

Poster Showcase #IAEM23

Competitive – Practitioner

Natural and Cultural Assets in Del Norte County, CA, and Adjacent Tribal Lands

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SITUATION

Del Norte County, CA is situated “where the redwoods meet the sea,” and holds within its borders two Wild and Scenic Rivers, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site, and other sites of natural and cultural significance. This has been the home of the Yurok and Tolowa people since time immemorial, and the land is now shared with others including those of Hmong and Latinx ethnicities. This region has a past steeped in disasters, including tsunamis, wildfires, severe storms, and landslides.

Problem Statement

Our way of life is tied to the natural world around us, and our personal and community identity lives within our culture. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that communities are more resilient in the face of disaster when they prioritize these vital resources. Now, as the growing effects of climate change are increasing the frequency and impact of disasters, it is more important than ever that tangible, intangible, and natural heritage is defended.



How can disaster planning address this growing crisis?

Proposed Solution

The Natural and Cultural Resource Preservation and Protection Program (NCRP3), a partnership between public and private partners, seeks to institutionalize and operationalize the protection and preservation of natural and cultural assets in the face of disasters within Del Norte County through the creation of an NCRP3 Disaster Plan and NCRP3 Response Team.

Results

Over the course of a year, the planner and project team met multiple times to determine and characterize plan elements within an inclusive environment that recognized multiple viewpoints and priorities.

The resulting NCRP3 Disaster Plan includes:

- The identification of local natural and cultural resources including intangible resources.
- A list of stakeholders with a role in natural and cultural resource protection and preservation at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels.
- A risk analysis evaluating the threat of local hazards to these assets and documentation of key vulnerabilities.
- Guidance on identifying and securing natural resource areas and cultural collections to protect them against identified threats and hazards.
- Protocols to share intelligence and information about potential acts of terrorism that threaten natural and cultural assets between stakeholders and law enforcement.
- Proposed mitigation projects with the potential to reduce or eliminate risk to relevant assets from hazards and their effects.
- A comprehensive CONOPs section that details roles and responsibilities, including integration with the EOC.
- A detailed recovery section capturing needed documentation and available resources (including a list of national and international organizations that specialize in heritage recovery).
- Adherence to regulations and best practices concerning tribal sovereignty and intellectual and cultural property rights.

Collaborators and Advisors

This project's Planning Team was comprised of members representing Del Norte County, California's emergency managers, cultural stewards, and heritage custodians, including those from Del Norte County Office of Emergency Services, Del Norte Association for Cultural Awareness, Elk Valley Rancheria, Resighini Rancheria, Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, Yurok Tribe, and the Latinx community. Technical assistance was provided by Tidal Basin Government Consulting and the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative.

Resources

Numerous resources were consulted in the development of the NCRP3 Disaster Plan including *First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis* (ICCROM, 2018), *Post-Disaster Damage Assessment of Cultural Heritage: Are We Prepared?* (ICCROM, 2017), *Preserving Native American Places: A Guide to Federal Laws and Policies that Help Protect Cultural Resources and Sacred Sites* (National Trust for Historic Preservation's n.d.), and *Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO, 2022). A complete list of resources and how to access them is available as an appendix within the Plan.

Analysis, Findings, and Outcomes

The following table provides findings uncovered as a result of analyzing existing literature and interviews with planning partners and other key stakeholders, and beneficial outcomes that were obtained through the planning process.

Findings	Project Outcomes
Regulations/guidance applicable to natural and cultural resource protection and preservation are not widely known within the emergency management community. Similarly, emergency management practices are not widely known within the cultural steward and heritage owner community.	The planning endeavor significantly strengthened relationships between emergency managers, cultural stewards, and heritage custodians – groups that previously had little interaction.
Existing County documents included timelines and historical references that were not informed by all members of the community and did not reflect the perspectives of diverse populations.	A comprehensive timeline and historical narrative were developed that included input from many subcultures within the jurisdiction, resulting in a better understanding of the overall community culture.
Many local government officials did not have a good understanding of tribal jurisdictions, including the differences between ancestral territory, trust land, and fee land.	Officials became educated on tribal areas of responsibility and gained an understanding of tribal sovereignty and the need for collaboration during disaster response affecting tribal assets.

Next Steps

Del Norte Office of Emergency Services is currently recruiting for the NCRP3 Response Team. Recruits will receive training in response protocols and procedures, including the safe documentation, transport, and storage of heritage items, as well as actions that can be taken for site stabilization and mitigation of cascading damages.

Significance for EM Professionals

This effort is the first of its kind known to be positioned at the local level of government. The planning stakeholders hope it will be an inspiration to other emergency management practitioners to further improve the resilience of communities in the face of an increasingly threatening disaster landscape.



Scan the QR Code to access the full copy of the NCRP3 Disaster Plan
or visit https://www.preparedelnorte.com/_files/ugd/f264aa_520e7c0fe8a9401887288aab273e7716.pdf

(Scott, K. 2022. Redwoods [Photo])

(Scott, K. 2021. Pacific Coast [Photo])