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Editorial

Selected Papers from the 2019 and 2021 Visual Resource Stewardship Conferences

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1. Introduction

The biennial Visual Resource Stewardship conferences of 2017, 2019, and 2021 were designed to catalyze new ideas and innovation between academia, practice, NGOs, and government agencies who work to address the analysis, planning, valuation, design, and management of visual resources. The aim of these conferences was to share ideas and discuss the issues associated with the assessment and protection of visual resources in an era of continued and new landscape changes—regionally, nationally, and globally. This Special Issue is a compilation of articles from these conferences that represent a broad perspective of research and project works focused on visual, scenic, and landscape resource assessment and management.

2. A Brief History of the Visual Resource Stewardship Conference

The catalyst for these recent conferences came on the heels of the 2012 National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) meeting (Portland, Oregon). The meeting included a specific track in Visual Resource Management (VRM) whose presentations and panels covered a range of related issues. The track was inspired by discussion amongst a group of leading professionals and academics on the topic (referred to as the VRM working group). The VRM working group also presented a one-day preconference short course, which was attended by 100+/− attendees. These activities consisted of the largest gathering of visual resource management practitioners since the 1979 Our National Landscape Conference at Lake Tahoe Nevada [1]. After the 2012 National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) meeting, the same group started monthly conference calls and followed up with visual resource presentation tracks organized for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 NAEP meetings. However, the success of the 2012 conference waned, calling for a new strategy to capture and maintain interest in VRM.

In early 2016, the VRM working group decided to develop a conference solely dedicated to visual resource stewardship. Robert Sullivan, at the Argonne National Laboratory who was pivotal in developing the visual resource assessment methodology for the USDI Bureau of Land Management, volunteered to host a conference at Argonne. The decision proved wise, as the 2017 Visual Resource Stewardship Conference (VRSC) brought seventy-five participants to Argonne for a two-and-a-half-day conference. This first conference was supported by major sponsors, including the USDI Bureau of Land Management, the USDA Forest Service, the USDI National Park Service, and the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF). The proceedings of the conference were published as a USDA Forest Service General Technical publication, Gen. Tech. Rep. NRS-P-183 [2]. The proceedings can be accessed at: 2017 VRS Conference Proceedings: Landscape and

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Seascape Management in a Time of Change. The editing and curation of this publication was completed by members of the original planning group, with substantial efforts from the US Forest Service via Dr. Paul Gobster, Dr. Richard Smardon, and members of the conference planning committee. These efforts provided a platform for sharing research and practice activities in one venue.

With the foundation set for a new conference, a conference planning committee was formalized with a vision to expand the reach and dissemination of activities within the subject area. Following on the success of the 2017 conference, planning began for a 2019 conference. This conference was also held at Argonne, with 90 participants in attendance. Conference activities were inspired by five themes: (1) Landscape scale and context, (2) Visual resource benefits, (3) Visual analysis benefits, (4) Integrated visual resource planning and application, and (5) Skill-building workshops. The addition of the skill-building workshops as a dedicated day proved successful. The workshops covered visual resource methods and practices and were very well attended. The workshops offered a unique venue for mutual engagement across practice, government, and the academy. The post conference survey revealed that participants greatly appreciated this learning opportunity and the shared expertise of the workshop instructors. Unlike previous associations with the NAEP conference and the 2017 conference, the blend of workshops and papers provided an opportunity to gauge continued activities in the field and find new means to add value to the work being performed. The proceedings of the 2019 Conference are held at ESF and can be accessed at: 2019 VRS Conference Proceedings: Seeking 20/20 Vison for Landscape Futures. The editing and curation of this publication was completed by Drs. Robin Hoffman and Richard Smardon, co-chairs of the 2019 conference.

The five 2019 conference themes were carried through to the 2021 Visual Resource Stewardship Conference co-hosted virtually by the Departments of Landscape Architecture at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and Utah State University. The virtual platform raised the number of participants to 154, including the highest ever international representation. Plenary speakers and presenters from Australia, Columbia, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom brought new perspectives to the conference's content. The no-travel platform also facilitated the opportunity for college students to present their visual resource research to an audience of visual resource practitioners during a poster session—a valuable educational and networking event. The proceedings of the 2021 Conference are also held at ESF and can be accessed at: 2021 VRS Conference Proceedings: Exploring Landscape as Culture, Resource, Home. The editing and curation of this publication was completed the co-chairs of the 2021 conference, Drs. Brent Chamberlain, Robin Hoffman, and Richard Smardon.

