethnographic landscape, the living landscapes of American cities. Joseph noted that the diversity of people connected with urban national parks created challenges that ethnography could help meet. “Location does make a difference,” she said. “Urban national parks are integral parts of the built environment. They provide a laboratory in which to study the meaning of urban spaces through the knowledge of people who know them intimately” (Joseph, 2001: 29). With more than 80% of Americans living in urban areas, and many of the new NPS units established in the past 10 years in or near urban areas, today’s NPS is actively involved in understanding and engaging with urban neighborhoods and communities.¹

When Audrey Brown wrote about African American churches as ethnographic resources, and their deep significance to African American communities (Brown, 2001: 27), no one could have predicted the tragedies of recent church shootings and how central these same places are to healing within today’s communities. At a 2016 gathering of national heritage areas, a community leader from the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, which includes a church that suffered a shooting tragedy, said, “In these complex social eruptions, some of our heritage areas have [an] understanding of these things from the bottom.” He was reflecting on how cultural knowledge in place could be assembled in such a way that it would be transformative for public healing. He continued, “I am someone from the culture that wants to be a part of this [National Heritage Area] Alliance in a way that has [cultural] integrity” (personal communication, February 9, 2016).

The legacy NPS ethnography website (www.nps.gov/ethnography) provides access to many ethnographic resources, including a selected bibliography of ethnographic research conducted in parks up to 2007. The current NPS cultural anthropology site (www.nps.gov/

cultural anthropology) provides an updated description of the program and its role to “connect cultural communities with places that are considered essential to their identity.” Here you’ll find news, what we do, and links to current contacts.

Ethnographic contributions to national park management

The National Park Service centennial celebration in 2016 brought a resurgence of interest in connecting parks and people. The connection between traditional cultural communities and the places that are now managed by NPS runs deep. But why is there a resurgence of interest *now*? Expanded efforts to connect parks and people show maturity in a bureaucracy now 101 years old that seeks to engage and learn from people rather than “preserve” or remove them. People are not ethnographic resources, but the natural and cultural objects and places they value are. National parks have been called “America’s best idea” and the agency that manages them is now engaged in a multitude of interagency and international conservation and heritage initiatives. NPS works regularly with local, state, tribal, and other agencies within the federal family as well as with nonprofit partners and international organizations. The agency employs conservation professionals who realize that, to meet our goals for sustainability and adaptation in the face of a changing world, we must learn from and engage the communities in which our parks are embedded. Parks are no longer seen as islands, and they cannot be managed as such. Large landscape conservation cooperatives now engage upstream and downstream with agencies, states, local governments, nonprofit organizations, tribes, and local communities in conservation planning and scaled-up stewardship over multi-state regions.

The national park system has grown to reflect our multi-culture, multi-storied nation. In 2016, more than 330 million people visited the 376 park units that reported visitation figures.² A study by the US Travel Association indicates that the number of international travelers who visit national parks was expected to reach about 14.6 million in 2017.³ The two most-visited park units—Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Blue Ridge Parkway—each had more than 15 million visitors.

As a leader in cultural heritage preservation, the parks and programs of NPS aim to balance the conservation of the resources and places entrusted to us with the need for access by those millions of visitors and by those whose roots run much deeper. The National Park Service is not only, as former Director Jonathan Jarvis said, “in the forever business,” it is increasingly in the business of engaged stewardship and big-picture conservation.

Integrated management at scale

To meet the needs of integrated natural and cultural resource management on a large scale, the NPS Cultural Anthropology Program and the NPS Office of Tribal Relations and American Cultures support landscape-level collaborative conservation initiatives, research, and management. Actively engaged in providing information and technical support in relationship to new policies and legislation, such as Interior Secretarial Order 3342 on cooperative management with tribes and the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act, the program is also involved in international efforts to support broader

nature–culture conservation goals.⁴ Working with other US land management bureaus—as well as Parks Canada and Mexico’s federal protected areas agency, CONANP (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas)—the NPS program is currently collaborating on a joint product to highlight best practices of engagement with indigenous communities in management of parks and protected areas.⁵ The Cultural Anthropology Program was also an active participant in the “Nature–Culture Journey” at the 2016 World Conservation Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This broader engagement on local, regional, landscape, national, and international levels reflects the recognition highlighted in the statement from the Nature–Culture Journey “that our planet is at the crossroads and that there is compelling evidence that integrated nature–culture approaches improve conservation outcomes, foster cultural diversity, support the well-being of contemporary societies in urban and rural areas, and advance sustainability objectives” (Mitchell, 2017: 238).

