

REFLECTIONS

ON ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY WITH A HUMAN FACE: EXPERIENCES FROM A

new national park

IN 1998, A NEW national park opened to “interpret the history and evolution of conservation stewardship in America.” The inspiration came from Mary F. and Laurance S. Rockefeller, who generously gave their 550-acre estate in Woodstock, Vermont including lands, buildings, and collections, to become Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park (MBRNHP).¹

This essay is intended to provoke thought and reflection on the management of historic places and the challenge of making them exciting, relevant centers of learning. It is not intended as an administrative or comprehensive history, but rather a personal perspective of a work in progress—the making of a national park. Several events and programs are described in detail, others are mentioned in passing, and some may have been neglected inadvertently.

The property that is today Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park was originally the home of Woodstock native George Perkins Marsh, author of *Man and Nature* (1864)—considered one of the seminal texts of environmental thinking. In *Man and Nature*, Marsh wrote about the essential interrelationship between the health and integrity of human communities and the everyday landscapes that sustain them. Marsh’s work, particularly his writings on forest and watershed management, had a profound influence on the nascent conservation movement in the United States and in many countries around the world.

The park also is named for Frederick Billings, a lawyer and president of the Northern Pacific Railroad (1879-1881) who was involved in the early efforts to create Yosemite and Yellowstone national parks. After years in the West (1849-1864), Billings returned from San Francisco to Woodstock to build his estate on several eroded hill farms including the property where Marsh had grown up. Billings, a believer in material progress, social engineering, experimentation, and education, committed himself to establishing a model farm on the Marsh property,

Figure 1. Carriage Barn Visitors Center



Barbara Slaiby/Conservation Study Institute

and a scientific forest on the worn-out and deforested slopes of Mount Tom. Billings began his forestry work in 1874. He thus created one of the earliest planned and scientifically managed forests in the United States.

In 1983, Frederick Billings's granddaughter, Mary French Rockefeller, and her husband, conservationist Laurance Rockefeller, established the Billings Farm & Museum on historic agricultural lands of the Billings estate. The Billings Farm & Museum is a living museum of Vermont's rural past, as well as a working dairy farm.² MBRNHP was established by legislation in 1992, when the Rockefellers conveyed the estate's upland residential and forest land to the people of the United States. The park includes the 550-acre working forest, as well as formal and woodland gardens, sixteen structures (most prominent is the 1805 Marsh family residence, significantly remodeled and enlarged by Frederick Billings), and a large and diverse museum collection with more than 23,000 inventoried objects associated with the Billings and Rockefeller families. The collection features American landscape paintings by such nineteenth-century artists as Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, John Frederick Kensett, and Asher B. Durand—who had a powerful influence on the conservation movement.

Laurance Rockefeller served as conservation adviser to five presidents from Dwight Eisenhower through Gerald Ford. He also served as chair of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, which in the 1960s contributed to the creation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Wilderness Act, and the National System of Scenic Rivers. For

Rockefeller, the first conservationist to be awarded the congressional Gold Medal, the creation of this national park and the Billings Farm & Museum were capstones of a lifetime championing national parks, historic preservation, and conservation. The two sites embody his and Mary's devotion to the continued stewardship of this land. The close operating relationship between MBRNHP and the Billings Farm & Museum also exemplifies Laurance S. Rockefeller's strong commitment to public/private partnerships and his belief that the most sustainable arrangement ensuring the continued stewardship of the historic Billings estate lay in the collaboration of the National Park Service and the Woodstock Foundation.³

Given this extraordinary opportunity to interpret the history of conservation stewardship, the National Park Service (NPS) faced several fundamental questions in shaping a meaningful and effective program for the new park. How could the NPS ground the new park's interpretation in the specific identity of the place and the stewardship of the Marsh, Billings, and Rockefeller generations, while also recognizing the broad diversity of stewardship experiences in a larger regional, national, and international context? Could the NPS define the concept of stewardship in a way that people could easily understand, and that could encourage them to reflect on the meaning of stewardship in their own lives? What would be the key ideas behind interpretive efforts—what sort of stories would be told and what kinds of exhibits and programs would be used to tell them? How could the park speak effectively to a local audience visiting the site, and also reach a regional, national, and international audience through methods other than site visits? How could the partnership with the Billings Farm & Museum enrich the visitor's experience and create opportunities for mutual success? Where could additional partnerships be developed to demonstrate the collaborative nature of successful conservation in today's world? In other words, could the park (through its stewardship practices and relationships with people) model the behavior it is interpreting? And last, but not least, how could the park begin to realize Laurance Rockefeller's hope that "the message and vision of conservation stewardship and its importance for the future will, once again, go out across the nation from the hills of Vermont."⁴

