



## Integrated Management of Cultural and Natural Resources

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Project planning and land management typically consider cultural and natural resources independently, as if they are islands, alone on the landscape. This can lead to isolated, and at times conflicting management decisions. The landscape is the product of the collective interaction of human activities and the environment (which also includes things like safe roads and a reliable energy infrastructure).

An integrated management approach understanding that cultural and natural resources co-exist can yield outcomes that benefit the resources while acknowledging the realities of the modern environment.

### Definitions

Before we go further, allow me a brief digression to define some terms. Cultural resources might conjure up images of archaeologists dusting off pottery on an international dig, or a sign marking some historic battlefield, but in reality cultural resources can be much more.

Here are a few examples:

- Archaeological sites,
- Historical objects,
- Historic structure or collection of structures,
- Scenic landscapes,
- Spiritual places, or
- Any place or object that has historic or cultural value

Natural Resources, of course, include things that naturally occur on the landscape and possess ecological value, such as:

- Plant and animal species,
- Habitats,
- Water, air, or land resources.

One important point to make is that these categories aren't mutually exclusive – items that might initially be considered natural resources could also be valued by a group of people as a cultural resource – for example certain landscapes, or certain animals or plants have particular meaning to certain groups of people. Places can also possess multiple resource types – for instance, a designated scenic byway may

travel past an historic battlefield, a local cemetery, and a historic downtown – all of which might be located in a river valley home to endangered plant and animal species. Each of these resources presents unique management challenges in a world that needs things like safe roads, reliable energy, and clean water.

### **Integrated Management**

A proactive approach integrating the management of natural and cultural resources can address these challenges. The benefits include:

- *Increased Efficiency* - Specialists from multiple disciplines can share data and coordinate work, reducing duplication and overall labor intensity.
- *Increased Consistency* - This approach also allows consistent use of data and reporting of results. This enables crews to easily maintain up-to-date information regarding resource identification, project details, and other rapidly changing information.
- *Improved Collaboration* - Impacts of projects on a particular resource are considered in the context of other resources and the project as a whole, avoiding unintended impacts.

The landscape is the product of the collective interaction of human activities and the environment. To act as if individual natural and cultural resources occupy this landscape alone, or in a vacuum ignores this connection and places these resources at risk. Developing an integrated management approach for these resources, allows us to better understand threats to our collective important places, while accounting for the needs of a modern world.

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