

The Concept of Cultural Attachment and its Policy Applications  
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**Abstract**

The concept of cultural attachment is in the vernacular in the Appalachian region of the U.S. and served to stimulate policy attention to the concept when a 750 kv electric transmission line was proposed through Peters Mountain on the border between Virginia and West Virginia. The environmental impact statement of the U.S. Forest Service examined the extent of cultural attachment in the project area using our social science consulting company which resulted in a rejection of the line in 1995 and an acceptance in 2002 when the proponent changed routes to avoid communities with high cultural attachment. The concept has been noted and used in several other settings and has evolved into a policy tool that accommodates the three pillars of cultural attachment—attachment to land, to place, and to kinship and social networks. We contend that use of the concept as evolving is an appropriate way to consider “endangered cultures.” The use of the concept of cultural attachment in decision-making means there is now a track record and precedence that give legal weight to the concept, value to local residents in manifesting their voice, and improved prospects that we can continue to shape life in sustainable and human-affirming ways.

**Introduction—the Story of Peters Mountain**

Practicing anthropology is at once a research endeavor, a process of facilitating social change and a story. The research phase is always there—to investigate social phenomena—and practitioners endeavor to facilitate productive outcomes. It is also a story of what happens to a person, to a community, or to a region in response to that social phenomenon. This article contains all three of these elements—a research report on the concept of cultural attachment, efforts to create applied and policy tools which assist local residents, and a story. The story is what happened to several communities in areas of Appalachia as a result of a proposal to build an electrical transmission line from Oceana, West Virginia to Cloverdale, Virginia, a distance of 115 miles.

Cultural attachment as a social phenomenon entered the realm of policy considerations in 1995, when the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests (hereafter, GW&JNF) were called upon to review and decide upon permits for construction of a powerline project proposed by American Electric Power (AEP). If a proposed project is a “major federal action,” the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA 1969) requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the environmental, social and economic effects of the proposed project as a basis of project approval.

Cultural attachment was identified as an “issue of community significance” in the EIS process when residents persistently requested it to be evaluated in determining the advantages and disadvantages of the project for residents in the various affected communities. The Forest Service was obligated to assess and consider the social meanings behind this phrase. Our company, James Kent Associates (JKA), was hired to conduct community fieldwork, describe the social meanings of “cultural

attachment,” and determine the degree of cultural attachment of communities along the proposed powerline routes. JKA had two periods of involvement, in 1995, to examine cultural attachment for the initial proposal by American Electric Power (AEP), and in 2002, to evaluate the company’s re-submission of a powerline proposal using a different route.

Cultural attachment is a term used by residents in the local communities to describe their lives in their specific geographic areas. It is also a term that is used more broadly in many communities of Appalachia and embodies high levels of local meaning regarding the rural lives and lifestyles of residents. People who live in the project area date from settlement of Scotch-Irish people in the 1790s. The residents made clear their long history in the area of Peters Mountain and their success in creating sustainable mountain communities. In determining their timber harvest, for example, they judge the health of their ecosystem by the amount of forest canopy. If gaps become too large, they cut back timber production; if the canopy is thick, some logging is permitted. They are keen observers and participants in their environment, they exhibit a strong ethic for stewardship of their lands, and they can cite long histories of stewardship activities of their families and ancestors.

This is the story of how the concept of cultural attachment affected the ultimate decision about a powerline on Peters Mountain. For practicing anthropologists, it brings into sharp relief the scientific validity of cultural attachment as a social phenomenon and its growing legitimacy in policy considerations.

In this article, we first share the definition of cultural attachment as developed through our research for the powerline project and we review the literature of its constituent parts. We then complete the story of what happened to the powerline proposed for the Peters Mountain area and other nearby areas of West Virginia and Virginia. Because cultural attachment was a critical factor in the powerline decision, it has entered the policy arena as useful both as a scientific concept and it now has an administrative record that lends credibility to the concept. Therefore, subsequent uses of the concept in other settings are also reviewed. We close by making a case for the scientific validity of the concept and its value in policy applications.

### **Cultural Attachment as a Social Phenomenon—A Review of the Literature**

In the Peters Mountain situation, we defined cultural attachment as “the cumulative effect over time of a collection of traditions, attitudes, practices, and stories that ties a person to the land, to physical place, and to kinship patterns” (GW&JNF 1995: 28).

The cultural part of the definition relates to: “...the cumulative effect over time of a collection of traditions, attitudes, practices, and stories.”

The attachment part of the definition relates to “...that ties a person to the land, to physical place, and to kinship patterns.”