NEW LIFE FOR HISTORIC PLACES

IN THE SUMMER of 1995, while I was superintendent of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts, I was asked to serve as an adviser on planning and start-up of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park. When MBRNHP opened in 1998, I became the park's first superintendent. Throughout my career I have enjoyed working on a number of "transitions and start-ups," including assignments at Golden Gate National Recreation Area in California, Gateway National Recreation Area in New York, Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, and Weir Farm National Historic Site in Connecticut. I also had the opportunity to develop broader utilization of public/private conservation partnerships, both for newly created

park units and in the establishment of national heritage areas and wild and scenic rivers. However, it was my experience as superintendent of the Olmsted site that was perhaps most instructive for what lay ahead in Vermont.

The Olmsted site is the home and office of park maker Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and his sons, John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Visitors tour the restored landscape of “Fairsted” and the century-old design office that remains virtually unchanged from the days when the Olmsted firm was at its height. Housed in a vault within the office complex are nearly one million original design records detailing work on many of America’s most treasured landscapes, including New York’s Central Park.

At the Olmsted site, the National Park Service has built upon traditional visitor programs by also creating a center for the study and preservation of American landscapes. Ernest Allen Connally had originally articulated this vision in the mid-1970s, when the legislation to create the Olmsted National Historic Site was moving through Congress. Connally, then NPS associate director for the preservation of historic properties, testified: “I hope we can come up with a positive meaningful approach to the preservation problem ... Rather than the usual house museum, I think the place should be a functioning study center and national historic site at the same time. The Historic Sites Act of 1935 provides broad authority for cooperative agreements to effect such compatible uses.”⁵

Connally’s concept of a combined historic site/study center, went largely unrealized for the first decade of the Olmsted Site’s operation. Most of the vast archives were unprocessed and essentially off-limits, and with little visitation and few programs or partners, the park seemed to drift along. When I arrived as superintendent in 1988, implementing Connally’s original vision offered the most promising strategy for turning things around. Beginning in 1990, funding was secured to begin an ambitious ten-year initiative to process and catalog the Olmsted archives. This initiative provided for enhanced public research access to the archives, and enabled park and city planners from across the United States to use the records for the rehabilitation of some of the nation’s most significant landscapes. In 1991, the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation was established at the Olmsted National Historic Site, making available expertise in horticulture, landscape architecture, and history to promote the stewardship of important cultural landscapes throughout the National Park System. In 1992, the Olmsted National Historic Site and the Olmsted Center established an educational partnership with Harvard University’s Arnold Arboretum and Graduate School of Design and a number of state and national conservation and historic preservation organizations that, over the years, invited scores of leading environmental historians and practitioners to share their current research and work in public forums.⁶ Taken together, the Olmsted Archives, the Olmsted Center, and the educational partnerships enlivened and enriched the Olmsted National Historic Site with a steady stream of visiting scholars, park and landscape professionals, new collaborations and constituencies, and a variety of cosponsored public programs and discussions—adding value, context and contemporary relevance to the site’s mission and message.

The precedent of the Olmsted National Historic Site and this integrated concept of park management were very much on the minds of the planners for the new Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park. In 1993, the National Park Service and the Woodstock Foundation, with the assistance of the Library of Congress, cosponsored a conservation stewardship workshop that brought together fifty scholars and practitioners to define broad outlines of the stewardship story to be told at MBRNHP. The workshop developed three fundamental guidelines for interpretation:

- ground interpretation in the specific identity of the place by presenting the historic and evolving relationship between the land and the Marsh, Billings, and Rockefeller generations that shaped it and have been its stewards;
- reflect the complex past of conservation and its dynamic and vital legacy; and
- affect the future by stimulating, provoking, teaching, and inspiring appropriate stewardship.

