Defining An Approach To Cultural Landscape Planning

In every corner of the world, landscapes have been shaped by the interactions of people and place over time. Nunavut is no different. Tent rings, kayak stands and fox traps dating back more than 4,000 years still exist today. Not only are these places evident; but continued patterns of land use have proven them sustainable over centuries. They are living examples of Inuit cultural heritage and are rich in value not in spite of, but because of, the presence of people. Their tangible cultural elements and patterns cannot be separated from the intangible environmental qualities and associations Nunavummiut have with this landscape. As a result, conservation approaches need to reflect traditional connections to the land and engage people in stewardship of place.

The question facing Nunavut Parks was how to achieve this. Existing models for parks and protected areas tend to emphasize natural heritage separately from cultural heritage, or incorporate heritage sites...
after ecological frameworks have been defined. There are also challenges with measuring integrity of a cultural landscape if the resource has been compromised. Similarly, meanings of places may be lost to the current generation with the passing of the elders, but communities still want to protect them because they are important.

In response, Nunavut Parks and Special Places initiated a Cultural Landscape based approach to protected areas establishment and planning that emphasizes the integration of humans and nature, rather than an approach focused on the protection of ecological landscapes, or historic sites. In the absence of models that can be applied to this broad approach, Nunavut Parks has been working with Inuit and residents of Clyde River and Aarluk Consulting to create a model for a proposed Territorial Park that may be used to assess the value of cultural landscapes across the territory as a whole.

**Initiative**

In 2005/06, following several years of feasibility study, land, water, and aerial based field work; significant research and assessment of potential landscapes and associated benefits; and guided by a Park Steering Committee, the residents of Clyde River recommended a park boundary for a proposed Territorial Park around Clyde River northwest of the community. Conservation and protection of an area as a territorial park is important to the people of Clyde River because it would protect important archaeological and cultural sites, valuable wildlife habitat and significant tourism and recreation opportunities in the area. In keeping with park establishment processes described in the Umbrella Inuit Impact and Benefits Agreement, the next step involves preparation of natural and cultural resource inventories. Recognizing the separation between cultural and natural resources is not distinct; Nunavut Parks initiated a **Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment** to gain a better understanding of the cultural landscape resources in the Clyde River area; and identify a strategic plan for cultural heritage assessment that will guide future comprehensive resource inventories for the proposed Clyde River Territorial Park and other parks. The study will also inform a new Parks and Special Places Program, System Plan, and management frameworks.

The first step in this approach was to develop a common understanding of what is meant by cultural landscapes. By its broadest definition, cultural heritage resources are understood to be both natural and manmade features associated with human activity and holding particular significance to individuals or a group. Given the unique Clyde River context and Nunavut generally, this understanding must be expanded to include areas with significant association to past, present and future generations. These “cultural landscapes” would therefore include places to which oral traditions are attached, places associated with living heritage including natural features, archaeological and palaeontological sites, graves and burial grounds, and community use or recreation sites among others.

Through community consultations, open houses, community radio shows, interviews with Elders and other residents and organizations with related interests, people were asked what is important to them about known cultural heritage resources in the Clyde River area, and were invited to add
information on maps of the study area. Presentations were also made to High School students who were also asked about resources they felt should be protected. Based on these consultations, the Park Steering Committee developed a definition which recognizes that the landscape has cultural meaning because it is connected to Inuit heritage in the past and present. The definition also recognizes the importance of: geographic area and place, associations, cultural and natural relationships, identity, distinct character, and is community based. This definition would be used as a basis for more detailed natural and cultural inventories, oral histories, archaeological studies, mapping and other information collection.

Data will be collected based on this definition, which will require a comprehensive database that is accessible and can present the information in various ways that can be used effectively in park management. The Steering Committee made recommendations on how to record and capture the knowledge and materials collected, and especially how to capture the interconnections between features and appropriate categories:

- Non-living resources—topography, geology, soils, hydrology, etc.;
- Living Resources—vegetation, wildlife, terrestrial habitat, marine habitat, etc.; and
- Cultural Resources—archaeological sites, family/community sites, fishing areas, travel routes, recreational areas, environmental phenomena, legendary/spiritual areas, etc.

For example, a local Elder spoke of an area with “… lots of caribou. They have always been here since the old days. Hunters have to walk up here to hunt because it is so steep.” Using the categories developed through this project, the area described would be mapped and recorded in a GIS database in at least three separate categories: biotic—wildlife (caribou); cultural—hunting on the land; and abiotic—topography. The system developed allows all points, routes, and areas identified to be mapped, recorded and sorted, and readily allow further inventory work. As an ongoing and comprehensive database, it will provide park planners with information needed to ensure park management planning can fully consider all current knowledge of the land.

Lessons Learned

The notion of cultural landscapes is an important one for Nunavut. It is an appropriate approach to park system planning, and a relevant foundation for park planning and management. The absence of models that capture both the tangible and intangible relationships between people and places required that a new approach be developed. As a community-driven project, the model developed by Nunavut Parks & Special Places will ensure that its application more broadly will first reflect what is important to communities.
However, there will be challenges unique to the implementation of this approach. Because it is heavily community driven, and in the absence of information generally, there will need to be community leaders who can work with Nunavut Parks to maintain project momentum over extended timeframes. Related to this, there will be challenges associated with funding its implementation over time, and there will be an ongoing need to develop training programs to ensure the capacity of communities and expertise of its residents can respond to the needs associated with this approach.

Conclusions

The outcome of this study will contribute to the development of a cultural heritage assessment process for the proposed Clyde River Territorial Park, and Nunavut that is at the leading edge of a global movement searching for an equitable approach to cultural landscape resource management. Working closely with community based Joint Planning and Management Committees, implementation of the framework will allow for the ongoing development of a comprehensive analysis of all natural and cultural aspects of a landscape, as well as effective community involvement that will capture Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit Traditional Knowledge) and maintain a record of oral histories and knowledge related to park landscapes. The Nunavut process considers both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of cultural heritage resources in the landscape, making the approach for Clyde River’s cultural heritage assessment precedent setting.

Cultural Landscape Management is a process by which Nunavut Parks & Special Places and their park management partners (e.g. Park Steering Committees, and Community Joint Parks Management Committees) will affect the protection and management of the elements of cultural heritage within park boundaries while also acknowledging that parks are cultural landscapes that do not exist in a dormant state. Instead they are situated in an environment where people live, hunt, recreate, and travel.