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November 13–14, 2018

San Francisco

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#### ***Forward Together: A Culture-Nature Journey Towards More Effective Conservation in a Changing World***

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The Presidio

San Francisco, California

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*Forward Together: A Culture-Nature Journey Towards More Effective Conservation in a Changing World*  
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**Landscape Processes and Cultural Resources:  
Shifting Perspectives to Protect Mendocino Woodlands**

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**Abstract**

As one of only two Recreation Demonstration Areas built in the western part of the United States and one of only two that remain intact nationwide, Mendocino Woodlands is a rare and complete example of the planning, design and craft of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) era. As a camp that still enjoys its historic use today, the threats to this National Historic Landmark don't come from adaptive reuse. Instead the dense redwood forest that continues to mature and the flowing streams rich with life that braid through the site both contribute to this cultural landscape's character and are contributing to its loss. In addition, the site is struggling financially and has been at the short end of funding streams in a region that often prizes its natural resources over its cultural ones. These are not isolated issues, but systemic of the types of challenges facing historic properties located in sensitive complex landscapes. The solution is not to continue conserving one resource at the detriment of another but looking at the resources more holistically and developing preservation and conservation strategies that sustain the character of this property.

**Keywords**

Conservation, Preservation, Cultural Landscape, WPA, Mendocino, Partnerships

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## **Landscape Processes and Cultural Resources: Shifting Perspectives to Protect Mendocino Woodlands**

Mendocino Woodlands is a complex site where cultural resources, natural resources, and recreation resources all come together. In many ways this exemplifies why the place resonates with so many people, and why it provides such good habitat for the numerous flora and fauna that exist here. How these three aspects are viewed and managed today has caused conflict and is threatening the vision of this landscape as a place set aside for resource conservation and recreation.

Mendocino Woodlands is a 720-acre property that was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1997. The state park is in Mendocino County, California, approximately seven miles east of the town of Mendocino and the Pacific Ocean, in a coast redwood forest with steep hillsides and intermittent flatlands in the Big River watershed. Mendocino Woodland's three distinct camp sites are located along portions of the north-south running Little North Fork of the Big River. Mendocino Woodlands is currently owned by the State of California, which has a concession agreement with the non-profit Mendocino Woodlands Camp Association (MWCA) to run summer camp and outdoor school programs. MWCA has been running camp programs continually at the site since 1948. Mendocino Woodlands State Park is surrounded by other state-owned lands most notably the Jackson State Demonstration Forest, which is managed by California's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The state park is part of the Russian River-Mendocino District, which also includes the adjacent Russian Gulch State Park and Big River State Park. Historically, the 720-acre Mendocino Woodlands was part of a larger 5,426-acre Mendocino Woodlands Recreation Demonstration Area (RDA) which was established by the United States Congress in 1942 as part of the New Deal era federal recovery programs.



**Figure 1.** Walking across a historic foot bridge over the Little North Fork of the Big River in Mendocino Woodland’s Camp Two which is set amidst towering coast redwoods. Laurie Matthews © 2011.

Mendocino Woodlands is significant because of its association with the New Deal, specifically the program of establishing RDAs on below par agricultural land that would be better used for recreation and conservation. It was one of forty-six RDAs established in the United States. “Mendocino Woodlands was the only RDA in California, the only one in a redwood forest, and one of only two group camp facilities built west of the Rockies” (James and Carr 1997). On June 6, 1942 the United States Congress declared that Mendocino Woodlands “...shall be used exclusively for public park, recreation and conservation purposes” (ibid.). The property is an intact example of the bungalow/NPS rustic architectural style and recreational land use planning principles epitomized by the National Park Service during the New Deal era. According to the National Park Service, Mendocino Woodlands “is one of the two best remaining examples of recreational demonstration area (RDA) planning and design in the country” (ibid.).

### ***Developing the Cultural Landscape Report and Identifying Preservation Treatment Issues***

In 2011, MWCA used grants to fund the development of a cultural landscape report to help them refine their understanding of the landscape, identify issues associated with its long-term care and management, and learn ways to address those issues using *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. Because funds were tight, two critical partnerships were established to fill the gap between the level of work needed to develop a cultural landscape report and the level of funding available. The first partnership enlisted the help of the University of Oregon to assist with research, documentation, and the development of preliminary treatment concepts as part of a studio for landscape architecture, architecture, and historic preservation students taught in Spring 2011 by Professor Robert Z. Melnick with assistance from Laurie Matthews and Christina Frank from MIG, Inc. Work associated with this first phase was presented to the client and used as the basis for a workshop facilitated by MIG, Inc. with key stakeholders including MWCA, California's Department of Parks and Recreation, and California's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The workshop focused on fleshing out critical issues facing Mendocino Woodlands and the surrounding landscape, re-engaging partnerships between the key stakeholders, and providing information to develop preservation treatment recommendations. Six primary issues were identified during the development of the cultural landscape report that are adversely affecting Mendocino Woodlands and threatening its historic integrity, its ability to function as a group camp, and the health of some of its flora and fauna. Those six issues include:

- deferred landscape maintenance
- changing environmental conditions
- multiple partners
- scarce financial resources
- incomplete documentation
- current use and high levels of visitation.

