One of the big stories in the world of conservation is the significant rise in efforts to conserve resources on a landscape scale. This approach brings partners from different geographies, sectors, and cultures together to collaborate on conserving important landscapes for the ecological, cultural, and economic benefits they provide. The Network for Landscape Conservation, an organization dedicated to supporting this work, now has a membership of more than 100 organizational partners and 2,000 individual practitioners representing hundreds of large landscapes. In a 2018 survey, “Assessing the State of Landscape Conservation Initiatives in North America,” the network gathered in-depth information about more than 130 initiatives in North America and found that 90 percent of them had been established after 1990 and 45 percent since 2010.

As cultural heritage practitioners become aware of this increasingly widespread holistic landscape approach and consider integrating it into their work, it might be helpful to examine the origins of the movement.

THE BEGINNINGS OF LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The history of the landscape-scale conservation movement has not yet been written. However, there is a long tradition in the United States of managing fish and wildlife habitats with the understanding that species preservation requires conserving wider ecosystems across jurisdictions. As noted in a 2015 National Academy of Science report on landscape conservation cooperatives:

“With advances in landscape ecology over the past quarter century, conservation planners, scientists, and practitioners began to place a greater emphasis on conservation efforts at the scale of landscapes and seascapes. These larger areas were
thought to harbor relatively greater numbers of species that are more likely to maintain population viability and sustain ecological processes (e.g., fire, migration) and natural disturbance regimes—viewed by most ecologists as critical factors in conserving biodiversity.”

States have worked for decades to protect fish and wildlife within their borders, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has long focused on preserving refuges for migrating and breeding wildlife populations. The first refuge—established in 1903, the era of President Theodore Roosevelt—was Florida’s Pelican Island, an important rookery and feeding site for migrating birds. Today there is a system of 564 wildlife refuges across the nation. In 1986, recognizing the continental scope of the challenges, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and the Canadian Minister of the Environment signed the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, which called for establishing Migratory Bird Joint Ventures.

The Yellowstone to Yukon initiative is an even more recent international wildlife conservation effort. Initially aimed at preserving grizzly bear habitats, it has become a model of collaborative wildlife management focused on the vast mountain ecosystem stretching from Yellowstone National Park to the Yukon. Its partnerships to conserve land and steward the region’s natural resources now encompass five American states, two Canadian provinces, two Canadian territories, and the traditional lands of more than 30 Native governments.

This is important work: the architects of landscape-scale initiatives are confronting some of the greatest environmental challenges of our time—threats from climate change, habitat fragmentation, energy development, and urban sprawl. These issues transcend political and disciplinary boundaries and demand solutions to match the scale of the threats. All of this, it should be noted, impacts cultural as well as natural resources.
THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The National Park Service (NPS) has emerged as a leader in the landscape-scale approach to resource management. National parks were set aside to protect their special qualities within clearly defined boundaries, but conceiving of each park as an island rather than part a larger ecosystem ultimately hampers efforts to conserve its value. As early as 1964, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall wrote to the director of the NPS that “effective management of the National Park System will not be achieved by programs that look only within the parks without respect to the pressures, the influences, and the needs beyond park boundaries.”

The 1960s saw an overall national policy shift toward conserving natural and cultural resources reflected in such laws as the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The NPS began experimenting with new ways to conserve larger landscapes, particularly ones that provide natural and recreational experiences near population centers. Cape Cod National Seashore, created in 1961, was an early test of this new kind of park. Its boundaries, which extend into six cape communities, were authorized with the understanding that the designated 43,500 acres would always have a mix of federal, state, municipal, and private owners. To address the issues of mixed ownership, the authorizing legislation included innovative approaches to integrating the new park into the community. It established the first citizen’s advisory board and prohibited the NPS from condemning private improved property so long as the local government adopted land-use controls consistent with the park’s purpose.

Cape Cod National Seashore auditorium at Provincetown.

