

# IN THE LIMELIGHT: RECENT CULTURAL RESOURCES INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS ON THE SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST

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## ABSTRACT

In conjunction with the increased awareness of the management of cultural resources within the Sierra National Forest, many educational and interpretive projects have been undertaken, completed, and used to foster cooperative relationships between the Forest Service and local groups as well as to share compiled and presented materials with local libraries, school groups, the general public as well as other Forest Service employees. In this paper, some past, present and future interpretive and educational efforts concerning cultural resources sponsored by the Sierra National Forest will be discussed and a potential means of future funding for projects will be reviewed.

## DISCUSSION

Over the last few years, interpretive and educational efforts on the Sierra National Forest have increased. Due to the complexity of the multiple-use strategy of the Forest Service, consideration of cultural resources is often seen only as they relate to projects requiring section 106 compliance. In general, the opportunity for interpretation is seen as peripheral and a luxury. Archaeologists who see the value of interpretive efforts as a protection tool will convince their supervisors of its importance and ensure that it is made an objective. However, recent decreases in timber targets make this an important window of opportunity to emphasize the value of other forest resources in addition to timber.

Directly related to the increased awareness of the management of cultural resources within the Sierra National Forest, many educational and interpretive projects have been undertaken, completed, and used to foster cooperative relationships within the Forest Service and between the Forest Service and local groups such as Native Americans, as well as historical and advocationalist

archaeological societies. These relationships have been formed to share compiled and presentable materials with local libraries, school groups, and other Forest Service employees. In this presentation, past, present, and future interpretive and educational efforts concerning cultural resources sponsored by the Sierra National Forest will be discussed as well as potential means of future funding to accomplish these projects.

In general, interpretive efforts have been informal, situationally specific, and unstructured projects hosted by a few individuals with the drive and initiative to carry them out. On a grass roots level, these projects have been successfully fostering increased communication within the Forest and between the Forest and local interest groups.

Ongoing interpretive and educational efforts within the Sierra National Forest include informal presentations to groups as widely diverse as seasonal employees on the High Sierra Trail Crew and to the Forest Management Team, which is comprised of the Forest Supervisor, the various section chiefs, and the 4 District Rangers. These

presentations to the Management Team are usually not recurring, but are project, situation and topic specific.

Presentations to seasonal employees (and their supervisors) are sporadic. These talks usually include similar information: for the most part, a general discussion of the archaeology on the Forest, what the archaeologists do, what comprises an archaeological site, what to do (and what not to do) if they or one of their coworkers find a site, as well as what to do if they find vandals or evidence of vandalism on a site. The high turnover rate of seasonal employees necessitates repeated presentations on an annual basis.

Presentations to the Management Team are most often topic specific, and are usually suggested when new directions or interpretations of standing procedure are encountered or when the success of a particular project is impressive. These presentations are much more sophisticated and are generally part of the archaeologists' job description. These presentations are very important for internal support of new direction as well as continued support for the archaeology program on the Forest.

In addition to these internal presentations, presentations to outside organizations lend support for archaeology, in general, and, in particular, for the Forest's archaeology program. For example, last fall, a presentation about archaeology on the Forest was presented by an archaeologist from the Supervisor's Office to a group of archaeology students from California State University, Fresno. This presentation was delivered in a direct response to a request from the Anthropology Department at Fresno State. During this presentation, summer employment opportunities for archaeology students with the Forest Service were discussed and applications and related hiring information were distributed. One of the topics the Forest Service archaeologist brought up was the possibility of internships for students in the Supervisor's Office.

The success of this presentation was almost immediate, and, this spring, 3 students conducted internships with the Forest. This arrangement allowed the students to

become more familiar with the archaeology program on the Sierra National Forest, including becoming familiar with federal archaeology in general, the processing of archaeological information for the Sierra National Forest, and general familiarization of the Data General computer system that all the National Forests use. In return, many projects that have been labeled "would be nice to do" were undertaken and completed. A recently returned artifact collection from a contracted excavation was checked against its catalogue and many sets of archived files were inventoried, and information from these was extracted and encoded for computerization in the form of a data base. Now these files will be able to be used for project-related background research and public presentations.

Although their internships are now complete, at least one of these students has expressed interest in continuing the work done this semester and another one, who will be graduating this semester, is looking for summer employment with the Forest Service. The third student is a local Native American woman who has been sharing the information presented to her during her internship with some of her friends and family. She has been impressed with the archaeology program on the Forest and has been sharing that information as well. The success of these internships will surely encourage the continuation of the Sierra National Forest's relationship with Fresno State's Anthropology Department and students.

Displays and demonstrations during local events have been very successful. In the case of a recent photographic display, the process of building the display was as important as the final product. With the support and encouragement of the Pineridge District Ranger, the archaeologist on the district and a Native American elder from the local Rancheria collaborated on an acorn-processing photo display for the local annual fair. The archaeologist initially suggested photographing the elder processing acorn during a series of field trips, but, with a few more conversations, the elder suggested they use her old family photos of her mother processing acorns. These photos were duplicated, the text collaboratively

written, and both were mounted in a collapsible display. The display is now located at the local branch library and may be borrowed by anyone for educational purposes.

Last year, during the Big Fresno County Fair, archaeologists from the Supervisor's Office gave a demonstration at the Forest's display booth about archaeology. A flint-knapping demonstration and an artifact display, along with the above-mentioned acorn processing display, became a very helpful way to attract passersby to impart information about the Forest's archaeology program as well as to pass on a "please help us preserve and protect our cultural resources" message. Hundreds of people, both children and adults, stopped by the Forest's booth on those days. The days we were not there, the word had gotten around and people were asking for the arrowhead-making demonstration. Next year, we will be out there again. These are the same people who work and play in the mountains east of Fresno, and this is an excellent approach to information dissemination and hopefully site preservation.

