

Framing Narrative for Indigenous Cultural Landscapes along the Susquehanna

A User's Guide to Recent Applications of the ICL Concept

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Background and Summary of ICL Work along the Lower Susquehanna

In 2014, the NPS funded a study to assess Indigenous Cultural Landscape (ICL) characteristics along the Lower Susquehanna from south of Harrisburg to the Susquehanna Flats in Havre de Grace, MD.¹ The work, resulting in the report *Contact Period Landscapes of the Lower Susquehanna River* (Barrett, Brenda and Jackie Kramer 2015) was motivated for two reasons. The current cycle of FERC relicensing for Exelon could present opportunities for land conservation to protect undeveloped shoreline, an important landscape characteristic for providing learning and recreational experiences to users of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (CAJO). For example, Exelon is proposing to remove several of its shoreline properties in Maryland from its FERC boundary. Once these properties are removed from the boundary, Exelon may sell them without FERC approval. Secondly, the National Park Service, as the Trail manager, desired to complete a segment plan for this segment of the Trail to identify near-term visitor experience and resource protection priorities of mutual interest to Trail partners.

NPS initiated ICL identification along the Lower Susquehanna in full acknowledgement of the limited scope that could be achieved with minimal funding. NPS staff coordinated with the lead contractor to facilitate data collection, convene experts and scholars, and process GIS. The resulting landscape study provided a draft set of criteria for identifying ICLs along the Lower Susquehanna, identified findings and challenges, and proposed recommendations for further research and applications.

The study completed several important steps of the ICL concept first laid out in the Prototype Methodology (Sullivan et. al. 2013), including gathering GIS and related data, convening experts and scholars, and assembling preliminary high probability ICL areas based on a set of mutually agreed-upon, regionally-specific criteria.

Study participants and authors recommended completing the other steps outlined in the Methodology, including refining GIS mapping, further research on environmental and ethnographic factors influencing the landscape, and engaging the American Indian community.

Following the study's recommendation that future work continue to focus on the continuum of the American Indian presence in the landscape, a second report was completed in fall 2015, *Indigenous Cultural Landscapes Study for the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail: the Lower Susquehanna Area* (Katie Faull, David Minderhout, Kristal Jones, et. al. 2015). This document presents additional research on the cultural, historic and ethnographic features of the pre-Contact period landscape, providing a historical foundation and backdrop for the earlier landscape study. The study also merges additional GIS data, initiates content review with the American Indian community, and provides recommendations for applying

¹ For more information about ICLs, visit <http://www.nps.gov/cajo/learn/indigenous-cultural-landscapes.htm>

the narrative content in a dialog with resource managers and descendent communities to instigate greater storytelling and stewardship of the Susquehanna River valley using a landscape-scale perspective.

This second document also makes recommendations for further consideration. The lower Susquehanna offers only a portion of the whole story of the Susquehannock, and their movement and interactions beyond the valley. It does open the door to further conversation about the places and types of places -- and the stories and types of stories -- that need to be experienced and shared to build a stewardship ethic that supports environmental protection and restoration of the river.

Related Site and Landscape Identification Work along the Susquehanna

A number of organizations have been involved in related work that has ranged from investigating individual archeological sites to land conservation from a large landscape conservation perspective. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) has been working in the Lower Susquehanna River sub basin since the 1930s. The PHMC has led many archeological investigations of the several Susquehannock towns concentrated in Lancaster and York Counties.² The Susquehanna Greenway Partnership (SGP) is a 500 mile corridor that links the natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources along the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania.³ The *Stories of the Susquehanna Valley project*, supported by Bucknell University, is a collaborative project in environmental humanities, community studies, and natural history.⁴ One of the first tasks of the collaborative was the research necessary for the nomination of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania as a connecting trail to CAJO in collaboration with SGP. The Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape encompasses the communities that border the Susquehanna River in Lancaster and York Counties and focuses on land conservation, public access, and the revitalization of local river towns. The Land Protection Committee facilitates important land conservation projects in the area. The Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway in Maryland, whose mission is to stimulate local economic activity by developing a linkage between the area's natural, historic and cultural resources, is creating a series of land and water recreational trails.⁵ The Maryland Historical Trust (MET), along with other partners, is involved in a long term effort to preserve and display the Bald Friar Petroglyphs that were removed from the Susquehanna River prior to the construction of the Conowingo Dam.⁶ Local land trusts and conservancies throughout this corridor continue to move forward their land conservation priorities.

Key Caveats of Recent ICL Work

A few important things to note about the landscape documentation work in these studies. First, the work was conducted through the lens of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail, with interest primarily in the landscapes proximate to the river as they looked and functioned in the early 17th century. Importantly, human habitation in the river valley and beyond spans thousands of years, and continues to evolve.

