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Editors: Nora Mitchell, Archer St. Clair, Jessica Brown, Brenda Barrett, and Anabelle Rodríguez

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2018 US/ICOMOS Symposium

*Forward Together: A Culture-Nature Journey Towards More Effective Conservation in a Changing World*  
13-14 November 2018, The Presidio, San Francisco, California

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**Water/Earth/Sky Journeys: Overcoming Serial Nomination Challenges with a Themed  
Landscape Approach**

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**Abstract**

Multi-site (serial) World Heritage nominations have become more common in recent years. Such nominations present unique challenges to stakeholder engagement, interpretation, and site buffering because nomination components are often geographically separated and isolated. Ongoing work on the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks nomination in Ohio, United States, shows that a World Heritage nomination's Outstanding Universal Value can be the source of landscape themes that help overcome these challenges. Working with the themes water/earth/sky/ journey, this case study shows how these ancient landscape themes reframe relationships among World Heritage nomination components, between those components and other culturally related sites, among stakeholders, and between the World Heritage project and potential partners. These reframed relationships offer solutions to pressing World Heritage serial nominations challenges.

**Keywords**

Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, World Heritage tourism, World Heritage serial nomination, World Heritage landscape, landscape themes, Hopewell

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## **Water/Earth/Sky Journeys: Overcoming Serial Nomination Challenges with a Themed Landscape Approach**

### **Introduction**

Serial nominations for World Heritage continue to increase, and as a result World Heritage advisory bodies seek to understand and articulate how these nominations differ from single-component nominations (e.g. Engels et al. 2009; World Heritage Committee 2008; World Heritage Committee 2010). In 2010, the World Heritage Committee clarified the relationship between the individual components of a serial nomination and the nomination's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), stating that component parts of serial nominations must "contribute to the OUV of the property as a whole in a substantial, scientific readily defined and discernible way" (World Heritage Committee 2010: 2).

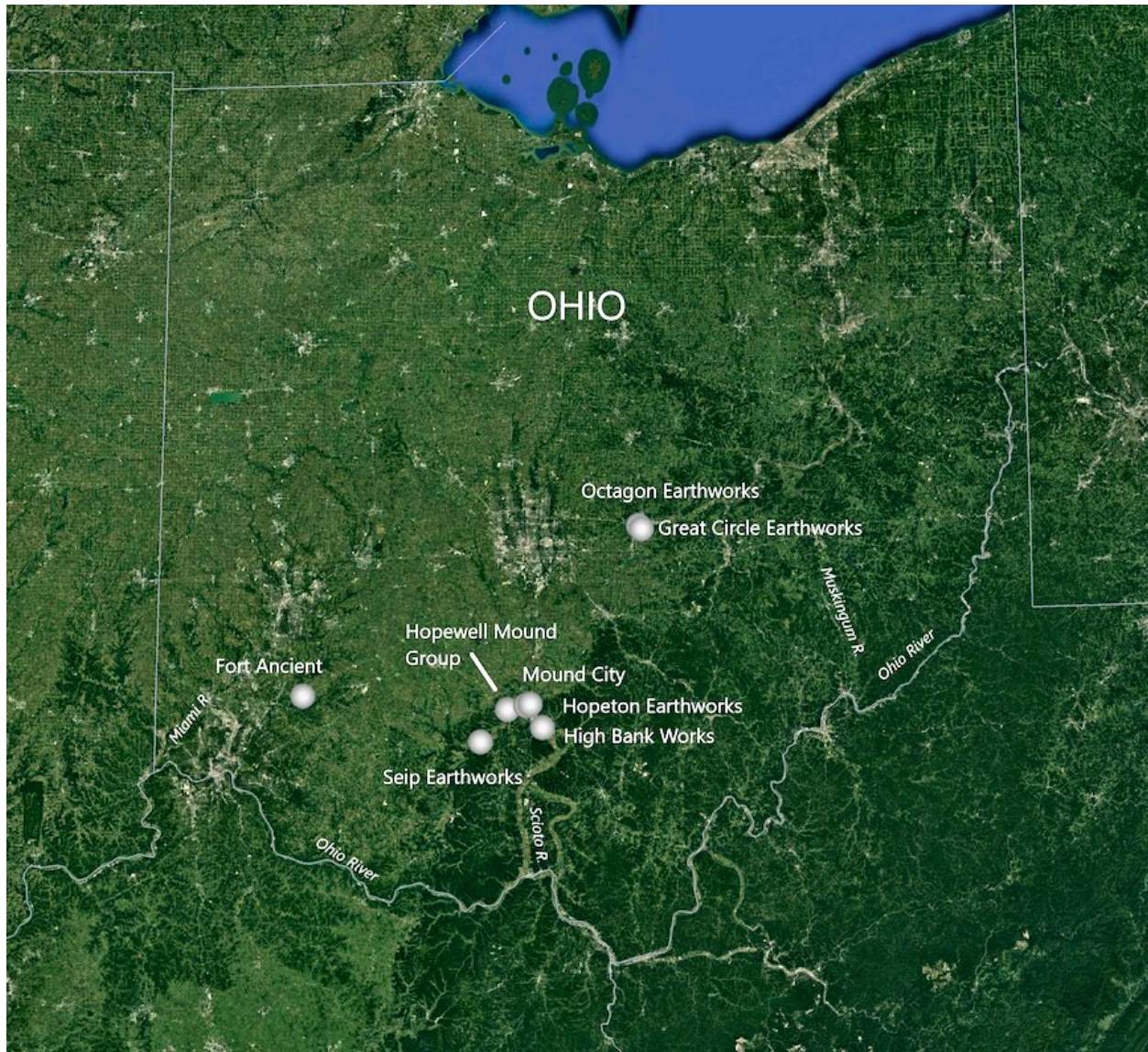
Using the case study of the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks World Heritage nomination, this paper explores how aspects of an OUV can translate into themes that offer strategies for overcoming common serial nomination challenges. In the case of the Hopewell nomination, reframing site and stakeholder relationships around four landscape themes—*water, earth, sky* and *journey*—shows promise as a problem-solving strategy.