In a 2016 article in *The George Wright Forum*, NPS Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Raymond Sauvajot wrote:

The traditional concept of a national park or protected area as a static expression of an ecosystem, a set of natural features, or a collection of cultural or historic objects has been replaced by a more dynamic perspective that recognizes natural and cultural resources as part of ever-changing environments.... To manage parks and protected areas successfully and ensure that resource values persist, park managers must understand landscape-scale phenomena; establish and maintain relationships with other agencies, organizations and stakeholders; and engage directly in conservation efforts at local, regional and even national and international scales (2016: 145).

How do we address and understand heritage on a landscape scale? For example, how can we learn more about the value of resources to communities along the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail when it stretches over 700 miles through three states and the District of Columbia? At this unit, NPS engaged with an anthropological team from Towson University to conduct a rapid ethnographic assessment, using traditional applied anthropological field methods combined with innovative methods of networked anthropology. The assessment employed social network analysis, web analytics, and link analysis to allow the researchers to identify networks of stakeholders and communities engaged with the trail resources and to understand the strength and connection of these links. Further, the team engaged directly with users along the trail using technology that anthropologists Samuel Collins and Matthew Durning term *multimodal anthropologies*. This method expands traditional anthropological practice to include constant engagement and reflection with the community, acknowledging “the centrality of media production to the everyday life of both anthropologists and our interlocutors” (Collins 2017: 142). Multimodal anthropology provides a way for NPS managers to gain an understanding of place-based expressions of heritage and value at scale.

Engaging new methodologies

This era of broad and integrated park management invites the application of new method-

ologies to understand the social systems parks function within. How can we make use of social science data alongside natural resource data sets? This challenge was recently tackled by a team of anthropologists and social scientists, engaged by the Appalachian Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC), in partnership with the National Park Service, to seek a new model for integrating cultural resource data into planning. The Appalachian LCC is a partnership of federal, state, nongovernmental organizations, tribes, and key members of regional partnerships who collaborate within the Central Appalachian Region, stretching from New York to Alabama, to research and act on environmental concerns that would be beyond the scope of any single agency.⁶ With Pennsylvania as their study site, the team looked at both tangible and intangible visual and cultural resources and developed a model that would help to identify existing and predictive “culturally significant hotspots as a means to guide sustainable and strategic conservation and landscape planning” (Mazurczyk et al. 2017: 9). Jointly funded by the National Park Service, Penn State University, the National Council on Preservation Education, and the Wildlife Management Institute, and relying on first-phase research completed by Clemson University, the team developed a framework to evaluate quantitative and qualitative aspects of visual and cultural resources. They adapted “principles and techniques used for assessing biodiversity and landscape scale conservation planning of natural resources,” standing the models next to each other to inform conservation planning and priority-setting within the multi-state conservation partnership (Mazurczyk et al. 2017: 5). They have continued to expand their scope and application to include West Virginia and Maryland.

Within large landscapes, long-standing traditional uses by associated groups are being recognized. In 2016, the NPS plant gathering regulation was published after over a decade of effort to develop legal means for federally recognized tribes to continue traditional plant gathering practices in parks without impairing natural resources.⁷ The regulation enables tribes and park managers to establish plant gathering and monitoring procedures through an agreement and a special-use permitting process. Here, shared ethnographic knowledge of ethnobotany and traditional association informed regulatory needs to acknowledge and provide for the persistence of traditional practices in parks (Figure 1). Together, common goals guide the conservation of plant species to include traditional use without impairment. Currently, two tribes and two parks are developing the first plant gathering agreements, although dozens of tribes and parks have inquired about the new rule over the past year.