PHOTO BY DAVID JOHNSON VIA FLICKR CC BY-NC 2.0
Created in 1978, the Santa Monica National Recreation Area was another test of introducing a national park presence into a complex landscape—in this case, the highly urbanized Los Angeles Basin. Stretching from the Santa Monica Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, the area encompasses one of the largest and most significant examples of Mediterranean-type ecosystems in the world. To protect this important resource, the NPS adopted an innovative “green line” approach: setting a boundary around the resource to be conserved and limiting the federal dollars for land acquisitions. To ensure effective and affordable management, the founding legislation directed that the park be collaboratively managed by both state and local governments that already owned property within its boundaries.

Building on the idea of protecting large landscapes through partnerships, in the 1970s the NPS proposed creating a system of National Reserves. Also known as Areas of National Concern, these multilayered governmental partnerships are connected by jointly prepared management plans that provide for land protection by local controls and for limited federal property acquisition. In the end, only a few reserves were created. The best known are Eby's Landing National Reserve in Washington state and Pinelands National Reserve in New Jersey, both dating to 1978. Both reserves feature the tradition of long-standing human use that residents wanted to see carried forward: agriculture uses in Eby's Landing and harvesting cranberries and other natural resources in the Pinelands.

In the 1980s changes in national policy that discouraged federal spending, land acquisition, and new parks halted the expansion of the National Park System. However, the NPS adapted earlier innovations such as limited federal investment, landscape scale boundaries, and citizen commissions into a new approach to conserve the cultural, natural, and recreational resources of a region with limited federal involvement: the National Heritage Areas program. The program established boundaries that included multiple property owners, developed management plans with the local community, and valued places as lived-in landscapes. The biggest change from previous approaches was that, while the federal government
invested limited dollars in stabilizing and interpreting resources, the management of those resources became the responsibility of local entities.

Recently, the NPS has explicitly articulated a focus on large-landscape initiatives to protect both natural and cultural resources. Action #22 of its 2016 strategic plan, "The Call To Action," directs the agency to:

“Promote large landscape conservation to support healthy ecosystems and cultural resources. To achieve this goal, we will protect continuous corridors in five geographic regions through voluntary partnerships across public and private lands and waters, and by targeting a portion of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to make strategic land acquisitions within national parks.”

TOWARD A NATIONAL POLICY
The boldest effort to launch a national policy initiative for landscape-scale conservation was a 2009 secretarial order from the U.S. Department of the Interior that established Landscape Scale Cooperatives (LCC). These were a network of 22 individual, self-directed conservation regions throughout the United States as well as on some Pacific and Caribbean islands and in parts of Canada and Mexico. The LCCs were defined as “landscapes capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources for current and future generations.” The network focused on providing scientific expertise—in particular, on climate change issues and building the capacity to mobilize conservation planning across multiple jurisdictions.

Under the current administration, the LCC initiative has been defunded, but Interior agencies such as the NPS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are continuing to conduct scientific research and planning for landscape-scale conservation. In addition, landscape-scale initiatives are embedded in other federal agencies; the 2015 National Academy report identified 10 other programs in agencies ranging from the Department of Defense to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
NETWORK FOR LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

With its rapid growth, the movement to conserve large landscapes has spawned an organization with the exclusive mission of documenting and advancing this work. In November 2017 the new Network for Landscape Conservation and partners convened the National Forum on Landscape Conservation, gathering 200 leading landscape conservation practitioners from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The network has just released a report, “Pathways Forward: Progress and Priorities in Landscape Conservation,” that documents the growth of the movement not just by the number of landscape-scale projects but, more importantly, by the growing understanding of what it means to successfully sustain them. The report tackles critical topics such as the need for effective communication, wide-ranging collaboration, and targeted investments. It also explores the role of science and the challenge of gaining the necessary support from policymakers.

It breaks new ground for a report on the future of conservation by fully recognizing the essential role of human activity in all landscape-scale efforts and by acknowledging that preserving traditional American communities and their cultural values is integral to our nation’s future. As the report poetically states, landscape-scale conservation can “rewear the natural and cultural fabric of the larger landscapes that define and sustain our character and quality of life.”