### **Water/Earth/Sky/Journey Landscape Themes**

The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks is a series of monumental American Indian earthwork and mound complexes distributed along the major south-flowing tributaries of the Ohio River in the southern half of the state of Ohio. Both geometric and free form, these earthwork complexes measure between approximately 15 and 40 hectares in size. Added to the U.S. Tentative List in 2008, the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks were constructed by ancestors of modern American Indians between about A.D. 1 and 400. The eight nomination components include: Fort Ancient in Warren County in southwestern Ohio, located on the Little Miami River; Newark Earthworks' Octagon and Great Circle in Licking County in east-central Ohio, located on the Licking River;



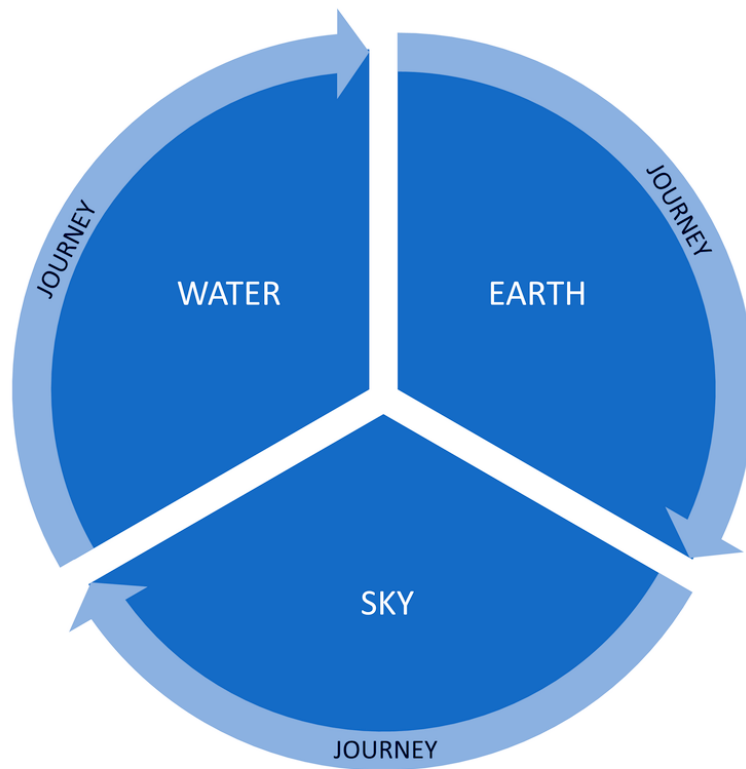
and Mound City, Hopeton Earthworks, Hopewell Mound Group, High Bank Works and Seip Mound in Ross County in south-central Ohio's Scioto River watershed.



