

CONSERVATION

Current Situation

The cultural resources of California are being lost or damaged at an alarming rate and there is no strategy for their conservation. A statewide effort is needed to recognize this problem and take steps to remedy it. A report published by the Society for California Archaeology in 1973 stated that an estimated 1400 archaeological sites were being lost to development within California every year. The report also estimated that 50% of all sites in California had already been destroyed. If we project up to 2005, at least 44,800 more archaeological sites have been lost since then.

Population data indicate many additional Californians will soon be occupying and recreating within our rapidly disappearing open spaces, where many archaeological sites exist. The open space in California -- in particular, public lands dedicated to recreation and public use-- will face ever-increasing pressures to provide greater access and greater flexibility in allowable uses. There are two main issues connected with cultural resources conservation:

- Population growth and the demand for use of open space. There is an increasing pressure for converting land to development and recreational use.
- The general lack of recognition of the importance of conserving cultural resources on a landscape scale. This results in incremental loss of cultural and traditional areas.

Ideal Situation

Archaeological sites are often interconnected locations that were used systematically by people, and include living areas and processing locations. They may also be tied to places that, although not archaeological sites, are part of the overall "cultural landscape", such as resource-gathering areas and sacred or religious places. There are many examples of these areas being preserved, but few that have been recognized as districts or cultural landscapes. Instead, individual archaeological sites and features have been recorded with no understanding of the connectivity between the sites and features, nor recognition of the relationship of the sites to the environment. Without the concept of the overall cultural landscape, individual sites and features may appear to lack importance, and are incrementally destroyed by development or inappropriate public uses. The ideal situation would:

- Conserve open space specifically for archaeological districts and the overall cultural landscapes of which they are a part.
- Consider appropriateness of uses for this land and control those uses.

How to Bridge the Gap

Conservation of cultural resources can be accomplished through changes in planning, implementation of collaborative efforts, improved education, and a change in the perspective of professional archaeologists from a focus on individual sites to archaeological districts and cultural landscapes. The following actions are recommended:

- Acquire land to conserve cultural resources and define the use of the land to specifically protect these resources. Make sure there is adequate funding in bond acts and other budgets to conserve cultural sites in place and to prepare management plans for long term conservation.
- Support and expand the ability of the State Parks system to create Cultural Preserves to conserve archaeological districts and cultural landscapes. Despite the many archaeological resources in the park system, relatively few Cultural Preserves have been established. Cultural Preserves control recreational uses in highly sensitive areas and provide additional protection for cultural resources. Establish as many Cultural Preserves as needed to conserve cultural landscapes, historical sites, and archaeological sites and districts. Define how Cultural Preserves benefit park users by clarifying appropriate recreation that is allowed in sensitive areas.
- Support the concept of cultural landscapes for conservation. Land managers and archaeologists need to adjust their context for identification and interpretation of cultural resources to a larger, landscape scale to see the relationships among site types, features, and the environment.
- Support the use of language in land conveyance documents to assure preservation if land is purchased by a public agency for open space and mitigation land. Currently, unless there are restrictions in the deeds or conveyance documents, the use of land where there are cultural resources is not specifically constrained. There need to be enforceable preservation covenants. A third-party monitor with legal standing could be established in the conveyance documents. The third-party monitor should have sufficient funding for ability to take legal actions; suitable funding could be established as part of conveyance document.
- Seek collaborative relationships with various conservation organizations, conservancies, and land trusts operating in California. Look beyond the usual archaeological societies for networking.
- Ensure that archaeological sites, traditional cultural properties, and other cultural properties are given priority in land management decisions. State and cultural resources professionals must get involved in local and statewide planning matters.
- Consult with California Indians and other stakeholders in local land use. Then, consider and follow through with commitments based on their recommendations.
- Support and assist the many public agencies with little to no funds to inventory their lands. Assist in the survey of public lands affected by wildfires, flooding, ongoing natural erosion, and impacts brought on by active recreational public uses.
- Discourage excavation of preserved, non-threatened cultural resources. The mission statements of both the Society for American Archaeology and the Society for California

Archaeology place site conservation and stewardship of cultural resources as a critical goal for all members.

- Encourage the establishment of conservation programs in colleges and universities. Colleges and universities need programs that instill a *conservation ethos*.
- Use district evaluations instead of looking at individual sites in isolation. Cultural resource managers too often look at small pieces of the cultural landscape and evaluate them individually.
- Refine Categorical Exemptions in CEQA to prevent inadvertent site destruction. For example, CEQA exempts habitat restoration projects from environmental review, resulting in the potential destruction of sites even on conserved lands. A review of the Categorical Exemptions in CEQA is needed to amend the list of exempt activities, and to add language that requires consideration of whether the activity could result in damage to, or destruction of, cultural resources.