



*Preserving America's Heritage*

## **INFORMATION PAPER ON CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: Understanding and Interpreting Indigenous Places and Landscapes**

**Introduction.** Archaeologists and others working in the field of historic preservation benefit from better understanding and more inclusive interpretations of indigenous<sup>1</sup> sites and places, including Traditional Cultural Places (TCPs)<sup>2</sup> and cultural landscapes encountered during cultural resource surveys or research projects. While non-indigenous landscapes exist across the country and need to be considered as well, this information paper focuses on indigenous landscapes. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies engaged in undertakings to identify and assess effects of their actions on historic properties, including indigenous landscapes considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A number of landscape-level examples exist on the National Register or have been determined eligible—including indigenous landscapes—and the Register includes criteria that recognize the significance of these places. Often information on these places and landscapes can only be gained from consultation with Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations (NHOs). For federal agencies participating in the Section 106 process and the consultants they work with carrying out cultural resource management (CRM) surveys, or in the context of research projects, these better understandings are critical for more complete identifications of historic properties required by the law. Beyond legal requirements, more inclusive interpretations also help develop stronger relationships between consulting parties and serve to educate agencies, other parties, and the public.

Using three examples from different areas of the United States, this paper addresses the topic of identifying and considering the role of indigenous places and landscapes in Section 106, as well as in non-Section 106 contexts. It is meant to serve as a starting point for discussions within and among federal agencies, cultural resource practitioners, researchers, and indigenous peoples on this topic. A goal of the ACHP has been to encourage early involvement of Indian tribes and NHOs in the Section 106 process—and land management and project planning decisions in general—for more inclusive identification of indigenous places and landscapes. For example, one important reason is to avoid inappropriately breaking larger properties into smaller units managed separately and out of context.

**Defining and Learning About Landscapes.** Landscapes can be defined as large-scale properties often comprised of multiple, linked features that form a cohesive area or place. They have cultural and historical meanings attached to them by the peoples who have traveled, used, and interwoven these places into generations of practice. In addition to the physical, on the ground components, visual and audio aspects of place are often important to how they are defined. For example, an indigenous landscape used for ceremonial practices could be affected by the presence of structures that impede a viewshed or by noise interrupting an otherwise quiet area.

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous is used in this paper to include American Indian, Alaska Native, Native American, Native Hawaiian populations of the United States, plus indigenous populations of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Virgin Islands, Republics of the Marshall Islands and Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Northern Mariana Islands (all included in the National Historic Preservation Act).

<sup>2</sup> See the National Park Service Bulletin 38, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* for more on the topic of TCPs.

Those potentially working with landscape-level properties can learn to recognize them in several ways, in addition to consulting with the communities associated with these places. A first step is recognizing that indigenous landscapes may include broad areas well beyond the conventional area of a “site;” in other words, it requires looking up and not being site-specific and myopic. Second, teaching the next generation of practicing archaeologists about indigenous perspectives, in general, and landscapes, in particular, is important. This could be to younger colleagues at an agency or CRM firm, or to students in classrooms or in trainings. Third, include in courses and trainings readings—and perhaps even a full class—devoted to discussions about landscapes. While this topic is often addressed in architectural, planning, or historic preservation programs and training, it could be included more in archaeology and Section 106 courses and training. CRM and historic preservation professionals are often involved on a daily basis in Section 106 review and National Register criteria and eligibility decisions, but students and other professionals may not have as many reasons to consider this topic unless encouraged to do so.

***Examples of Indigenous Landscapes.*** Both large- and small-scale places significant to Indian tribes and NHOs across the United States are increasingly being identified as part of the Section 106 process, and in non-Section 106 projects. Three cases studies of National Register historic places and landmarks from across the country associated with indigenous histories and cultures demonstrate how varying these places can be.

#### **EXAMPLE 1: Hassanamisco Reservation, Massachusetts**

The Hassanamisco Reservation and Cisco Homestead in Grafton, Massachusetts, is a 3 1/2-acre landscape with a few buildings, including a 200-year-old homestead in the process of being restored. Through a nomination generated by tribal members, the property was placed on the National Register in 2011 under criterion A as contributing to broad patterns of our nation’s history, and under the significance area of ethnic heritage. The reservation holds one of the few standing Native homesteads in New England from the early 19th century. Without the survival of this structure, the land would have been sold out of Nipmuc hands long ago, taking away the base for the tribe’s annual powwows and tribal museum.

The central meaning of this property for the indigenous community associated with it is that the preservation of land and structure has ensured the continued survival of the Nipmuc Tribe into the 21st century by providing a place for community and political engagement. The property is not associated with any famous people but with everyday people less documented in American history who struggled to make ends meet and continue as Indian people in a world that challenged their continued existence. Their stories are more often the most uncommon stories told in association with National Register landscapes such as this. For more information about this property, go to

[https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/indian/2011/Hassanamisco\\_Reservation.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/indian/2011/Hassanamisco_Reservation.htm)

#### **EXAMPLE 2: Big Horn Medicine Wheel and Mountain, Wyoming**

Located in the Bighorn National Forest, this National Historic Landmark (NHL) was initially listed in 1969 at 100 acres and is considered a powerful ceremonial site to Plains area Indian tribes. The wheel is almost 80 feet in diameter with 28 spokes extending out from a central cairn. Today the National Park Service recognizes more than 4,000 acres as an NHL, and the revised nomination to expand it to this size included an ethnographic study. Indigenous knowledge confirmed that the entire mountain was sacred and not just the Medicine Wheel area, establishing a precedent that the land surrounding a specific site or place can be as critical to cultural practices as the central feature. The 4,000-acre NHL, however, is still just part of an even larger landscape recognized by the tribes. Big Horn Medicine Wheel is an iconic representation of indigenous landscapes in America and demonstrates how important boundaries are to indigenous definitions of places in that they often extend far beyond non-indigenous interpretations of place.