The workshop also emphasized the importance of demonstrating stewardship through park management, working in partnership on programs that focused on landscape conservation and stewardship, and launching outreach efforts that would carry the conservation message beyond the boundaries of the park.⁷

Joining the planning team in 1995, I began a close and enduring collaboration with David Donath, president of the Woodstock Foundation and executive director of the Billings Farm & Museum. David brought to the plan years of experience operating the museum, deep knowledge of Vermont's environmental history, and extensive relationships within the community of Woodstock and the wider museum community.⁸ We worked to make the plan a useful blueprint for future development of the national historical park and the Billings Farm & Museum. The NPS and the Woodstock Foundation agreed that instead of a remote inter-modal shuttle and orientation center proposed in an earlier draft of the plan, the National Historical Park would share the existing parking area and space at the visitor center at the Billings Farm & Museum. This evolving common vision of cooperation gave rise to a concurrent investment strategy: a commitment of public funds for NPS rehabilitation of the 1895 Carriage Barn to house park exhibits, conferencing spaces, collections storage, and offices would match a commitment of private funds to enhance the visitor center at the Billings Farm & Museum with new exhibits, a new film, and a theater.⁹

TEXT AND CONTEXT

PERHAPS OUR most challenging task was to ground the park interpretive program in a clear historical context. Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park's enabling legislation provided an excellent foundation:

- To interpret the history and evolution of conservation stewardship in America;
- To recognize and interpret the contributions and birthplace of George Perkins Marsh, pioneering environmentalist, author of *Man and Nature*, statesman, lawyer, and linguist;

- To recognize and interpret the contributions of Frederick Billings, conservationist, pioneer in reforestation and scientific farm management, lawyer, philanthropist, and railroad builder, who extended principles of land management introduced by Marsh;
- To preserve the Marsh-Billings Mansion and its surrounding lands; and
- To recognize the significant contributions of Julia Billings, Mary Billings French, Mary French Rockefeller, and Laurance Spelman Rockefeller in perpetuating the Marsh-Billings heritage.¹⁰

What still was needed was a more carefully drawn picture of the evolution of stewardship from the writings of George Perkins Marsh to current conservation practice and philosophy. Simply stated, we still needed to articulate the connection between past, present, and future. An invitation to prepare a paper for the 1997 George Wright Society Conference presented us with the perfect opportunity. David Donath and I joined with Nora Mitchell, director of the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, to co-author a paper entitled “Conservation With A Human Face: Re-Considering Stewardship” that subsequently was published in *History News*. We had been greatly influenced by Marsh’s biographer, the geographer David Lowenthal, and we structured our essay around Marsh’s most prescient and provocative statement: “Every middle-aged man who revisits his birth-place after a few years of absence, looks upon another landscape than that which formed the theatre of his youthful toils and pleasures.”¹¹

Marsh’s voice on watershed and forest conservation, on democracy and environmental citizenship, and on the complex nature of stewardship still resonates and connects with many of the environmental crises of our day as well as his. Our essay framed the contextual narrative that we were searching for:

“The wisdom of George Perkins Marsh haunts us. For good or ill, whether intentionally or unintentionally, wisely or foolishly, humans shape the earth. We are stewards, and we hope we can learn the ways of good stewardship. But first we must learn to see and understand the places where we live. This is not easy, because as a society we are homogenized, scattered and systematically alienated from the landscapes and communities that nurtured us in our youth. Still, by returning—perhaps by looking again with new eyes—we can gain the lessons we need to be good stewards of our homes.”¹²

In his introductory remarks at the 1993 Conservation Stewardship Workshop, Laurance Rockefeller challenged the National Park Service to interpret the history of conservation stewardship in a way that also would help to inform the future of conservation: “The true importance of Marsh, Billings, and those who follow in their footsteps, goes beyond simple stewardship. Their work transcends maintenance. It involves new thought and new action to enhance and enrich and even repair errors of the past. This may be the real importance of what we can be taught and learn at Marsh-Billings. We cannot rest on the achievements of the past. Rather, each generation must not only be stewards, but activists, innovators, and enrichers.”¹³