**Figure 1.** Locations of Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks components, Ohio, United States of America. *Copyright Google, Image NOAA, Image Landsat/Copernicus.*

These eight sites are exemplary among hundreds of monumental earthworks built by the people of the Hopewell culture. Most of these precise geometric and naturalistic hilltop enclosures are adjacent to rivers and include *water* elements in their architecture; all are carefully engineered using specific combinations of *earth* and stone; and most encode astronomical and landscape

alignments viewed across the *sky*. A three-level cosmology including a watery underworld, an earth realm, and a sky realm is common today among American Indian tribes with Ohio roots (Romain 2015: 26-27). Nearly all earthworks' forms suggest the importance to their creators of directed *journeys* among and between these realms.



**Figure 2.** Water, Earth and Sky realms integrated by Journey

### ***Water***

Stretching across an area of hundreds of square miles, the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks bespeaks a cultural tradition or traditions that, over hundreds of years, developed in the region's south-flowing tributaries to the Ohio River. Ancient peoples relied on these rivers for long-distance travel, and each of the eight nomination components connects to the others via the Ohio River and its tributaries. The Scioto River valley, the geographic center of these three tributaries,



holds the densest concentration of earthen mounds and monumental earthworks in the United States and, likely, the world. Away from the Scioto the density of earthwork sites drops off somewhat, but the Miami and Muskingum (Licking) river valleys that flank the Scioto still contain among the world's highest densities of monumental ancient earthen architecture. Today, after two centuries of plowing and development only a small fraction of the once abundant earthworks are preserved above ground, yet by a conservative count the Ohio Archaeological Inventory/Historic Preservation Office documents approximately 260 monumental earthwork sites remaining in the state. Thanks to the long history of archaeological research and mapping in the region, it is clear that the earthwork builders' lives and constructions oriented toward rivers and water.

Water's stillness and flow is also an important aspect of the sites' internal architectures. Many include water in their design; Fort Ancient has over 100 interior ponding areas.



**Figure 3.** An ancient ponding area at Fort Ancient reflects the earthworks and the sky.

*Courtesy John Hancock.*

The impressive interior ditch of Newark's Great Circle, like the pits surrounding Mound City, were carefully lined with stone and clay so they would hold water. Water represents travel and journey, reflects the sky, and likely held spiritual and cosmological significance for the builders. For example, the Miami tribe—a tribe with deep roots in Ohio and Indiana—begins their origin story with the words, “at first the Miamis came out of the water” and continues to describe how this emergence from water followed a challenging journey (Myaamia Center 2010). While it is impossible to know if the people of the Hopewell culture had a similar origin story, the Miami story highlights the continued importance of *water* and *journey* to a tribe with strong local connections.

### ***Earth***

Built as places for ceremonial and civic gatherings, the earthworks consist of embankment walls enclosing huge geometric or topographically defined spaces, in a variety of combinations. They show remarkable consistency of motifs and dimensions across the region. The earthwork builders were masters of earthen architecture, using different textures and colors of sediment for different engineering and, likely, symbolic reasons (Lynott 2014: 148-150; 226). The full repertoire of Hopewell earthwork configurations includes landform-based shapes, plus geometrically precise circles, squares (some with rounded corners), octagons, and elaborate combinations thereof often connected by long, parallel earthen walls. Many are built to standard dimensional units and proportions repeated across the region. Besides the enclosing walls themselves, the designs incorporate mounds, gateways, water features, and pavements as enduring architectural elements. Many of the earthwork enclosures originally contained large, ceremonial wooden structures. When the earthwork builders eventually dismantled these structures they covered them with earthen mounds. The Seip-Pricer mound offers one enormous example, at 250 ft (75 m) long, 150 ft (45 m) wide, and 32 ft (9.6 m) high (Lynott 2014: 159-162). The amount of human effort and knowledge that went into engineering and building the monumental enclosures and mounds identify *earth* as a key Hopewell landscape concept.