An ethnographic overview and assessment of subsistence fishing on the Potomac and Anacostia rivers is documenting, for the first time, nonrecreational fishing along 47 miles of river shoreline across eight NPS park units in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Through a cooperative agreement between the NPS National Capital Region’s Cultural Anthropology Program and the University of Maryland, a research team lead by anthropologists Shirley Fiske and Don Callaway have used both qualitative and quantitative methods, along with GIS and mapping data, to test assumptions about who is catching, eating, and sharing fish from the Potomac and Anacostia rivers. Preliminary findings by NPS anthropologist Noel Lopez (2017) showed that these urban fishers gain a certain level of needed subsistence through the fish they catch and that the acts of learning to fish and sharing the



Figure 1. Biologists, Wabanaki traditional sweetgrass gatherers, and ethnobotanists are engaged in interdisciplinary research to study the ecological impacts and sociocultural dimensions of plant gathering in marshlands within Acadia National Park. NPS photo.

tradition are important (Figure 2). Contrary to the assumption that these urban fishers are predominately uneducated or have English as a second language (and thus may not understand the potential risks of eating fish from urban waterways), the team found that 90% speak English and 70% either hold a high school diploma or its equivalent, have some college education, or hold a bachelor's degree. These ethnographic data provide new knowledge about natural and cultural resources (the fish, the rivers, and the fishers) and is important to the many park managers who seek to engage with fishers regarding access and stewardship.

Challenges for the future

Applied anthropology continues to challenge park managers and the public to see through another's eyes. It tests assumptions and leads park staff to a greater understanding of the past and the present. For example, in her work in the NPS Southeast Region and with the University of South Florida, Antoinette Jackson provides a glimpse into "multiple ways of seeing ... segregation" (Jackson 2010: 80). Jackson argues for the need to use ethnography to inform heritage management plans, designations, and public interpretation in places



Figure 2. A subsistence fishing study along the Potomac and Anacostia rivers in metropolitan Washington, DC, revealed the importance of nonrecreational fishing to communities. NPS photos.

shaped by segregation. It must provide a “conscious critique of the systematic organization of segregation from a material and social-cultural perspective ... because segregation has played a critical role in shaping what is publicly acknowledged, remembered, and preserved [in the present] and what is forgotten, whispered about, or relegated to the status of *other*” (Jackson 2010: 85). This need was documented by Jackson’s ethnographic interviews for the Kingsley Plantation within the National Park Service’s Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve (Figure 3). Through interviews with descendants of Easter Bartley, who spent the first 50 years of her life as an enslaved laborer at the plantation, Jackson documented a complicated

history of post-Emancipation family life, inheritance, and loss that continues to influence the relationship of descendants to the site today. The descriptions underscore that Easter Bartley

is more than a property entry in the Kingsley family estate book, and more than a surviving picture in a National Park Service document. She lived and her negotiations of race and place in the past, along with the recounting and interpretation of her life and experiences by family members in the present, reveals the impact America’s legacy of slavery and segregation continues to have over time (Jackson 2010: 89).

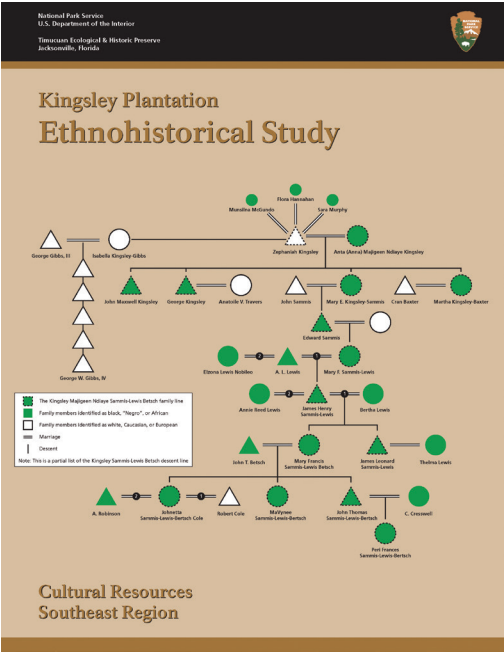
Similarly, we know that many Civil War battlefields, locations where soldiers on both sides met in terrible combat, were first and foremost family farms. In addition to Civil War-era national cemeteries, many sites in the national park system hold family cemeteries within their boundaries. The descendants of those families often maintain a connection to these hallowed places, which in some cases includes requests for burial within the cemetery or family reunions that continue at park sites today.

When ethnographic associations such as these are shared, the result is a broader and deeper knowledge of the depth of connection of contemporary people to parks and places of heritage. The future challenge and responsibility for resource managers is to see differently, and through engagement with interpretation, education, and visitor services provide the public with an opportunity to enter into these worldviews.