In response to a specific recommendation from the workshop to create a center “for ongoing research, conferences and training in conservation stewardship,”

the National Park Service established the Conservation Study Institute in 1998, concurrent with the opening of the park.¹⁴ The purpose of the institute, based at MBRNHP, is to “enhance leadership in the field of conservation and to strengthen public understanding of the concept and practice of stewardship.” The National Park Service asked Nora Mitchell to be the director of the new institute. This was the first time that the agency had created an entity specifically to share conservation experiences and best practices inside and outside the NPS. The creation of the institute was a response, in part, to the growing realization that the field of conservation was rapidly changing. In particular, the stewardship of ever-larger, more complex landscapes called for more sophisticated, broad-based partnerships and collaborations.

The Conservation Study Institute gives professionals in the National Park Service the opportunity to ponder lessons learned from their work, to maintain a dialogue with partners and potential collaborators, to stay abreast of the best thinking and practice in the larger world of conservation to enhance their professional and leadership skills. The institute adds value to Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, as the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation enriched the Olmsted National Historic Site. It serves as a magnet for conservation practitioners, scholars, students, international delegations, and emerging leaders throughout the National Park Service. Participants in institute programs take away powerful and lasting impressions from their encounters with Woodstock, the Billings Farm & Museum, and MBRNHP.

As the park was starting up, David Donath, Nora Mitchell, and I engaged in an ongoing series of conversations on the changing nature of stewardship and conservation with a number of professional acquaintances and colleagues in Vermont. These conversations, lightly but deftly facilitated by Middlebury College professor and writer John Elder, inspired park officials, in partnership with the Woodstock Foundation and the Conservation Study Institute, to undertake an initiative that would highlight and encourage the best thinking and practice in conservation stewardship. The final general management plan for MBRNHP recommended this collaborative effort to find and write about people and organizations involved in new and thoughtful approaches to conservation of special places in the United States and abroad. Particular attention would be given to work that is bringing conservation stewardship to new audiences or extending stewardship activities in new ways. The goals of the project included:

- Exploring current stewardship practice.
- Strengthening the interpretation of conservation at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.
- Establishing a network of conservation practitioners.
- Recommending programs and partnerships that recognize and encourage stewardship.

A report, “Landscape of Conservation Stewardship,” was prepared, based on interviews with representatives of fifty organizations including nonprofit groups, public agencies, on-the-ground practitioners, organizations that assist the efforts of others, and private foundations that fund stewardship work. The interviews

revealed a wealth of creative energy and thinking as great as at any time in the history of conservation. The report describes the three common threads of conservation stewardship:

- a sense of place that is complex and multi-faceted;
- community-based conservation that is comprehensive, collaborative, respectful, and self-sustaining; and
- a foundation of commitment and passion that works in concert with a sound scientific understanding to provide enduring inspiration.

The report also made a number of recommendations that would strongly influence the program direction of MBRNHP and the Conservation Study Institute. For example, the report recommended activities that would enhance leadership and build capacity, including training in partnership and collaborative skills. The Conservation Study Institute and partners have responded by convening national workshops to look at lessons learned from “Collaboration in Conservation.”¹⁵ The report proposed professional and citizen exchanges on stewardship. MBRNHP and the Conservation Study Institute have hosted conservation study tours from all over the world and have partnered in “Gateway Community Planning” workshops bringing together teams of local leaders and public land managers from gateway communities—towns and cities that border public lands such as parks, forests, or wildlife refuges—around the United States. The report also proposed research and dialogue on conservation stewardship. MBRNHP and the Conservation Study Institute accordingly have undertaken a number of collaborative projects including participation in a recent national symposium on the future of conservation.¹⁶ The “Landscape of Conservation Stewardship” also recommended investing in educational programs for young people that could be shared with other national parks. In response, the NPS, Shelburne Farms, and other partners have founded a Research Learning Center for place-based education to develop and evaluate strategies for building long-term partnerships between schools and communities.

EXHIBITS

THE REHABILITATION of the 1895 Carriage Barn provided an opportunity to implement interpretive recommendations. In the exhibit “Celebrating Stewardship: People Taking Care of Places,” the National Park Service tries to strike a balance between past, present, and future perspectives. The exhibit presents the compelling personal stories of place-based stewardship by the Marsh, Billings, and Rockefeller families, and provides diverse contemporary examples of conservation stewardship that integrate social, cultural, and ecological values. To put stewardship in context, a “reader rail” timeline traces the development of conservation thought and celebrates stories of stewardship from across the country and around the world.