² *Susquehanna's Indians* by Barry Kent provides details of PHMC's work in the area. For more information on Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, visit <http://www.phmc.pa.gov>

³ For information on the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, visit <http://www.susquehannagreenway.org/>

⁴ For information about Stories of the Susquehanna Valley, visit <http://storiesofthesusquehanna.blogs.bucknell.edu/>

⁵ For information on the Lower Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, visit <http://www.hitourtrails.com>

⁶ For information on Maryland Historical Trust, visit <https://mht.maryland.gov/>

ICL documentation along the Susquehanna has also played out a little differently than that along the Nanticoke (University of Maryland, 2013) and Nanjemoy-Mattawoman [Potomac River] (St. Mary's College, 2015) rivers. Preliminary ICL identification was motivated by a desire to identify conservation priorities that could support John Smith Chesapeake Trail viewshed protection and interpretation. To most efficiently meet this need, ICL identification focused primarily along a river corridor where archeologists had already documented indigenous peoples' habitation. The results of this work did not include an Annotated Bibliography for the study area, although study participants recommended that one should be conducted to acknowledge the continuum of the American Indian presence throughout the river valley. The second study provides that historical framework and continuum. It is important to note that the ICL is still a new and evolving concept, and intentionally responsive to the needs of the landscape in which the work is being conducted. Needs for additional work, and opportunities to conduct large-landscape interpretation and protection based on ICL identification and mapping continue to evolve.

Third, and related, a descendent community with strong ancestral ties to specific geographic areas has not been engaged in an ongoing way in the information-gathering process because there are no recognized Indian tribes in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It should nonetheless be clear that indigenous representatives have reviewed the content of the second report, and that the ICL approach to reading the landscape provides an important foundation for further engaging directly with tribal representatives to identify and carry out research and storytelling opportunities.

Fourth, the landscape of the Lower Susquehanna, even more than other Susquehanna River segments has experienced significant development (railroads, dams, and riverfront development) that has altered the topography, river characteristics, and views to and from the water.

As an academic exercise, the ICL implies both a way of seeing the landscape and a process for bringing together different perspectives and ways of seeing the landscape, suggesting that we might continue the dialog with several audiences as we develop applications for the information and recommendations provided in each study report.

Applications and Next Steps

The following are some applications and next steps for continuing to explore the ICL concept and its applications along the Susquehanna River.

As suggested above, there may be opportunities for in-person conversations with interested Haudenosaunee Confederacy representatives about important places and stories along the Lower Susquehanna, and beyond. These stories might be about the Susquehannock, or they might more explicitly convey messages about the Susquehanna River valley through indigenous eyes. Stories that could be shared with the public might be about a place, or a type of place, or could be told in many places along the Susquehanna. The ICL sets the stage for taking a landscape-level approach to interpretation and resource protection that merges natural and cultural values. And, these conversations could help the NPS and partners achieve greater understanding about the ways we might be able to help each other.

The work described above provides information for materials and workshops, and tools and techniques that could be provided to resource and site managers, partners, scholars, and teachers about the American Indian presence in the valley, useful for those desiring to interpret the landscape through indigenous eyes through storytelling and place-based education and public interpretation. It also provides content for the NPS and partners to develop virtual and on-site media about the history of the Susquehannock people.

Substantial research remains to be done within the Lower Susquehanna and along the entire river, conducting remote sensing, modelling, archaeology, aligning conservation priorities to ensure protection of individual landscapes and types of landscapes that support indigenous values and connect people of all ages to the river.

The two studies, and this Framing Narrative, provide the substance and direction for an Interpretative Framework that NPS will add to its Segment Plan for the Lower Susquehanna. This is an opportunity not to be missed; the Segment Plan, which lays out NPS and partner investment priorities over the next 3-5 years, can then inform conversations about what messages to convey in addition to where the stories can be told.

Some Final Observations

We should not be afraid to use big, broad stories and messages to interpret, educate and communicate. Not every story has to be about an individual place or single event. As Drs. Evans and Casselberry explained in *At the Crossroads*, "If we are to learn from the past, we must not be too hasty to adopt single cause explanations. The generally successful and sustainable adaptation made by the Native Americans to their environment was not exclusively because of their world view which emphasized living in harmony with nature, nor was it entirely determined by their relatively small population size, low population densities, and limited technology. Instead, it was a combination of material and spiritual characteristics."⁷ Using these broad stories creates opportunities to share a narrative that unfurls across the landscape, to bring people closer to the interconnectedness of things. Stories and messages can be communicated in parks and public spaces, where the public can imagine the stories unfolding before their eyes.

The story of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail along the Susquehanna is the American Indian story. And the story of indigenous peoples' relationship to and with the land is the story that knits the Susquehanna River together with all of the places along it. The American Indian story of the Susquehanna is a story that connects onto itself. It is the whole story of this river.

It is in this way that we hope to work through the ICL concept and the rubric of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail to elevate public stewardship and permanent protection of the lands and waters of the Susquehanna.

⁷ *At the Crossroads: A Natural History of Southcentral Pennsylvania*, David A. Zegers, Editor, published by Millersville University in 1994. Chapter 7, "The Influence of Native Americans on the Land" by Dr. June Evans and Dr. Samuel Casselberry, p 95.