While all are important to the future preservation and sustainability of Mendocino Woodlands, it became clear during the development of the cultural landscape report that addressing one of the most complex issues, namely the changing environmental conditions of the landscape, could have the most benefit. Addressing this issue also pointed out gaps in how traditional cultural landscape reports are less effective when faced with complex landscape issues that go beyond the resources themselves to the people and agencies that are stewarding them.

### ***Limitations and Challenges***

Though recommendations were made to address the issue of changing environmental conditions in the cultural landscape report, recommendations that will be addressed in more depth later, it is important to first acknowledge the limitations that were present which prevented fully discussing and developing solutions as part of that process. The primary limitations and challenges were:

- the hierarchy in the western United States of favoring the conservation of natural resources over the preservation of cultural resources,
- the framework and methodology associated with developing traditional cultural landscape reports, and
- navigating public-private partnerships needed to steward our public lands.

### ***Conservation of Natural Resources and Preservation of Cultural Resources in the West***

Many often say that the western United States doesn't have the breadth and depth of cultural resources that other parts of the country, namely the east coast, have because of the perception it was "settled" more recently. This is wildly inaccurate but perseveres and continues to affect the priority that cultural resources have in the planning and design of our public places in the west. This construct also perpetuates the separation of cultural and natural resources as if they are two different entities.

Within cultural landscapes these resources are often one and the same or are resources that have a symbiotic relationship. Isolating one from the other or ignoring how resources are connected

only puts them at risk of not being conserved or preserved effectively. At Mendocino Woodlands the steep topography combined with significant winter storm events and an aging and clogged drainage infrastructure creates significant storm water drainage issues that are adversely affecting both natural and cultural resources including: stream and river health given the number of particulates that wash into the watershed, washing out roads and trails, and causing water damage to buildings and structures. Fixing this problem, which would involve the restoration of cultural resources - namely historic wood culverts, as well as natural resources - namely ephemeral tributaries, has not been addressed due to the overlap and complexity of how the resources are intertwined. It's a game of "not it" with the landscape itself on the losing end.

### ***Cultural Landscape Report Framework and Methodology***

While the National Park Service methodology for developing cultural landscape reports effectively embraces the complexity and dynamic qualities of cultural landscapes and provides a critical framework for researching, documenting and analyzing all types of significant cultural landscapes, this focus remains too narrow when developing preservation treatment recommendations for complex landscapes managed by multiple jurisdictions and/or interests. Often, landscapes are interconnected physically and politically to watersheds, circulation networks, plant and wildlife habitats, and hills and valleys owned or managed by multiple interests. These connections often span much larger areas than that of the historically significant cultural landscape itself. However, the current methodology lacks enough guidance for these more complex landscapes. While most practitioners who develop cultural landscape reports are trained as landscape architects, not all are, and therefore they may not be trained to look beyond the cultural landscape being studied at the natural and political systems and processes it fits within. In the case of Mendocino Woodlands, it is the byproduct of this construct, namely the artificial separation of cultural and natural resources, that adversely affected the ability to dig deeper and develop more holistic cross-disciplinary solutions. The traditional methodology also failed to address the critical need that strategic planning, team-building, and facilitation have in managing cultural landscapes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to address issues associated with the people and

agencies managing the properties that sometimes overshadow the issues associated with the properties themselves.

### ***Collaborations and Partnerships for Stewarding our Public Lands***

In terms of managing our shared heritage, public-private partnerships are gaining popularity and rightly so for the benefits these collaborations can provide a site. However, just forming a partnership without understanding what each partner brings to the table or what limitations are inherent can severely limit a partnership's effectiveness and leave the management of a site at the short end of the stick. At Mendocino Woodlands, three groups are at the table, each with a different mission, constituency, and access to resources. The MWCA is the non-profit that manages the site and can apply for and receive grant funding. They also bring in revenue from groups who rent the site. However, they do not have access to in-house cultural and natural resource planning, design, or management expertise. California Department of Parks and Recreation is the owner, has cultural resource expertise and a deep understanding of park management, but they don't have a strong regional presence and are not involved in the day-to-day operations. A result of this kind of ownership is "out of sight, out of mind." California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is not directly associated with Mendocino Woodlands but owns and manages the land surrounding it and has a stronger regional presence than does the owner. They have more natural resource management expertise and equipment but have traditionally had a strained relationship with MWCA due to perceived conflicting missions and priorities.