The park joined with The Orion Society, an award-winning environmental education organization and publisher of *Orion* magazine, to produce a series of audio interviews with a number of “citizen-stewards.” These are personal stories from a variety of people and places, both urban and rural, and while their

circumstances and locations vary widely, the impulse to be good stewards and good citizens holds a universal message. Many of the people we interviewed speak of their attachment to the landscape of home in terms that echo George Perkins Marsh. Here are a few examples:

“The future’s so random, and so mobile, there’s no way you’re going to get to your vision of what you want your community to be, just by chance alone. I really believe you have to let people know, to use your voice, to say, ‘this is what I like about my place, I want to keep it this way, this is what I think can be improved, this is what I disapprove of.’ That’s the only way you can have a part in shaping the future.”

Rick Bass, Yaak Valley Forest Council, Yaak Valley, Montana

“This farm is in our blood. I can’t visualize ever leaving here. I want to make sure my children will be able to make a good living here, too. We hope at least one of them will be the seventh generation on the farm.”

Tim Leach, Woodlawn Farm, Mettowee Valley, Vermont

“My husband’s and my philosophy is that none of us really ever own the land—we only hold it in our hands for a very brief time, and what we do with the land is our gift to the next generation. And some day, we’ll be held accountable for what happens on this land.”

Lynne Sherrod, Warren Ranch, Elk River, Colorado

The exhibit concludes by encouraging people to reflect on stewardship in their own communities and offers everyone an opportunity to share whatever personal stories of stewardship they might have by making an entry into a digital “community conservation journal.” Hubert Matheny of Barrington, New Hampshire wrote: “I am a firefighter by profession but on my days off I volunteer at the Seacoast Science Center in Rye, N.H. For the past five years I have been reading about and studying the Gulf of Maine. The one thing that has been made very clear in my learning is that we must treat the ocean with as much respect as we treat the land. It appears we are not treating either well. There are many things an average person can do. If nothing else find out which fish are being over harvested and change your eating habits so that those fish are not eaten. Also every bit of chemical you use on your lawn will make it to the ocean. They will also end up in your drinking water. ... O.K. off my soap box. Enjoy this beautiful place. I am.”

SEEING THROUGH THE TREES

NOT LONG AFTER the park began interpretive programs, David Lowenthal was invited to share some thoughts and observations in an informal roundtable conversation on Marsh, stewardship, and public interpretation. Lowenthal reminded everyone that Marsh viewed humans as “free moral agents” making critical choices, the consequences of which could be catastrophic for civilization. Marsh envisioned a civil society where citizenship also implied an active, participatory role in managing and conserving land, demonstrating, in Lowenthal’s words, “a patriotic ardor for national stewardship.”¹⁷

Figure 2. Park guide.



Barbara Slaiby/Conservation Study Institute

Forest for Every Classroom is founded on the belief that if today's students are to become responsible decision makers, they must understand local ecosystems and cultural heritage, and they must have educational opportunities based on real life issues that encourage them to practice stewardship and citizenship in their parks and communities.

Lowenthal said he had two principal concerns about interpretive programs at the park. First, both the idea and the practical application of stewardship should be at the heart of all interpretation at MBRNHP. Visitors need to think about stewardship in the context of their own lives and homes. Second, this park, this place, should be about the nature of landscape change. Visitors today see a green and verdant forest on the slopes of Mount Tom and assume it has always been that way. Somehow park interpreters need to find ways to shake visitors up a little bit and help them look beyond the lush New England greenery to envision a much different landscape—a broken landscape, stripped of its trees and topsoil, gullied by erosion. Only then can visitors begin to grasp the power of people to destroy and also to recover.