Each of the three elements of cultural attachment—land, place and kinship—can be seen to have its own literature and research tradition. Each can be said to represent a fundamental aspect of the human experience that has rightly attracted ongoing research attention. This section summarizes the conclusions of researchers who believe that these elements of attachment are difficult to treat separately—that subjectively, people identify several inter-related traits that make up attachment,

and that, objectively, researchers have a hard time measuring each of the three elements as stand-alone items as well.

## 1. Attachment to Land

Attachment to land is a central experience of the human enterprise. The topic has a voluminous literature, and here we only summarize the major features of the research literature. A foray into this literature brings forward several dimensions that are examined by researchers:

- The time dimension: Has the land been occupied for 20 years or 20,000 years?
- The scale dimension: Is this a family farm or a large-scale tract that makes up a nation-state?
- The social dimension: Is the land occupied by a people with a single identity or ethnic origin, or is the land a cross-roads area, subject to a constant mingling of different peoples?

Rozin and Wolf point out that: “Land is often thought of as untradeable, which would not be the case if it was just a source of resources. The French word *terroir* captures a broader perspective and refers to the land including its human capital and cultural history” (2008: 325). They also write of the concept of “protected values” and discuss “taboo tradeoffs” involving sacred values common around the world, such as one does not trade one’s children, religion, or land. They review literature in which in many areas of the globe, land is considered an extension of self, and further, that land is an important expression of the symbolic value of property in reinforcing group identity.

Among the variety of applications related to attachment to land are:

- For indigenous people around the globe, the sacredness of land and their attachment to it are central features.
- In Appalachia, Radford University professors have studied land attachment in Appalachia, documenting the Scotch-Irish heritage dating from the 1700s (Wagner and Hedrick 2001, Wagner 1995).
- In addressing suicide risk and health issues for older African-American farmers, researchers found that farmers have positive perspectives on work and strong attachment to the land (Macuiba et.al. 2013).
- Land attachment is a frequent topic in the arts. Sally Nemeth's “Holy Days” is a stage poem about farm families clinging to their farms on the dying plains of Kansas in 1936, with one character commenting, “It never occurred to us to leave” (Drake 1990).
- Setha Low (1992) studied the formation of group identity in Costa Rica and analyzed attachment to the public plaza. She explored the symbolic linkages of people and the land, almost all suggesting long experiences and deeply rooted belief systems.
- Australia has tied social security benefits to the long-term (20 years) “attachment to land” (<http://guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/4/6/8/60>).

When human activity can be observed to harm or benefit the land, the outcomes are noticed because survival depends on continued productivity of the land. Stewardship of the land and its resources is an outcome of human experience since there is a natural motivation to preserve productivity. Attention to these dynamics leads to attachment to land, but also attachment to the sense of place that develops with customary and routine use, and attachment to kinship and social relations through which stewardship and continued presence on the land are accomplished.

## 2. Attachment to Place

“Attachment to Place” and “Sense-of-place” are treated synonymously in the research. The terms refer to where people live but include where they visit and where they recreate as well. The literature on attachment to place is more than three decades old and has been diverse and interdisciplinary, involving psychological, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions. Tuan (1977) is often cited in the literature for an early seminal work exploring the meaning of place. Tuan claimed that the concept of homeland was especially appropriate for examination. Experience and cultural transmission of meanings, in his view, are central ways in which humans develop attachment to place. Beckley states, “The early innovators in the place attachment literature eloquently described the ‘why’ of attachment, and how places help to forge self-identity and social meaning” (2003: 106)

In 1992, an edited volume was published entitled, Place Attachment, which proved to be seminal and has influenced the field since that time (Altman and Low 1992). The authors wanted to move beyond the “commodity metaphor” of the idea that a price tag could somehow be attached to sense-of-place, and instead, one of the first psychological scales was introduced for measuring place attachment as an affective bond.

A leading researcher in this field, Thomas Beckley, and his associates, conducted research on forest management related to understanding sense-of-place in Canada in six different communities. They asked subjects to photograph 12 special places and then interviewed them about their choice of photo subjects and why they selected them. They determined that attachment to place is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Their research subjects found it difficult to identify a single element associated with attachment to place. Rather, a special place related not only to its aesthetics, but also because of an important event, association with family and loved ones, and particular activities that occurred at the site (2003).

According to Dan Williams, social science researcher for the U.S. Forest Service, “Place represents a basic subject matter of interest to virtually all the social sciences, humanities, and even the natural sciences” (personal communication, September 10, 2015). He described growing attention to sense-of-place considerations within Forest Service planning. He and his co-authors observe the trend in sense-of-place research in recognizing that attachment to place is now recognized and valued in decision-making in evaluating local effects of natural resource decision-making.