CONSIDERING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Although most recent landscape-scale efforts do reference cultural resources, the intersection of this burgeoning movement with the established world of historic preservation remains ill defined. Remember that the landscape-scale approach is rooted in the need to protect wildlife habitat for migrating birds; anadromous fish—those that travel from salt water to fresh to spawn; monarch butterflies; and species that need a large land base, such as bison and grizzly bears. Shifting gears to incorporate cultural sites has not always been easy.

Data availability and formatting is just one example of the barriers between the two fields. The large-landscape movement
has taken off in part thanks to the availability of big data, exploiting the power of geographic information systems to map large regions and use science-informed datasets for setting conservation priorities. Having cultural resources data available in this format would go a long way toward integrating the practices. However, the National Register of Historic Places is still an imperfect tool for identifying the range of cultural resources present in a landscape, due in part to the fact that many regions have not been adequately evaluated. Local and state historic inventories that should be the first place to consult are aging, sometimes inaccurate, and often incomplete—and not all states have invested in providing state-of-the-art computerized digital access to their data. Funds to redress these problems are in chronically short supply. In addition, existing data are often very particularistic—building by building or archaeological site by site. While the National Register does define the cultural landscapes property type, this classification has seen limited application. State historic preservation officials who administer the National Register program in partnership with the NPS have been wary about designating landscapes, often concerned about the effort required to document and oversee them and the reality of political pushback.

While the lack of data has hindered the inclusion of the cultural dimension in landscape-scale conservation, there is some good news: The NPS has undertaken a study of the nomination of cultural landscapes to the National Register as part of a new initiative to develop improved guidance. Another strategy for promoting the conservation of cultural landscapes would be making more effective use of other large-landscape designations, such as National Heritage Areas. Efforts to preserve long-distance trails can also complement this goal. For example, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy has a new large-landscape initiative aimed at recognizing and preserving not just the footprint of the trail, but also the lands surrounding it. The Chesapeake Bay Partnership also has great promise, positing that, while ecological resources are important, cultural and recreational connections are also critical in any conservation approach. Using a layered approach, the partnership has helped pioneer a model that conserves multiple resources types and incorporates
many values. The project also leads with a ground-breaking approach to Indigenous Cultural Landscapes, recognizing the natural and cultural resources that supported Native American lifeways and settlements in the early 17th century in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Native American places were not confined to the sites of houses, towns, or settlements, so a holistic understanding of their homelands must include entire landscapes.

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

Landscape-conservation initiatives are increasingly including cultural and human dimensions and creating partnerships to do so. Such efforts are underway across the country, from the Chesapeake Bay watershed to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. However, as positive as this trend may be, serious challenges remain. The resource conservation and preservation communities are still mired in the nature/culture split. Going forward, it is critical that preservationists recognize the applicability of “natural” resource scholarship and tools to cultural resources, especially cultural landscapes. This means a change in perspective from the traditional preservation criteria, which focus on the integrity of cultural resources, to an approach recognizing that natural environments are inevitably dynamic, especially in this era of climate change. The natural resource community also needs to move beyond just lip service to including cultural resources in landscape planning. Practitioners on both sides need to think bigger and be more flexible. Today this discussion is still a work in progress.
The bottom line is that historic preservation is about saving places, and the opportunities to do so jointly with our natural resource partners are expanding. As my co-authors and I noted in a recent issue of The George Wright Forum, connecting the practices of culture and nature conservation is an increasing consideration for the global conservation community. Preservationists have a critical role to play by articulating the value of all landscapes; telling powerful, people-based stories; and, most importantly, engaging communities in the process of conserving place. This emerging approach provides one more important opportunity to engage new partners and funding prospects to preserve cultural landscapes, historic properties, and the communities that give them life. FJ

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**TAKEAWAY**

Fall 2007 Forum Journal: Heritage Corridors: Pathways to History

**TAKEAWAY**

Summer 2003 Forum Journal: Regional Heritage Areas: Connecting People to Places and History