Most of the above-mentioned projects are short-term and relatively informal. In contrast to these, one example of a long-term interpretive project is the current Jesse Ross cabin removal and stabilization project on the Minarets Ranger District. Beginning in 1990, excess timber receipts were used to move a donated, National Register-eligible, 130-year-old log cabin from private to public land along the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway. The stabilization efforts began in 1991 when the Forest Service sponsored hands-on training in log cabin stabilization. This training was attended by people from all over the United States, and in the process, the cabin stabilization was nearly completed.

The Sierra National Forest celebrated the National Forests' Centennial with the dedication of the Ross cabin and the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway. Two hundred local residents attended the celebration. Speeches were given by the District Ranger, the Forest Supervisor, the Regional Forester, and a local congressman. The project will continue over the next few years with the intro-

duction of interpretive signs, rest rooms and picnic tables. All facilities will be accessible to the disabled (Connie Popelish, personal communication, 1992). This project is an educational and interpretive gold mine with far reaching impacts. Already 200 local residents know more about their local history and about the lengths to which the Forest Service may go in order to preserve their heritage. Now the Regional Forester has shown his support for not only the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway and the National Forests' Centennial celebration, but also for historic preservation in general and the preservation and interpretation of the Jesse Ross cabin in particular. Now the congressman has information supporting historic preservation directly from 200 members of his constituency.

The success of these programs increases the potential success of future interpretive and educational projects as well as potential sources for their funding. Three proposed projects on the Pineridge Ranger District include a variety of plans. The first project includes the proposed capping of 2 prehistoric archaeological sites for their protection from continual recreational use, including the erection of interpretive signs, production of interpretive brochures for these sites, and hiring a Native American Interpreter from the local Native American community to interpret these sites to the public as part of the district's "campfire program". The second project will be a cooperative effort between the Forest and a local historical society, namely, the restoration of the original guard station at Huntington Lake with the intent of turning it into a local history museum. The local historical society has agreed to give financial as well as volunteer support for both the restorative efforts and facility maintenance, as well as providing members to keep the museum open during the peak tourist time once it is restored. The third project consists of interpreting sites which yield high public interest along the route of the proposed scenic byway. Specific information for this third project is unavailable at this time because it is still in the early stages of the planning process.

Each of these projects offers valuable

opportunities, not only for interpretation, but for interaction with local interested groups. In the long run, the projects will promote the Forest Services' varied uses of the public lands, as well as the cultural resources program on the Forest.

For the current and past projects discussed in this presentation, funding (except for the example of the Ross cabin stabilization) has not yet been discussed. For the most part, all of these projects have been carried out under general administrative and recreation funds. However, based on the regional archaeology budget for fiscal year 1992, this funding opportunity will not be available. Budgetary decreases are, at this point, directly tied to the decreasing number of timber projects. This decrease in funding is an excellent opportunity to investigate less obvious means of funding. First, some potential federal funding opportunities will be discussed, then some more creative avenues of funding will be presented.

In the "Fiscal Year 1994 Program Budget Instructions," issued nationwide in the Forest Service in October 1991, target goals and objectives are outlined. Throughout this outline, there is the potential for sponsorship of interpretive and educational projects. The criteria for selecting programs to fund are: "that they reflect programs that are highly acceptable to the President, the Secretary, Congress, and the public" (emphasis added). The first 2 criteria are problematic; however, the second to the last and especially the last one are easily met. Once these initial criteria for selecting appropriate projects are met, the specific projects fall under project type. That is, they are differentiated by whether they are recreation, commodity, or personnel in nature. For the purpose of this discussion, the interpretive and educational projects funding opportunities will be discussed as they relate to project type.

The first project type is "Recreation, Wildlife, and Fisheries Resource Enhancement" through which one of the foci of the President's Initiative "America's Great Outdoors" program will be on "increased interpretation and education related to forest resources". This is the most obvious source of

funding specifically earmarked for interpretive and educational projects. For the last 3 example projects mentioned above (the capping project, the restoration of the guard station, and the interpretation of the high public interest sites), America's Great Outdoors project funds are being sought. However, since the project proposal for these 3 has not yet been processed, it is unrealistic to assume that these funds will be obtained.

Alternative means to justify funding for interpretive and educational projects include projects which would fall under 2 different sections of the budget instructions. The first one is under the "Improved Scientific Knowledge about National Resources" section where managing forest and urban environments for people is the objective. In this case, "for people" are the key words to be able to associate interpretive and educational projects with these monies. The second section under which funding could be found and earmarked for interpretive projects is the "Human Resources Diversity" section where "cultural diversity in the delivery of all programs" is the objective. This is where funds for hiring the Native American interpreter could be found.

Any or all of these types of funds, with the possibility of matching funds from interested groups, could be used to undertake cultural resources related interpretive and educational projects. Since these would be new interpretations of these instructions, it is now the job of the archaeologist to use their presentation expertise to convince the Management Team, the Regional Office, and the Washington Office that these types of endeavors are more than worthwhile "nice to do" projects. It is up to the cultural resource managers on the National Forests to demonstrate the direct association and interrelatedness of support by an informed and involved constituency to the archaeology program. In the origins of the budget process, Congressional approval for programs is most definitely related to constituency support. Now is the time, during the beginning of the decrease in funding in the timber program, to diversify and strengthen the Forest's other resources. This is an opportunity for positive change in many directions, cultural resources being one of them.