Lowenthal's observations echoed the words of David Lacy, an archaeologist with the nearby Green Mountain National Forest, a partner with MBRNHP and the Conservation Study Institute in "A Forest for Every Classroom: Learning to Make Choices for the Future of Vermont's Forests," an intensive professional development program for educators. Lacy guides students to cellar holes and remnant orchards on abandoned farmsteads with sheaves of historic maps in hand. His place-based approach to learning focuses on the nature of landscape change and its relevance for young people. "We look at artifacts and their stories but also look at the larger vision of change" says Lacy, "and the powerful influence people have had through history on land use, shaping all our landscapes, even places that today appear wild. We want students to realize that they too hold this

power in their hands and they need to be very thoughtful about the change they put in motion.”¹⁸

A RESEARCH AGENDA ABOUT PLACE AND CONTEXT

LOWENTHAL AND Lacy’s observations drove home the importance of knowing a place well. For a park whose story is so much about place, it was clear from the beginning that there was much to learn about the people, resources, and history associated with the park. Even before the park was open to the public a wide-ranging and intensive research program in environmental history began. The park also benefited enormously from the scholarship and writings of Lowenthal, Robin Winks, and John Elder. Lowenthal’s recent biography, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet Of Conservation*, builds upon his 1958 biography, *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter* and includes much new information, many new sources, and fresh insight into Marsh.¹⁹ The University of Washington Press also recently has published a new edition of *Man and Nature* with a new introduction by Lowenthal. Winks, of Yale University, authored two important biographies: *Frederick Billings: A Life* and *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation*.²⁰ Elder has written a number of essays about stewardship. He also has a new book coming out in 2004, *Pilgrimage to Vallombrosa: A Mediation in Three Landscapes* (Harvard University Press), examining the lessons of George Perkins Marsh in the context of the landscapes of Vermont and Italy that were so central to Marsh’s life and work. The first words visitors see in the Carriage Barn exhibit are Elder’s: “We must pursue stewardship not simply as the maintenance of valuable resources but also as a way of fostering a broader experience of democracy and community.”²¹

Building on this excellent work, a more contextual research agenda was developed. Three major essays were completed on conservation history: “A People of Progress: The Origins of Conservation in America, 1850-1930” by Robert Dorman of the University of New Mexico (1997); “Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park: Landscapes Of Stewardship” by Mark Madison, historian, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Conservation Training Center (1999); and “Frederick Billings: the Intellectual and Practical Influences on Forest Planting, 1823-1890,” by Daniel Nadenicek of Clemson University (2003). In 2002, Robert L. McGrath of Dartmouth College completed a research study on “Art and the American Conservation Movement.” McGrath’s report provides an integrating context for tours of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller Mansion and its nineteenth-century landscape art collection, by focusing on the influence of art and photography in the development of an American conservation ethic.

During my years at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, I learned the value of cultural landscape reports (which identify the landscape characteristics and related features, values, and associations that make a landscape historically significant) as an effective integrator of cultural and natural site information in an historical context—a useful management tool. The Conservation Study Institute and the University of Vermont completed a *Cultural Landscape Report for the Forest at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park* (2000). The Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, with support from

the Woodstock Foundation, prepared a *Cultural Landscape Report for the Mansion Grounds* (2003). A Historic American Engineering Record team came to the park in 2001 to document the carriage road system for the Library of Congress. The following year the park was selected for the first Historic American Landscape Survey in the National Park Service. An international team of young landscape architects prepared eighteen sheets of measured drawings and supporting photographs documenting the park's gardens and forests.

In the spirit of George Perkins Marsh's global perspective, the research program has crossed the Atlantic. Gil Latz, professor of geography at Portland State University, is directing a Fulbright research project (facilitated by Forest History Society President Steve Anderson), making a comparative study of the land-use history and sustainable forest management of two places with strong common interests, MBRNHP and the estate of Spannocchia, part of the Italian park system's Riserva Naturale Alto Merse. This is a component of a larger program of international cooperation between the National Park Service and the national and regional parks of Italy—focusing on sustainable tourism, education, and stewardship. Building on this exchange of information and experiences between the United States and Italy, Parco Regionale dei Monti Simbruini recently has begun work on an Italian Conservation Study Institute.