Contemporary park management requires not only timely professional research, but engaged dissemination of research results. The challenges that NPS (and other agencies) have of producing a report that few may read, or that may become inaccessible within a few years, is alleviated somewhat when we encourage, and require, many useful forms of dissemination. Story maps, social media posts, films, and on-site apps that geo-locate the visitor within a heritage site and provide a relevant oral history clip or video are all innovative ways to reach numerous publics where they are.

Just as anthropology questions the “ethics of publishing our work behind paywalls” (Collins 2017: 144), so must NPS work harder to make its own social science and anthropological research easily searchable, retrievable, and accessible on many platforms. Today, the public can access NPS research on the

Figure 3. Ethnographic research, such as the Kingsley Plantation Ethnohistorical Study, offers critical information to park managers and communities.



Integrated Resource Management Applications (IRMA) portal, which is a step in the right direction.⁸ However, NPS-funded and maintained research is often not found through a simple Google search, and more needs to be done to provide digital access to appropriate (i.e., nonsensitive) research. Internally, NPS cultural resource program managers at the national level are coordinating an update, migration, and consolidation of the primary NPS cultural resource databases (for archeology, ethnography, cultural landscapes, and historic structures) into a single system. This will provide a secure, integrated, modern database that will allow access to the range of cultural resource data for resource managers at parks, regions, and the national level.

Conclusion

Cultural anthropology in the National Park Service offers unique tools to help us seek to understand more deeply the contemporary communities who hold places in the national park system dear. Applied anthropology moves beyond visitor statistics and the recreational value of parks to reach those with multi-generational ties to places that now happen to be managed by NPS (Figure 4). Although it continues to inform traditional programs of visitor services

Figure 4. NPS anthropologists and academic partners presented new research on applied anthropology in parks at the 2017 meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. Left to right: Jamie Lee Marks, Antoinette Jackson, Mark Calamia, Amy Craver, Janet Cohen, Mike Evans, Jennifer Talken-Spaulding, Noel Lopez, Amber Cohen. NPS photo.



and education, anthropology today is applied broadly to reaching people for whom parks are places of everlasting significance. The voices of traditionally associated people must be heard and integrated into park management if NPS is to achieve an engaged stewardship in its second century.

Applied anthropology in NPS brings skill sets for contemporary application, including understanding traditional associations, consultation, integration in park planning and management, and original research engaged with our academic partners. It recognizes that parks are places that have a deep history, that they are places shaped before humans and that they were valued by humans who came before us. They are places conserved through collaborative management and application of traditional ecological knowledge. Parks are places where cultures live.

We are standing on the traditions, work, and examples of those who came before us when the NPS Ethnography Program was established in 1981. We find many of the same themes in today's Cultural Anthropology Program, but today, over 30 years later, we have much more awareness and institutionalized support for the job. The NPS Cultural Anthropology Program continues to support connecting parks and people. What we do in the next 30 years, and the next 100 years, begins with what we do today.

Endnotes

1. See <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/index.htm>.
2. See <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/National>.
3. See <https://www.ustravel.org/press/study-more-overseas-visitors-choosing-us-national-parks>.
4. In October 2016, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell signed Secretarial Order (SO) 3342, "Identifying Opportunities for Cooperative and Collaborative Partnerships with Federally Recognized Indian Tribes in the Management of Federal Lands and Resources," to encourage cooperative management agreements and other collaborative partnerships between Department of the Interior resource managers and tribes. View the Secretarial Order online at https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/so3342_partnerships.pdf. The NATIVE Act (Public Law 114-221) was signed in September 2016. The act requires federal agencies with recreational travel or tourism functions to update management plans and tourism initiatives to include Indian tribes, tribal organizations and Native Hawaiian organizations. View the full legislation at <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ221/PLAW-114publ221.pdf>.
5. See <https://nawpacommittee.org/>.
6. See <http://applcc.org/cooperative/applcc-outreach/applcc-fact-sheets/appalachian-lcc-overview-fact-sheet/view>.
7. View the final rule, "Gathering of Certain Plants or Plant Parts by Federally Recognized Indian Tribes for Traditional Purposes," along with the Tribal Leaders' Guide, at https://www.nps.gov/history/tribes/final_rule.
8. See <https://irma.nps.gov/Portal>.

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