PROJECT SUMMARY

Ethnological and Ethnohistorical Assessment of Ethnobotanical and Cultural Resources

Source: G. Campbell, University of Montana

Introduction and Background

The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site (NHS) area is significant to several native Plains cultures that have historical and cultural associations with the land and its resources. The Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes traditionally used the area, though it is also associated with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Ute. In 2004, an assessment identified and documented ethnographic resources, or resources meaningful to how a group of people identifies itself. The assessment evaluated Sand Creek Massacre NHS and nearby Bent's Old Fort NHS for ethnographic resources significant to associated tribes.

Methods

Research emphasized the historical and contemporary importance of the Plains to tribal culture and way of life, especially resource use and identification of culturally significant plant species. The research included a review of historic and ethnographic literature which document the cultural patterns and behaviors of a contemporary community, and oral history interviews with knowledgeable tribe members.



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Cheyenne tribal members at Sand Creek Massacre NHS, 2006.



HOWARD F. SCHWARTZ

Soapweed yucca (*Yucca glauca*) is significant to multiple tribes.

Ethnological information on traditional plant use was collected in the context of the park's cultural landscape or natural environment that is culturally significant. Information collected included traditional use, cultural values, and the importance of plants to maintaining the beliefs and practices of tribal communities. Data was collected using ethnohistorical methods, which examine historical events from a cultural perspective. Oral history interviews were conducted by an ethnographer in a semi-structured format designed to highlight the importance of the cultural landscape to the associated tribes.

Results

Through the ethnohistory and historical ethnography of associated tribes and documentation of plants and their cultural uses, the assessment examined the significance of landscapes to native Plains people. The implications of alienating tribes from environments integral to their cultural identity during the reservation era were also evaluated.

Approximately 829 plant species were reported as culturally significant to the associated tribes, though several were not conclusively identified. Cultural usage of plants was documented. At Sand Creek Massacre NHS, 62 plant species are known to have ethnobotanical and cultural significance to the associated tribes: 13 are culturally significant to the Arapaho, 26 to the Cheyenne, 12 to the Comanche, 22 to the Kiowa,



NPS

Bush morning-glory (*Ipomoea leptophylla*).

and 8 to the Southern Ute. Several plants, including soapweed yucca (*Yucca glauca*) and bush morning-glory (*Ipomoea leptophylla*), were significant to multiple tribes, while others, such as showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*) and locoweed (*Oxytropis* sp.), were significant to a single tribe. The study noted that plant usage changed over time; some uses were lost while others were added, including the use of some non-native species.

Discussion

The physical environment is considered a natural landscape with potential sacred powers by traditional native Plains people. Natural features in the region and Sand Creek Massacre NHS have significant symbolic meanings that have become part of the cultural framework that gives meaning and definition the physical environment. Interactions with the natural and sacred world develop intimate relationships between tribal members and the landscape. Continuation and development of traditional culture is dependent on repeated use and renewed relationships with natural features; picking berries, collecting wood, and hunting continue to be important cultural activities. Sand Creek Massacre NHS was a vital area for subsistence activities.



USDA FOREST SERVICE/DAVE POWELL

Showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*).



JOY VIOLA

Locoweed (*Oxytropis* sp.).

Contemporary cultural practices of associated tribes are rooted in the area landscape by the examination of traditional beliefs, customs, and practices in the ethnological and ethnohistorical assessments of the tribes. Cultural landscapes provide a sense of identity and place and ethnobotanical resources are critical to the continuation of cultural traditions. The ethnological resources of Sand Creek Massacre NHS are rooted in the area's cultural landscape.

The study recommended continued Native American involvement with the site, including access and potential use of ethnographic and cultural resources. Recommendations also included prairie restoration, linking Sand Creek Massacre NHS and Bent's Old Fort NHS to other sites, and educating the non-Native public.

Literature Cited

Campbell, G. 2007. An ethnological and ethnohistorical assessment of ethnobotanical and cultural resources at the Sand Creek National Historic Site and Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site. Report. Missoula, MT: University of Montana. CD-ROM.

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