AN EVOLVING PERSPECTIVE ON PARTNERSHIP

I HAVE LEARNED much about partnerships from my friend and mentor, Karen Wade, recently retired NPS intermountain regional director. Karen and her colleagues developed a rather unusual statement of ethics that resonates with my own values, and the philosophy I have tried to follow in my work: “The National Park Service is uniquely positioned as a citizen-centered agency to help voice the nation’s conservation conscience. This conscience manifests itself as a conservation ethic with respect for land, our heritage, cultural diversity and human needs. This ethic reaches beyond the significance of any one unit of our system or the system itself. It lies in intrinsic values that help us understand whom we are as Americans and the systems that support and sustain us.”²²

In the past few years I have enjoyed the special opportunity to participate in several National Historic Landmark dedication ceremonies around Vermont, most recently for Shelburne Farms, in Shelburne. This is often a collateral duty for the superintendent of Vermont’s only national park but a responsibility I enjoy. For the owners of the landmarks, these ceremonies are a moment to reflect on all they have accomplished with their hard work and stewardship. These are very much community celebrations. Near the end of each program comes the moment when the National Park Service representative stands up and presents the landmark plaque. With that plaque you are bestowing the nation’s highest level of recognition for national significance and you are giving that plaque not to a single individual, but to a community. It is one of those rare moments when a celebration is both local and national. It is a day in your life you remember.

MBRNHP has tried to internalize this partnership ethic in the work we do. One example is our education program, “A Forest for Every Classroom.” This

program is characterized by its sustained commitment to helping classroom teachers and educators use woodlands as effective teaching environments for enhancing student environmental understanding, a sense of place, and decision-making and citizenship skills. In 2000, Shelburne Farms, the Conservation Study Institute, the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, the Green Mountain National Forest, and the Northeast Office of the National Wildlife Federation came together with a common vision: "If today's students are to become responsible environmental decision makers, they must understand their history and the local ecosystems in which they live and they must have educational opportunities based on real life issues that encourage them to practice citizenship in their own communities." Three years later this collaboration is stronger than ever, as is our partnership with the educators with whom we have been privileged to work.

Almost every public program offered at the park is, in fact, cosponsored with partnering organizations. The operating partnership between MBRNHP, the Billings Farm & Museum, and the Woodstock Foundation remains a bedrock relationship that continues to evolve and grow. This experience with partnerships also has been greatly expanded through MBRNHP's association with the Conservation Study Institute and its many national and international partners.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

THIS ESSAY was not intended to be a litany of accomplishment. Has the NPS made mistakes at MBRNHP? Hopefully not too many; however, there have been missed opportunities and occasional guffaws with friends and partners who have been kind or patient enough to overlook them. As the first national park in Vermont, and being a new organization in a relatively small community, in a small state, MBRNHP has tried to be a reliable, trustworthy friend.

MBRNHP is still a work in progress. For example, the park management plan recommended the continuation of active forest management as well as recreational activities along the historic carriage roads. Not until the Forest Cultural Landscape Report was completed did the NPS begin to fully understand and appreciate the cultural significance of the forest as one of the earliest surviving examples of a reforested landscape professionally managed without interruption since 1874. It took a while to realize just how much of this rich history of forestry practice was still readable on the landscape and how these areas could be managed and interpreted in ways that maintain their distinctive character and associated narrative. We are only beginning to explore how to demonstrate sustainability and embrace new forest stewardship ideas and innovations in the spirit of Frederick Billings, such as value-added conservation and third-party independent certification. So much more remains to be done.

From the start there has been ongoing research on so many different subjects that at times it has been difficult to assimilate new information and re-orient or revise interpretation accordingly. There is the problem of too much information. We ask our interpreters to speak knowledgeably about the careers, lives, and conservation work of the Marsh, Billings, and Rockefeller families, the socio-

economic history of nineteenth-century New England, the history of Woodstock, the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century conservation, the art of the Hudson River School, the identification of trees, the history of forestry in America, the evolution of nineteenth-century landscape design, the early history of national parks, the tools of land conservation today, and much more. We expect them, above all else, to engage visitors in thoughtful reflection and exploration of the meaning of stewardship. If we occasionally reach beyond our grasp, perhaps we can be forgiven. There always seems more to learn than time and resources allow.

