

Ethnographic Resources Inventory and the National Park Service

National Park Service ethnographic resources are landscapes, sites, structures, objects, and natural resources important to peoples or park neighbors who have had a long-term, or traditional, association with them. To the public, these resources may symbolize the shared history of our nation. To park neighbors and peoples traditionally associated with them, these resources link people closely to their shared subsistence, religion, identity, or sense of purpose.

The Ethnography program within the National Park Service (NPS) developed the concept of the ethnographic resource to integrate the perspective of traditionally-associated peoples into NPS resource management. The concept means that these resources are a window into the cultural knowledge, beliefs, lives, and history of traditionally-associated peoples.

The most recent addition to the NPS ethnographer's tool kit is the Ethnographic Resources Inventory, or ERI. The ERI stores ethnographic resource information electronically for parks. As a data management system, it helps reflect in schematic form how the information about ethnographic resources is important to traditionally-associated peoples and to the NPS.

Ethnographic Resource Information

NPS ethnographers designed the ERI to contain two kinds of information about ethnographic resources. The first reflects the viewpoint of the traditionally-associated peoples, the second the needs of NPS scientists and planners.

The Associated Peoples' View

To reflect the knowledge of traditional peoples, ethnographers must integrate information for each resource. They must then relate it to information about other resources. Traditionally-associated peoples interweave the meanings of landscapes, places, objects, and natural resources.

Among the Navajos, for example, features of a landscape can place a family within the shared history of a whole people. A particular family may have a place, marked by a cairn or a butte, where certain ceremonies take place. During a ceremony

the singer, or medicine man, will bless a family's sacred prayer bundle, or *dabmidiilyeh*. In addition to earth collected from the four major sacred mountains, this bundle may also contain *nit'liz*, or sacred prayer stones. The bundle also contains *chiin*, or talismans. These talismans stand for the livestock, the children, and other important elements that give meaning to the major events and achievements of the family.

The ceremony associated with the place will make many references to particular legends. The narratives of these legends contain lessons about how people should act toward the land and each other. Navajos associate these legends to places on the landscape because these places are exactly where these events occurred.

The ceremonies thus recapitulate these legends. They not only cure people of illnesses or made things happen, they reveal to individuals the paths through which they should lead their lives. Thus, the land literally becomes a cognitive map.

To the Navajo and other Indian people, the landscapes, places, objects, and natural resources are not simply sentimental reminders about life. They are integral to life, and to transmitting cultural knowledge. Without the protection of ethnographic resources, it becomes difficult for people to recall and teach the cultural knowledge with which these resources are associated.

Family members would sometimes show these sites, bundles, and talismans to outsiders enthusiastically. At other times, they are very reticent, talking only in general ways about their importance. They are worried not only about visitors damaging a site, but about witchcraft and other mischief. Thus, confidentiality remains an important issue.

It is difficult enough for conventional ethnographic studies to describe this complex cultural interrelationship. It is impossible with a database. A database must be able, however, to point out the interconnectedness, and direct the user to the literature and consultation opportunities that make better understanding possible.

The ERI lists the name of a resource as it is commonly known. It also lists the different names by which a people may know that resource. The ERI collects and provides a directory for all the peoples and neighbors associated with that resource.

For each associated group, the ERI provides a quick reference to legendary or sacred associations with that resource. There are quick references for a resource's use. An ethnographic resource may have many uses, even for a single group of people. The ERI details how a resource's uses may have changed through time. For example, a resource originally used for food or food production may presently be used for educating young people about their past, or for recreation.

The ERI records the associated peoples' view of an ethnographic resource's condition, and preferences for how to maintain it. Not only may the resource's condition change through time. The views of a resource's condition may change as well. Peoples' preferences for maintenance may differ sharply from plans the Park Service may have for maintaining or upgrading it.

The ERI records the consultations between a park and each traditionally-associated group. An NPS official thus can quickly review the institutional memory of the relationship between the park and the people traditionally associated with a resource.

Finally, the ERI program requires the user to cite documentation showing that there is a traditional association with a resource. It is true that its association with the cultural knowledge of a traditionally-associated people defines the ethnographic resource. However, those using the ERI must be able to track how the ethnographers conclude that the group is traditionally associated, to make informed decisions. By meeting this need for tracking, the ERI also becomes a master bibliography for documentary sources, ranging from books and journal articles to field notes and tape recordings.

The NPS Resource Management View

As an ethnographic tool, the ERI will help mediate between the view of the traditionally-associated peoples and the needs for NPS planning. The ERI includes information that links a traditionally-associated peoples' cultural knowledge to the NPS planning process. The ERI thus includes information on the location of the resource, and other databases where information on this resource may be found. It includes infor-

mation on the physical location of the resource, and records the condition of the resource from the standpoint of NPS management. ERI users can then compare the condition defined by the NPS to that of the traditionally-associated groups.

Conclusions

Ethnographic resources are a window into the cultural knowledge of traditionally-associated peoples and park neighbors. The concept helps NPS ethnographers mediate between the potentially conflicting values of traditionally-associated peoples and the Park Service resource management process. Through such mediation, ethnographers can involve traditional people better in the way NPS manages, plans, and operates parks.

First, it can help serve as the institutional memory for a park by tracking the changing conditions of ethnographic resources, the history of consultation with park associated groups, and the location of resources.

Second, the ERI can link ethnographic resources to other cultural and natural resource data records, and help NPS management and planners come up to speed quickly on this information.

At present, the ERI's first customers are the parks. However, NPS plans to integrate it with other databases through Park Service geographic information systems (GIS). This integration will enhance both NPS and traditional user understanding of ethnographic resources by revealing patterns of resource distribution. These patterns can then reveal interwoven components of landscapes, patterns of natural resource consumption, and other elements of a people's cognitive map not otherwise obvious either to NPS management or to the traditionally-associated group.

The ERI is not a substitute for consultation with traditionally-associated groups. Nevertheless, the ERI can be integrated with other NPS data systems to make more logical and reasonable NPS planning for the stewardship of our nation's living heritage.

References

Management Policies 2001, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, December 2000.
Cultural Resource Management Guideline, Release No. 5, Director's Order No. 28, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, June 11, 1998.

Mark Schoepfle, Ph.D., Anthropology, is the Coordinator, Ethnographic Resources Inventory, Archeology and Ethnography Program, National Park Service, Washington, DC. He can be reached at <mark_schoepfle@nps.gov>.