## *Sky*

The nomination's OUV highlights the earthworks' embedded astronomical alignments, which belie their builders' profound knowledge of celestial patterns. The Newark Earthworks and High Bank Works offer rich examples. Hively and Horn (1982) recovered knowledge that these two sites, separated by 60 miles (96 km) align with all eight key lunar rise and set points in the 18.6 year long moon cycle.



**Figure 4.** Digital rendering of the Octagon Earthworks' maximum northern moonrise.

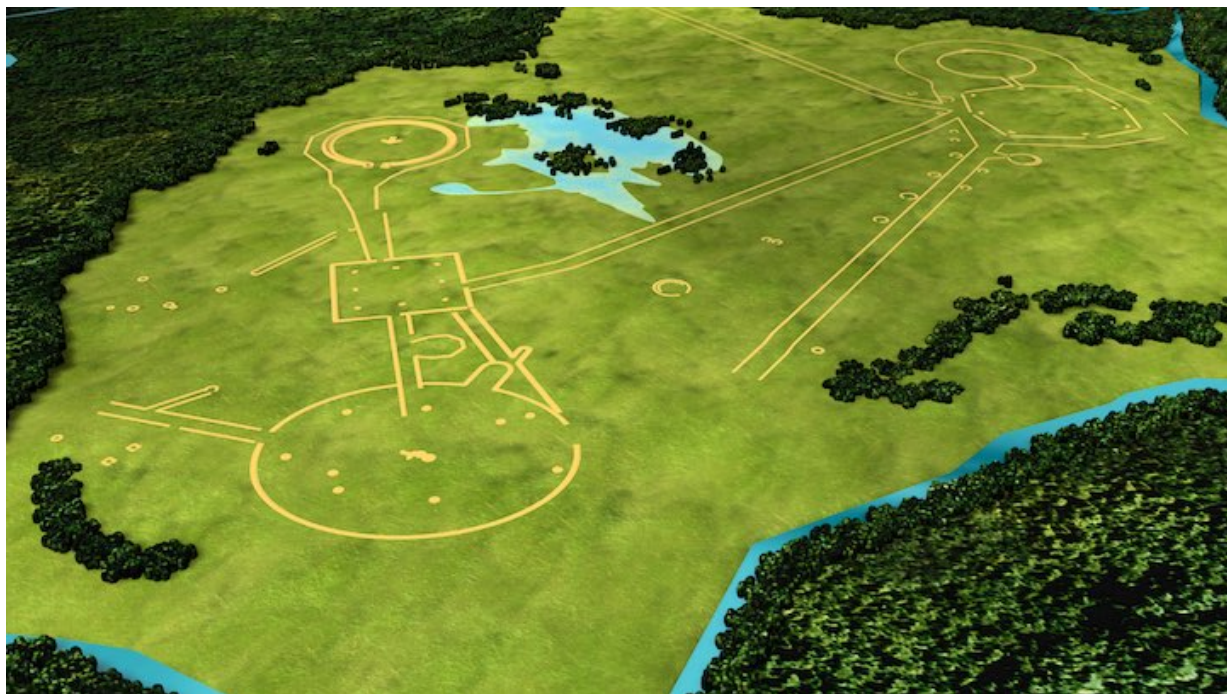
*Courtesy CERHAS.*



Additional astronomical alignments continue to be explored and recovered (Hively and Horn 2013; 2016). Astronomical alignments are not the only important visual alignments at the sites. For example, High Bank's primary central axis is aligned not to any astronomical event but instead towards the locations of two other earthwork sites in its immediate vicinity—Works East, which stood 2.0 miles (3.3 kilometers) to the north, and the Liberty-Harness Earthworks 3.9 miles (6.3 kilometers) to the south. High Bank therefore suggests both *earth-sky* astronomical alignments and *earth-sky-earth* visual alignments among sites and between sites and elevated vantage points (Hively and Horn 2013).

### ***Journey: Integrating Water, Earth and Air***

The people who built the earthworks imagined, designed, and erected them according to the tenets of their worldviews, and each site was built with a purpose even though we may not comprehend it from across the ages. But we can surmise from their forms that people journeyed *within the sites* in purposeful ways, guided by visual alignments, walls and gateways (Chaatsmith 2013, 184). They journeyed *among components* of larger complexes like the Newark Earthworks as directed by long sets of parallel walls, visual alignments and gateways.