When these groups came together for a workshop to help identify and solve some of the issues discovered during phase one, an important issue was resolved just by having these three groups at the same table. During the workshop a deal was struck to fix deteriorating roads that provide access to Mendocino Woodlands. As previously stated, poor drainage wreaks havoc on the roads, which created potholes and large washouts. Because of this poor condition, the only garbage and recycling company serving Mendocino Woodlands threatened to quit service when their trucks suffered several broken axles. Ending service would effectively shut down the camp, which in

turn would have a disastrous effect on the maintenance of the site and preservation of its resources. During the workshop a representative of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection mentioned that they have access to road building and maintenance equipment that could help solve the problem. MWCA gratefully accepted the offer and the roads were fixed in time for the camp's busiest season.

### ***Changing Environmental Conditions***

In the cultural landscape report that was developed, changing environmental conditions are defined as being part of “a dynamic landscape [that is] subject to disturbances introduced through storms, pests and diseases, accidents, floods and droughts, and the mortality of aged plants. Responding to changing environmental conditions such as these and others requires the flexibility to make appropriate but action-oriented choices that balance the needs of the cultural and natural resources with the site's established recreational and educational uses. Developing or codifying a process for making decisions, especially in response to unplanned events, will ensure that cultural resources affected by changing environmental conditions will be protected as best they can” (Matthews and Melnick, 2014).

Cultural landscape report recommendations addressed three major factors stemming from the site's changing environmental conditions:

- conservation and recreation were meant to co-exist at Mendocino Woodlands, but the balance has been lost;
- need for a forest management plan that conserves and preserves all resources, both natural and cultural; and
- address changes in terms of the storm water and sewage systems on site.

### ***Conservation and Recreation***

Conrad Wirth, second director of the NPS who directed early CCC state park camp development, clearly outlined that park lands would be set aside for conservation or recreation and that those

distinctions should be clear. “The two types... might be joined or separated, and ‘one might even completely surround the other, forming a multiple-use area’” (James and Carr 1997). However, planners “should ‘always bear in mind the distinction’ between the two types” (ibid.).

Recreation areas were selected to take sub marginal lands that “could be transformed to serve good recreational purposes near cities and towns in need of such areas” (ibid.). “Certain areas, especially of larger state parks, were intended to remain undeveloped ‘conservation’ areas, analogous to the ‘wilderness’ zones of national park master plans. Roads, fire roads, and trails would be kept to a minimum, but would allow access to the most important scenic and other features of interest in the park” (ibid.). With these principles in mind, recognition of the difference between recreational areas and conservations areas should be readdressed in terms of Mendocino Woodlands, as recommended in the cultural landscape report. The current management strategy should be reviewed and updated by a joint group of the property’s stewards to ensure that it both reflects the original vision for the RDA and contemporary guidelines regarding preservation of cultural and natural resources. The updated management strategy should recognize different areas’ uses and their distinct characteristics and implement a management plan so that both types of areas can continue to fulfill their full potential as originally designated. For example, the camp areas should be treated with a recreation management approach.

### ***Vegetation Management Plan***

A vegetation management plan, specifically a forest management plan as recommended in the cultural landscape report, should be developed with all the site partners to ensure that management issues related to a major component of this landscape are addressed. These issues include but are not limited to the future health of the forest, the relationship of managing the forest with the historic buildings, preventing wildfires, and ensuring that a diversity and balance of vegetation types continues in the future. In places where historic resources and visitor use is high there should be an effort to manage the natural succession process so that there is a balance of wooded and open areas and the variety of spaces and features that contribute to the site’s historic character are retained. Areas where there is less intense visitor use and/or no historic

resources a process of natural succession could be encouraged. The planning group should include representatives from each of the partnering stewardship groups, but also include people with expertise in cultural and natural resource protection as well as expertise in coast redwood forests. The plan should address pertinent issues raised over the years, including but not limited to what policies are in place for thinning trees, what the natural and cultural reasons would be to trigger tree removal, how to repurpose the lumber for historic building projects since it cannot be sold, and if there are any species of trees that need to be managed more intensely than others to ensure a balanced ecosystem and retain the historic setting for the camps.



**Figure 2.** Circa 1940 photograph of the morning flag ceremony in a meadow filled with sunlight near the Camp Three Dining Lodge that no longer exists. *Courtesy of Mendocino Woodlands Camp Association.*



**Figure 3.** Camp Two Gatehouse shrouded in the coast redwood forest and covered in moss.  
*Photograph courtesy of Laurie Matthews.*

### ***Water and Sewage Infrastructure***

Both the water and sewage system infrastructure remain in dire need of attention. Patchwork solutions instituted over the past several years have kept these systems functioning but requiring an extreme amount of staff time that could be better appropriated to other operations.