Reflecting back on the questions I posed in the introduction to this essay, we also clearly have made some progress. In exhibits and personal interpretation, we have tried to manage the tension between knowledge of place and the vital importance of context. Stewardship wherever possible has been defined by personal story or example and by providing opportunity for individual reflection. Partnerships have become the lifeblood of the park, adding value in so many tangible and intangible ways. And if this national park has made some progress communicating the message and vision of conservation stewardship, we all are acutely aware how much more progress is needed.

Rolf Diamant is superintendent of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont.

NOTES

1. *Marsh-Billings National Historical Park Establishment Act*, Public Law 102-350, 102nd Congress, 22 August 1992. In 1999, Marsh-Billings National Historical Park was renamed Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park to honor Laurance Rockefeller's significant contributions to the American conservation movement.
2. As established in the 1992 enabling legislation, the 643-acre National Historical Park encompasses the core of the historic Billings estate, including an 88-acre protection zone that is part of the Billings Farm & Museum, privately owned and operated by the Woodstock Foundation, Inc. Established in 1968, the Foundation was chartered "To preserve and enhance the physical, cultural, and spiritual environment of the people of the State of Vermont, and of the United States of America, and primarily of the Town of Woodstock and the area comprising the watershed of the Ottauquechee Valley."
3. "Draft MBRNHP Cultural Landscape Report: Mansion and Environs," Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, (the National Park Service and the Woodstock Foundation, Woodstock, Vermont, 2003).
4. "Conservation Stewardship Workshop: Findings and Recommendations," (Marsh-Billings National Historical Park, Woodstock, Vermont, 20-21 November 1993), 3.
5. David Allen, "Final Draft Administrative History" (Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, March 1998), 10.
6. The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, the Trustees of Reservations, Appalachian Mountain Club, and Historic Massachusetts Inc.
7. "Conservation Stewardship Workshop."
8. Executive Director (later President) David Donath of the Woodstock Foundation served on the General Management Plan team, providing a liaison between Laurance S. Rockefeller and the NPS planners. Because of this collaboration, the Billings Farm & Museum was listed as a copublisher of the plan. The foundation would hold and manage

the endowment fund that Rockefeller established for preservation and conservation of the park's historical and natural resources.

9. The Woodstock Foundation commissioned filmmaker Charles Guggenheim to produce an orientation film, *A Place In The Land* (nominated for an Academy Award in 1999), to be shown in the theater.
10. *Marsh-Billings National Historical Park Establishment Act*, Public Law 102-350, 102nd Congress, 22 August 1992.
11. "Address Delivered Before the Agricultural Society of Rutland County," 30 September 1847 (Rutland, Vermont: The Herald Office, 1848), 17.
12. Rolf Diamant, David A. Donath, and Nora J. Mitchell, "Conservation With A Human Face: Re-Considering Stewardship," *History News*, 52 (Summer 1997), 24.
13. Laurance S. Rockefeller, opening remarks at the Conservation Stewardship Workshop, (Marsh-Billings National Historical Park, Woodstock, Vermont, 20 November 1993). Laurance and Mary Rockefeller excused themselves from the two-day workshop following the introduction.
14. "Conservation Stewardship Workshop."
15. "Collaboration and Conservation: Lessons Learned in Areas Managed through National Park Service Partnerships," Conservation and Stewardship Publication NO. 3, (NPS Conservation Study Institute, Woodstock, Vermont 2001).
16. "Speaking of the Future, A Dialogue on Conservation: A Report on a National Symposium," convened by the Woodstock Foundation, University of Vermont School of Natural Resources, Conservation Study Institute, Trust for Public Land, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, Conservation and Stewardship Publication NO. 4, (NPS Conservation Study Institute, Woodstock, Vermont 2003).
17. David Lowenthal, ed., *Man and Nature: George Perkins Marsh* (1965; reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), xxxi.
18. David Lacy, "A Forest for Every Classroom Teacher Seminar" (Ripton, Vermont, 2002).
19. David Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).
20. Robin Winks, *Frederick Billings: a Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robin Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997). When Winks died in April 2003, the National Park Service lost a close friend and a gifted scholar.
21. John Elder, "Inheriting Mt. Tom," *Orion: People and Nature* 16 (Spring 1997), 29.
22. "The Power of Partnerships; Working Shoulder to Shoulder to Preserve America's Heritage Resources" (NPS Intermountain Region, Denver, Colorado. 2003), iii.