The 2017, 2019, and 2021 Visual Resource Stewardship conferences had the presence of Scenic America as both a sponsor and active participant. Scenic America is the major advocacy group for scenic quality protection in the US and promotes outdoor advertising control, undergrounding utilities, and the promotion of scenic byways. Several of Scenic America's chapters are building scenic viewshed inventories in their respective states. Facilitated by Nathan O'Neill, Policy and Program Director at Scenic America, a panel of chapter representatives presented their experiences with creating the scenic inventories and the VRS tools and research which allow them to accomplish this work.

3. The *Land* Special Issue: Selected Papers from Visual Resource Stewardship Conferences 2019 and 2021

The organizers of the 2021 Visual Resource Stewardship conference were contacted by the publishers of *Land* to ask if they were interested in publishing a Special Issue of the journal drawn from papers presented at the 2019 and 2021 conferences. The publishers expressed their interest in having the content of the Special Issue include the work of international authors addressing scenic landscape research. The editors of this Special Issue agreed to contact authors and develop the issue.

The objective of Selected Papers from Visual Resource Stewardship Conferences 2019 and 2021 was to publish the latest international research on and applications of visual and scenic landscape resource stewardship assessment methods. In this Special Issue, the following research areas were proposed to potential authors:

- Ethics, equality, and equity in landscape assessment practice;
- Public perception, participation engagement, and conflict resolution;
- Valuation of landscape resources and cultural ecosystem services;
- Federal and state government programs, regulations, and policies;
- Visual resource management in urban communities;
- Visual landscape and cultural resource management and mitigation;
- Integration of visual resource inventory with multi-resource assessment;
- Visual resource management tools and technologies.

This Special Issue of *Land* contains two review papers, four research articles, a hypothesis article, and an essay (Appendix A). Lothian's article is a comprehensive historical review of landscape quality assessment—first focusing on the United Kingdom and then around the world. The author covers in detail why, in the UK, the landscape assessment methods veered away from quantitative approaches to more qualitative and descriptive wholistic approaches. Palmer's review paper is a comprehensive literature review of visual impact assessment literature and the lack of research into and review of the validity and reliability of assessment methods.

The first of the research papers, by Openshaw and Chamberlain, reviews the progress of optimization accuracy and viewshed method development plus a case study for optimizing viewpoint selection for route-based viewshed assessment. The second research article by Munder et al. is an exploratory study of the public's perception of visual aesthetics of a forest preserve in Malaysia. Li and Huang's research paper is on the use of eye movement recording to analyze students' aesthetic perceptions of historic Chinese gardens. The fourth research paper, by Ribe et al., is a perception study of diverse landowners' attitudes and responses to forest fuel reduction with respect to project types, risks, costs, and habitat benefits. Kelsch presents a hypothesis paper addressing the cultural history of scenic resources of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Virginia and Washington DC area. Finally, Miller's essay presents the argument for looking for "deeper meaning" in landscapes as perceived by residents. In addition, he describes how Scenic Virginia applied deep meaning content in their scenic viewshed assessment efforts.

The Council of Europe established the European Landscape Convention in 2020 [3]. The Landscape Convention is dedicated to bringing a much broader treatment of landscape characterization, assessment, and management to all places, not limited to outstanding landscapes. Most recently, there is a proposed "landscape manifesto" that aims to reframe the relationship between people and place. This Special Issue is one small step that can help facilitate dialog, reflection, and research toward these Convention endeavors, as well as a range of other international priorities on land stewardship. As the editors of this Special Issue, we welcome you to engage with the authors, invite you attend and present your work at the 2023 Visual Resource Stewardship Conference (planning is underway for 13–15 November 2023), and engage more broadly with national and local organizations on matters of visual resource stewardship.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

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2. Palmer, J.F. A Diversity of Approaches to Visual Impact Assessment. *Land* **2022**, *11*, 1006. https://doi.org/10.3390/land11071006

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