**Figure 5.** Digital rendering of the Newark Earthworks. *Courtesy of CERHAS.*

They journeyed *toward and away from the sites* through these same directed paths. They journeyed *between disparate sites* that were connected by waterways and parallel earthen walls. And, finally, people *journeyed from afar*, bringing to the earthwork sites special materials and objects from across the eastern two-thirds of North America, including: ceremonial spear points made of obsidian from Yellowstone's Obsidian Cliffs; ear spools crafted from Canadian silver; delicate carvings of Appalachian mica; Gulf Coast shell; finely carved geometric and animal motifs of Great Lakes and southern Appalachian copper (Hill et al. 2018; Lynott 2014, 201; Penney 2004, 45).

A clear example of embedded *journeys* comes from the Newark Earthworks. As documented in early 19<sup>th</sup> century maps (Squier and Davis 1848; Salisbury and Salisbury 1862), wide pathways connected the Octagon to both the Wright Square and the Ellipse, the latter of which served as a cemetery (Fig. 4). The earthwork builders designed ancient Newark with walkways, walls and openings that prescribe movement through the complex. Parallel wall passageways connected the Octagon and the Ellipse to nearby waterways, directing movement and implying water journeys to and from the complex. Additionally, a long parallel wall passageway heading at least 17 kilometers southwest from the Octagon likely marks the terminus of a "Great Hopewell Road" (Lepper 2006; Romain 2015, 69-72). Evidence of the road hints at a sacred journey pathway between Newark and the earthwork-rich Scioto River Valley (Lepper 2006:129-130), and this pathway may align with the Milky Way creating a dual earth-sky journey (Romain 2015, 73-75). Directed and purposeful movement is built into Hopewell landscapes; more specifically, journeys by water, earth and sky are essential to the earthwork builders' worldview, as we understand it.

### **American Indian Perspectives: The Earthwork Builders' Worldview, as We Understand It**

While no contemporary American Indian Nation claims singular descendancy from the Hopewell culture, broadly speaking the closest connections between the Hopewell culture and contemporary American Indians today are with tribes who have a deep history of earthen architecture in the Eastern Woodlands. Additionally, after European Contact many tribal groups

were pushed into the Ohio Valley from other areas and stayed for significant amounts of time, sometimes for several generations. Ultimately, these groups were forced to relocate through the federal policy of Removal. They were the last American Indian tribes to live among the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, and as such, were stewards of these places. Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma states, "...My people, my ancestors treasured these mounds. Perhaps they did not build them, but they loved them, protected them, revered them. They knew their importance, and these earthworks were sacred to them" (Wallace 2016, xi). This reverence is evidenced by the fact that the earthworks were kept intact and not destroyed by these American Indian settlers (Chaatsmith 2013, 192). By the time the earthworks were thoroughly documented in the Smithsonian's first volume (Squier and Davis 1848), no American Indian nations remained in Ohio, and by 1910 American settlement had destroyed the majority of the Hopewell-era earthworks across the region (Chaatsmith 2016, 185).

The tribes who were in Ohio just prior to contact are now located in Oklahoma, Kansas, Michigan, New York, and Wisconsin. Many of these tribes have organized journeys to the nomination sites to reconnect with the earthworks and their ancestral lands. Ohio is also the home of about forty thousand people who identify as American Indian, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. By engaging Tribes and tribal citizens, essential insights and perspectives bring life and detail to the landscape's stories. Through the input of World Heritage Ohio's American Indian Workgroup, *water*, *earth*, *sky* and *journey* emerged as central themes that ground the nomination in a broad landscape that connects past and present. Engagement of tribal citizens with the project is essential to bringing these authentic themes into present-day work on the nomination.

### **How Landscape Themes Address Serial Nomination Challenges**

Serial nominations, despite their differences, often share similar challenges related to the geographic separation of their components. These components may be located in different political jurisdictions, managed by different entities, controlled by different types of land use regulations, and likely involve a variety of local stakeholder groups. While the specific tactics



used to address these issues must differ on a case-by-case basis, general strategies can translate between nominations. The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks case study reorients relationships around landscape-based themes that counter dominant boundary narratives (e.g. physical site boundaries, political jurisdictions, community boundaries) to provide alternate frameworks for building relationships and experiences in support of World Heritage. The nomination provides both a general example of how “landscape” can offer a strategy for addressing serial nomination challenges, as well as a specific case study for implementing landscape themes tactically.

