

ASM Workshop Report: Environmental Histories in the LTER Network

Conveners: Adrian Howkins (MCM, Colorado State University), Anita Guerrini (SBC, Oregon State University)

Attendees

Kathy Welch (MCM, Ohio State University)
Emily Nodine (FCE, Florida International University)
David Ganely (FCE, Florida International University)
Sylvia Lee (FCE, Florida International University)
Kevin Geyer (MCM, Virginia Tech)
Fred Swanson (AND, US Forest Service)
Morgan Grove (BES, US Forest Service)
Joe Tuccillo (CAP, Arizona State University)
Nick Brokaw (LUQ, University of Puerto Rico)
Scott M. Pearson (CWT, Mars Hill College)
David Foster (HFR, Harvard University)
Ruth Alexander (Colorado State University)
Mark Fiege (Colorado State University)
Adrian Howkins (MCM, Colorado State University)

Workshop Report

In March 2012, Adrian Howkins and Anita Guerrini put together a session at the American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) annual meeting in Madison, Wisconsin titled “Environmental History and the LTER Network.” This panel presented environmental history work from three different LTER sites, alongside an overview of the history of the LTER network. Building on the success of this earlier session, the aim of this ASM-workshop was to bring together environmental historians and scientists with an interest in environmental history for a discussion of the current state of environmental history scholarship within the LTER network and to think about ways of moving forward with this work. The ASM workshop successfully achieved these goals by bringing together fourteen scholars from eight different LTER sites. We had an extremely productive and wide-ranging discussion about the nature of environmental history research and its potential to contribute to the core research areas of the LTER network. The workshop also began the work of creating an inventory of environmental history work taking place around the LTER network

The workshop began with five brief presentations relating to environmental history work in the LTER network. For the first presentation, Adrian Howkins read an abbreviated version of a paper given by Gina Rumore at the ASEH meeting in Madison on the history of social science and humanities research within the LTER network. This was followed by two presentations from environmental historians from Colorado State University, who spoke to the scope and potential of environmental history work within the LTER

network. Mark Fiege presented a brief history of environmental history, suggesting that the integration of environmental history and ecology is in fact a long-standing tradition, even if it has been somewhat neglected, especially by historians, in recent years. Ruth Alexander gave a summary of an environmental history that she has written on Longs Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park, with an emphasis on the challenges and opportunities of working with managers and scientists within the Park Service. David Foster then gave an overview of the environmental history work that has been done at the Harvard Forest LTER, suggesting that environmental history and historical ecology have been integral to the work of the site since its inception. Adrian Howkins finished this section with a brief introduction to the environmental history work at the McMurdo Dry Valleys LTER site, which suggested that the relative simplicity of the human history of the region offers excellent opportunities for asking complex questions about the interactions of people and the environment over time. Each of the presentations was followed by a brief discussion, which began to raise some of the central themes and questions relating to the integration of environmental history research into the work of the LTER network.

Following the presentations, the second half of the workshop moved into a more informal discussion of the challenges and opportunities for doing environmental history research in collaboration with the LTER network. A number of the workshop attendees gave brief introductions to the environmental history work that is taking place at their sites, both formally and informally. It quickly became apparent that many sites have been the focus for historical research, even if this hasn't always been done in collaboration with the LTER network. It also became apparent, as we expected, that extent of environmental history research is very different at different sites, with some LTERs drawing extensively on environmental history methodologies, while such an approach is much less developed at others. There was general agreement that there is relatively little common knowledge within the LTER network about the environmental history work taking place at other sites, and that facilitating the exchange of information would be a useful step towards developing environmental history research as a major contributor to the work of the network. In a clear demonstration of the utility of bringing together environmental history practitioners from across the network, we began a number of interesting discussions. For example we discussed differences between "environmental history" and "historical ecology," and discussed the compatibility of long-term (thousands of years, or more) and short-term approaches (centuries or decades). These discussions were productive and stimulating and there was widespread enthusiasm for continuing them at another meeting in the future.

Towards the end of the session, we began to discuss potential ways for moving forward with inter-site collaborations with the LTER network. It was agreed that a useful first step would be the creation of an inventory of environmental history related research that is already taking place at different sites. It was also widely agreed that there would be much to be gained from continuing our discussions at a future meeting. Everyone present was in agreement that there are tremendous opportunities for inter-site collaboration within environmental history research. The workshop organizers now intend to look for opportunities to move forward with this work.