Technologies for the Preservation of Prehistoric and Historic Landscapes

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Foreword

In recent years, the American public and Congress have become much more aware of the value of historic landscapes as teachers and guides to America's heritage. Interest in preserving landscapes for the enjoyment and education of future generations extends well beyond saving historic battlefields and the grounds of historic houses, and now encompasses such varied cultural landscapes as the Pinelands of New Jersey, the historic courtyards of Arizona, tobacco farms in Kentucky, and the historic parks and gardens of landscape architects. These and other historic landscapes in every State of the Union reflect the exciting cultural diversity of rural and urban America.

As this background paper shows, the implementation of Federal historic preservation laws with respect to historic landscapes lags far behind the effort expended on historic buildings and archaeological sites. For example, to date, no one has inventoried the many gardens, parks, and other historic landscapes designed by the well-known firms of Frederick Law Olmsted and his associates. Yet these landscapes, which grace most major U.S. cities, stand out as prime examples of American design and cultural values. The desire to rectify this situation has led to congressional consideration of a specific bill, the Olmsted Heritage Landscapes Act of 1987, which is discussed and analyzed in this background paper.

Because landscapes are always living, growing, and dying, they are highly vulnerable to environmental changes, from both human and natural agents. This background paper illustrates the importance of continuing to apply certain high leverage, cost-effective technologies, such as remote sensing and computer hardware and software, if this Nation wishes to protect, restore, and preserve important parts of its rich heritage for future generations of Americans.

In undertaking this work, OTA sought the contributions of a wide spectrum of knowledgeable and interested people within Federal and State governments and the private sector. Some provided information and guidance, others reviewed drafts of this background paper. OTA gratefully acknowledges their contributions of time and intellectual effort.

John H. Gibbons
Director
Workshop Participants:
Technologies for Preserving Planned Landscapes
and Other Outdoor Sites, Feb. 27-28, 1986

Patricia O’Donnell, Chair
Walmsley & Co., Inc., New York, NY

Shary P. Berg
Consultant
Boston, MA

Carole L. Crumley
Professor
Department of Anthropology
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC

Nomi Greber
Curator
Cleveland Museum of Natural History
Cleveland, OH

Robert Harvey
Professor
Department of Landscape Architecture
College of Design
Iowa State University
Ames, IA

Catherine Howett
Associate Professor
School of Environmental Design
University of Georgia
Athens, GA

Thomas J. Kane
President
Kane, Liede, & Ratyna, P.C.
Pleasantville, NY

Timothy Keller
Land & Community Associates
Charlottesville, VA

Setha M. Low
Associate Professor
Department of Landscape Architecture and
Regional Planning
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

Martin McGann
Supervisor of Landscapes
Director, Institute of Historic Horticulture
Sleepy Hollow Restorations
Tarrytown, NY

Hugh C. Miller
Chief Historical Architect
National Park Service
Washington, DC

Darwina L. Neal
Landscape Architect
National Park Service
National Capital Region
Washington, DC

Ford Peatross
Curator
Prints and Photographs Division
Library of Congress
Washington, DC

Scott Weinberg
Assistant Professor
School of Environmental Design
University of Georgia
Athens, GA

M. Jane Young
Associate Professor
American Studies Department
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM

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workshop participants do not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility
for the report and the accuracy of its contents.
Preservation of Prehistoric and Historic Landscapes
OTA Project Staff

Lionel S. Johns, Assistant Director, OTA
Energy, Materials, and International Security Division

Peter D. Blair, Energy and Materials Program Manager

Ray A. Williamson, Project Director
Mary Lee Jefferson, Contractor
Jannelle Warren-Findley, Contractor

Administrative Staff
Lillian Chapman    Linda Long
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Laura Feller
National Park Service

Stan Hordes
HMS Associates
Santa Fe, NM

Mary Hufford
American Folklife Center
Library of Congress

Thomas King
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

John J. Knorel
National Park Service

Adeyn A. Levee
Massachusetts Association of Olmsted Parks

Thomas Medan
Historic Preservation Division
State of New Mexico

Nancy Miller
Nation Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers

Loretta Neumann
Foresight Science & Technology, Inc.
Washington, DC

Marilyn Nichols
National Park Service

Connie Ramirez
Department of the Army

Orlando Ridout
Maryland Historical Trust