Unfortunately, it's only a matter of time before one of these patchwork solutions fails and an emergency or hazardous situation occurs. Discussions have started, and actions been taken between the site's partners to address this critical need. In fact, upgrading the water filtration system has been recently completed during the completion of the cultural landscape report.



**Figure 4.** Camp Three Dining Hall surrounded by water overflowing from the Little North Fork of the Big River during a spring flood event and which covers the road leading to the camp. More wetlands and adequate storm flow infrastructure are needed to be able to handle the surge of water during storm events which cover trails and wash out roads. *Photograph courtesy of Laurie Matthews.*

Many of the historic culverts have failed or are failing due to the deterioration of the wood material and lack of cyclical maintenance that is needed to clear these passageways of debris. These failures are creating flooding events and diverting water flow which affects both critical cultural resources, such as the main road, and natural resources such as the plant and wildlife that depend upon a working hydrologic system. Many studies have been completed by local and state agencies regarding the impact these failed culverts are having on the natural resources of the area, namely the salmon. It is in the best interest of both the significant cultural and natural resources that the flow of water, which used to be accommodated by the culverts, is restored, but in a way that ensures the health of the ecosystem and reflects the character of the historic features. For example, one solution would involve rehabilitating culverts so that the materials are more durable and will require less upkeep, but appear similar to the design of the historic

culverts. This rehabilitation work should be followed by a new maintenance regime that more regularly monitors and cleans the culverts. Because of the impact of the failed culverts on both



the cultural and natural resources, namely the salmon habitat, funding resources may be available through state and non-profit organizations that are targeted towards stream restoration and fish health which could be used to rehabilitate the historic culverts. This is a prime example of the benefit of solving issues through a holistic lens.

**Figure 5.** An ephemeral stream bisects a trail and rushes by a Camp One cabin during a spring rain storm. The integration of these resources is critical to the character of the site, but they should be managed so they don't adversely affect each other. *Photograph courtesy of Laurie Matthews.*

## **What's next?**

MWCA, which led the development of the cultural landscape report and has been leading the management and care of the site for nearly 70 years, does not have the resources or skills required to address a complex set of inter-related issues. Nor does it appear that either of the State of California agencies have the funding or political willpower to accomplish this work. The cultural landscape report identified how this gap is adversely affecting the site's resources, and how identifying non-traditional financial resources can be leveraged to protect Mendocino Woodland's cultural and natural resources holistically. Mendocino Woodlands, a National Historic Landmark with high integrity that is well loved by a devoted user group and clearly embodies the values of our public lands as models for conservation and recreation, is a place where we should focus our resources since it can serve as a testing ground for adopting new tools and models on how to preserve and manage our cultural landscapes.

As the lead agency for providing technical assistance to National Historic Landmarks, the National Park Service is ideally suited to provide leadership in pulling together a multi-disciplinary design team, that can forge new paths for places like Mendocino Woodlands that requires not just historic landscape architects, but biologists, strategic planners, foresters, facilitators, consensus-builders, and others who together can develop and implement solutions. The vision is that a small, multi-disciplinary team, with members from all three stakeholders can work alongside a multi-disciplinary design and planning team that has been contracted to:

- develop and implement a forest management plan that opens the canopy in places where buildings and structures need sunlight to help ensure the longevity of their original materials, and creates multiple edge conditions proven to be beneficial for increasing plant and wildlife diversity;
- design and implement a storm water and sewage design plan that preserves the character of the historic system, takes the current drainage patterns into account, and designs a system of streams, wetlands, roads, and trails that work together to prevent washouts and high particle content in the Big River watershed;

- form a new managing partnership that recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of each stakeholder so that resources and expertise can be more effectively and sustainably allocated to the site; and
- document the methodology and its process as a case study to learn from aspects that worked and those that didn't, to supplement cultural landscape preservation planning, design, and maintenance guidance to provide stewards across all agencies and non-profits a more effective model.

Mendocino Woodlands is not an isolated case, but a harbinger of what our work in preserving and managing historic resources will require in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is up to professionals working at these sites to push the boundaries and use Mendocino Woodlands, and places like it, to test new models for developing and implementing treatment recommendations and designs that recognize gaps among partners and agencies and use these multiple sources to put our national treasures on a sustainable maintenance path.

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### **Biographical Notes**

Laurie Matthews is Director of Preservation Planning + Design at MIG and a nationally recognized expert in preservation planning and cultural landscapes. Her work has helped to manage and plan the future of some of the most iconic and precious historic sites in the country such as Yosemite National Park, Willamette Falls, and Hearst Castle, and she is fascinated by the complexities and stories associated with landscapes and the history they reveal. Laurie has

garnered national and regional awards for her work, and she frequently speaks at national conferences on historic preservation and design.