### ***Serial Nomination Challenge #1: Overcome Political and Community Boundaries***

The components of the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks nomination cluster in three distinct geographic areas that lack a cohesive identity in the modern world. The counties, cities and townships in the three areas have minimal interrelationship, except as Ohio communities that compete for economic development, state funding and other resources. Some leaders in the three communities around the sites initially perceived a competition between their communities to “win” a single, imagined “World Heritage hub” for the nomination.

To overcome this disconnection, the project has worked to intentionally reorient the community leaders’ focus toward collaboration and synergy. *Water* offers a compelling metaphor for this work because the three rivers that correspond to the nomination’s three site areas are unique but, ultimately, flow together into the Ohio River. Paralleling these river connections, the three nomination areas remain locally distinct but also connect at a higher level, through World Heritage. One successful, concrete effort to build connections across these areas was a “Key Leaders” visit series. Community leaders from the three nomination areas came together for a *journey*, visiting the other areas in a round-robin tour. They experienced the other components of the nomination that they had not previously visited and learned about the nearby communities. Each community’s leaders had an opportunity to host their peers, sharing their visions and highlighting community assets, successes and challenges. They gathered ideas from each other, built relationships across the nomination, and began to understand how each component and community enhances the whole nomination. Similarly, interpretive staff from all eight

nomination sites have visited the other sites and begun to assemble as a single group for interpretive training. We intentionally recognize these journeys in the modern world as connected to journeys in the ancient past, and essential for the nomination's success.

### ***Serial Nomination Challenge #2: Overcome Perception of Sites as Isolated and Disconnected***

The components of a serial nomination, especially when separated by large distances, can unfortunately be perceived as a set of isolated, bounded components disconnected from each other and their surrounding landscapes. In the case of the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks, such an impression would be patently false. The nomination components are exceptional examples among hundreds of related earthworks, mounds and habitation sites in the region. To address this challenge, the project aims to build interpretive space in the *journey* between the World Heritage components. This interpretation will begin at the World Heritage property, where visitors will learn about connections with other sites and interact with print and mobile electronic interpretive resources that connect the World Heritage property components through guided journeys. These media will suggest travel routes; interpret other earthwork, mound, habitation and quarry sites along the route; draw attention to important waterways and culturally significant landforms; and illustrate visual alignments among sites and between sites and the sky. The key component of this interpretive journey will be a reworked "Ancient Ohio Trail" (AOT) ([www.ancientohiotrail.org](http://www.ancientohiotrail.org)) web resource, which was developed by Dr. John Hancock's Center for the Electronic Reconstruction of Historical and Archaeological Sites (CERHAS) at the University of Cincinnati, and which is now owned by World Heritage Ohio. The AOT has already themed and organized all of the publicly accessible earthworks and mounds in the region within a curated, multi-voiced media and tourism experience. In the future, an updated AOT can offer the desired suite of mobile-accessible experiences that visitors can engage with on their journeys between components.

### ***Serial Nomination Challenge #3: Balance Tourism and Sustainable Development***

Tourism benefits communities with World Heritage properties, if those communities build appropriate infrastructure (Jolley et al. 2018) and manage visitation sustainably. Economic and

cultural development strongly motivate local support for the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks nomination, but community leaders and residents who live near the nomination sites also want to balance tourism with quality of life. Their desire aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on sustainable tourism development. Because pressure for financial gain around World Heritage can be intense, UNESCO's Sustainable Tourism Toolkit states that "sustainable planning and management of tourism is one of the most pressing challenges concerning the future of the World Heritage Convention today" (UNESCO n.d.).

In order to adequately understand and prepare Ohio for World Heritage, Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Policy completed an economic impact study for the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks (Jolley et al. 2018). This study offers key recommendations for balancing economics and sustainability, including the importance of encouraging overnight visits that bring greater economic benefit per visitor (Jolley et al. 2018:15). Perhaps counter-intuitively, by offering a rich regional experience that encourages visitors to stay for several days, World Heritage sites and local partners can increase economic impact with fewer visitors while protecting the heritage resource by spreading those visitors out across broader areas. To implement this advice, World Heritage Ohio is beginning a regional destination planning process under the leadership of the nonprofit Ohio Travel Association. This planning process will include not only the three counties with World Heritage nomination resources, but also:

- Other counties in the region with tourist-accessible earthworks and mounds (*earth* theme)
- Counties traversed by the major rivers that connect the nomination earthworks to the Ohio River (*water* theme)
- Counties with observatories, dark sky stargazing locations and astronomy parks (*sky* theme)

The destination planning process can encourage tourism partners to create and market themed, multi-day *water*, *earth* and *sky* themed *journeys* for visitors that connect broadly with World



Heritage. These journeys can draw on the region's existing *water* (scenic river roads, canoe, kayak), *earth* (earthworks and mounds, bike trails, hiking), and *sky* (observatories, astronomy park and dark sky locations) tourism resources. The Ancient Ohio Trail mobile web-based resource previously described can supply the primary vehicle for implementing these broadly integrated tourism/travel themes and destinations at a regional scale.

***Serial Nomination Challenge #4: Adequately Buffer and Protect Nomination Components***

Securing buffers and protections for each component of a serial nomination can be time-consuming and expensive. Organizations that own and manage World Heritage sites need partners to help in this work. This challenge arises early in a nomination's World Heritage timeline, and can continue on past inscription as properties continually seek to strengthen protections.

Organizations with interests in protecting *water*, *earth* and *sky* are natural partners for buffers and protections collaboration for this nomination. The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks project has begun to build partnerships with land and water conservation groups whose target areas and goals align with World Heritage. These partnerships offer promise for extending site buffers to nearby waterways. State water and land protection agencies like the Ohio Department of Natural Resources have potentially overlapping interests to explore, as well. Local government entities like townships, cities and counties have the power to regulate land use and may be willing to put additional protections in place for World Heritage buffering. For example, the city council of Heath, Ohio, which is home to part of the Great Circle (Newark Earthworks), recently passed a viewshed zoning overlay restricting the height of future development in the vicinity of the earthworks. The council understands that protecting sky views supports authentic visitor experiences. Recognizing that conservation of all three elements – water, earth and sky – are essential to the earthworks, we can and should work together with partners to protect them.

## Summary

Four key landscape themes—*water, earth, sky* and *journey*— emerge from the collaborative work of the many people and organizations involved in the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks nomination. Authentically connected to the OUV, these themes offer a landscape-based strategy that embeds the nomination’s eight disparate components into the regional fabric and reframes relationships that support tourism, sustainable economic development and site buffering and protection. While these four themes are unique to this nomination, this strategy can provide a model for other serial nominations and properties, encouraging them to look to the OUV for landscape-oriented themes that can catalyze solutions to modern serial nomination challenges.

*The authors would like to thank Megan Cromwell of the Newark Earthwork Center and Dr. John Hancock, chair of the World Heritage Ohio Steering Committee, for their contributions to this work.*

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### **Biographical Notes**

**Jennifer Aultman** is the World Heritage Project Director at the Ohio History Connection. A landscape archaeologist, she specializes in landscape change and culture contact in the U.S. Eastern Woodlands. She has taught university courses in anthropology, archaeology, and archaeological field methods and was previously Curator of Archaeological Collections at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (Monticello). Jen is proud to have partnered with the Monacan Nation of Virginia in her previous work. She is community organizer who co-founded and leads a community educational partnership non-profit and is deeply committed to involving communities and educational institutions with the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks World Heritage nomination.

**Elizabeth Bartley** has worked in the cultural and heritage sectors for over 20 years. She is a member of the World Heritage Ohio Executive Committee and currently serves as the Executive Director for Invest in Neighborhoods. She is an active member of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), a former member of the Board of Trustees for US/ICOMOS and served as an Associate Member of ICOMOS' ICAHM (Archaeological Heritage Management) and IFLA-ISC (Cultural Landscapes) Scientific Committees. Elizabeth was previously the Executive Director for the Center for Electronic Reconstruction of Historical and Archaeological Sites (CERHAS) at the University of Cincinnati.

**Marti L. Chaatsmith** is the Interim Director of Ohio State University's Newark Earthworks Center, an enrolled citizen of the Comanche Nation and direct descendant of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Her work considers the consequences for Ohio's cultural heritage after the diaspora of historic American Indian nations from their Midwestern homelands in the 19th century. In collaboration with the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Marti initiated a tribal outreach program to re-introduce tribal governments to sacred places in Ohio. Marti has a BA and MA from University of Oklahoma and is ABD in Sociology.