Also, the fact that the significance of this property is not tied to its archaeological values is important, as archaeology is often the primary tool used for surveys to determine the presence of cultural resources. Archaeological investigations alone did not have the potential to identify the true significance of this place. In fact, this is a place where archaeology would probably *not* be appropriate, supporting the fact that landscapes are often recognized outside of (and in addition to) archaeological surveys and require another way of “seeing” the land and its cultural resources. Between 70 and 150 other wheels have been identified in South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada. But a smaller medicine wheel with perhaps not as much integrity may not be as obvious from the ground versus from the air, or identified through an archaeological survey, so “seeing” it may require thinking on the landscape (versus site) level. For more information about this landscape, go to <http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/NationalRegister/Site.aspx?ID=60>.

### **EXAMPLE 3: Old Spanish National Historic Trail, Western United States**

The third example crosses six states and is connected to a number of Indian tribes, in addition to non-Indian populations whose histories overlap across its 2,700 miles. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail is jointly managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service and was designated as a National Historic Trail by Congress in 2002. It was the most efficient and shortest route from Santa Fe to Los Angeles during its use, with four branches passing through red-rock mesas, below snow-capped peaks, across rivers, and across the Colorado Plateau and Mojave Desert. Today, it crosses Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and California.

Much broader than the other two examples, the trail evolved from a combination of indigenous footpaths, early trade and exploration routes, and horse and mule routes. The Old Spanish Trail has a long and multi-faceted history including a number of cultures over time and is a landscape with different meanings to different peoples; the only consistent presence over time (and dating to before Contact and EuroAmerican settlement) is the indigenous presence, which is still present. A number of tribes continue to live along the trail today. For more information about this property, go to <https://www.nps.gov/olsp/index.htm>.

**Summary.** This information paper provides just three of many diverse examples of the landscapes that exist all around us. They are landscapes that need to be taken into consideration by archaeologists, academics, and preservation professionals responsible for interpreting and defining the American past. Since many American landscapes have origins with indigenous use, or are still recognized and used by Indian tribes today, the inclusion of indigenous perspectives and knowledge about these places in federal processes such as Section 106, research contexts, and applied or CRM applications is critical. Acknowledging and incorporating this knowledge may require rethinking Western notions of boundaries and significance. Likewise, rethinking the Western distinction between natural resources and cultural resources also advances the ability to better recognize, interpret, and record landscapes.

Indigenous landscapes are the foundational landscapes of America, even though many have been written over, used in different ways (such as the trails), modified, or altered across time and across the country. Indigenous understandings, uses, and connections to the places continue in the 21st century, and should influence the way historic preservationists, archaeologists, educators, and federal agencies interpret and understand the history and meaning of the many places they encounter in their work. Even after 500 years of contact, indigenous understandings, meanings, and uses continue to define the landscapes all around us.

Identification of landscape-level properties allows for the greatest preservation of larger pieces of land, often a goal for many Indian tribes and NHOs but also perhaps an issue associated with landscape acknowledgement in the Section 106 and National Register processes. Like the extensive 2,700-mile long Old Spanish Trail, stewardship and maintenance of large-scale landscapes can require inter-agency

coordination and resources, in addition to continued consultation with other parties (such as Indian tribes and NHOs) with an interest in these properties. Thinking more broadly about places of meaning to diverse populations, such as indigenous peoples and other minorities, will help develop more accurate interpretations of our shared American history. Beyond this, thinking about places on the landscape level is fundamental to preservation; part of this knowledge base must include indigenous perspectives. Rather than seeing indigenous knowledge and perspectives as marginal, “additional” to, or “other” than Western perspectives of place, (or included only because federal law requires consultation, as in the Section 106 process) they are central to interpretations of assessments and identifications that determine significance. Recognizing these places is an important first step toward determining how best to manage them.

Beyond the Section 106 process, preservation of indigenous places and landscapes supports the important goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). Support of the Declaration is a major initiative of the ACHP’s Office of Native American Affairs. Preservation of indigenous lands is addressed in a number of articles in the Declaration, most specifically in Articles 25,<sup>3</sup> 26,<sup>4</sup> 27<sup>5</sup> and 29.<sup>6</sup>

For more information on the growing body of knowledge on indigenous cultural landscapes, see the National Park Service website at <https://www.nps.gov/cajo/learn/upload/ICL-Banner-Update-April2015.pdf> and <https://www.nps.gov/chba/learn/news/indigenous-cultural-landscapes.htm>. Also see the ACHP’s information on Native American Traditional Cultural Landscapes at [http://www.achp.gov/na\\_culturallandscapes.html](http://www.achp.gov/na_culturallandscapes.html).

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<sup>3</sup> Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

<sup>4</sup> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired. 2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired. 3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

<sup>5</sup> States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples’ laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process.

<sup>6</sup> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.