A further outcome of sense-of-place research is that the commoditization of land value is simply inadequate in reflecting the broader human experience of place:

“The concept of ‘sense-of-place’ is increasingly being employed as both an academic and popular way to represent the idea that there are aspects of human relationships to nature that legal, political, and market institutions under-represent in economic and other social transactions (Snyder et.al. 2003: 3)

Thus, while land relates to production and livelihood considerations, place brings affective meaning to the fore—place is special, it evokes memories of family gatherings or special events, and personal history of the site.

Blahna et.al. consider that the mapping of socially and geographically based community is one of the most useful units for Forest Service planning. “Thus, another advantage of using community as ... a basic measurement unit is its relevance for U.S. Forest Service planning, which is specifically mandated for all national forests” (2003: 69). This point is important because the JKA work on cultural attachment in Virginia and West Virginia related to a Forest Service decision on a powerline relied on its process of Human Geographic Mapping. In fact, Blahna and colleagues identify the JKA mapping approach as a key resource for the Forest Service in evaluating community impacts. They cite work done by JKA’s predecessor organization, The Foundation for Urban and Neighborhood Development (1978) and by a colleague (Preston 1999) to describe and critique Human Geographic Mapping. Both the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have used such mapping since the 1980s (Kent and Preister 1999). The methodology of this approach is based on the premise that people living in place-based geographic communities have a common and shared perception of where their neighborhood, community and region end and another begins. The Human Geographic Mapping process was a key aspect in the cultural attachment analysis in 1995 and 2002. This time-tested method for determining the natural, culturally based boundaries which residents make use of in their daily routines was critical to understanding the geographic areas where cultural attachment was present.

### 3. Attachment to Kinship

The study of kinship is one of the most important and central areas of study within anthropology. Early work focused on distinguishing kinship as an integral structure of human society whose features could be described and analyzed. The variations in the ways that humans develop systems to define social relations with each other formed the core of kinship studies. Over time, kinship studies evolved to include the cross-cultural study of child-rearing practices and their associated psychological and social effects.

“Attachment theory” is most often associated with the bond between babies and children with their mothers and other caregivers. The pioneer in the field was John Bowlby, considered the father of attachment theory, and one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th Century. In his early work, he noted that a significant number of thieves he examined had periods of early and sustained separation from their primary caregivers. He was enormously effective in changing attitudes toward parenting and maternal care.

When applied cross-culturally, attachment research remains primarily concerned with the nurturing relationships associated with raising young children and, more broadly, with emotional attachments and social relations in society. As research progressed, it became clear to investigators that it wasn’t “blood ties” in the common imagination as some immutable DNA that formed the ties of human relationships but the nurturing act itself in a reciprocal milieu. In a real way, you became related to

those for whom you did favors, and who did favors for you. The idea that it is the nurturing acts themselves that create social relations has gained ascendancy since the 1970s.

As a typical example, Lowe (2002) examined kinship relations in Chuuk Lagoon (formerly Truk) and described the “reciprocal needs fulfillment” present in any human society. Lowe asserted the development of social relationships is both personally meaningful and socially legitimate, and they intertwine to produce healthy relationships that sustain a society. He ascribes “idealized cultural models” to his subjects which are reinforced in daily life as the “right” way to do things and which shape behavior that support the models.

These findings over several decades of research played out in real time in the cultural attachment areas in Virginia and West Virginia described by JKA in 1995 and 2002. Kinship, as discovered in this cultural attachment work, was the glue that held the other two attachments together—i.e. attachment to land and place. Kinship, as discovered in this process, was life-being-lived that formed a network of bonds of varying intensity across time and across members. The concept of “linked lives” describes the ways in which decisions taken by a kin network member or events taking place in the life of a kin network member have repercussions for others. It is a conscious effort for every one’s benefit to have predictability, participation in and control of one’s environment in order to have strong kinship reliability. Kinship therefore is a predictable web of social relationships of reciprocity that maintains harmony and good will among the members. This was especially true in the social ecosystems within which cultural attachment exists in the study area for the issue of significance put forth by the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

Kinship is inherently a process of informal network relationships that people rely on to survive and to sustain themselves in healthy ways. Hence, in this paper, we wish to clarify the definition of cultural attachment stated earlier and supplement the kinship focus with social networks. Hence, our amended definition of cultural attachment is

“the cumulative effect over time of a collection of traditions, attitudes, practices, and stories that ties a person to the land, to physical place, and to kinship and **social networks**.”  
(emphasis added).

The reliance on kinship and social networks was found to be the most powerful of the cohesive forces binding the people of Peters Mountain together. It enabled people of the area to function at a trust level in that positive energy was maintained through actions such as taking care of neighbors.

The following quotes provide a flavor of the types of comments local residents made that relate to the three components of cultural attachment. They are from residents of Tazewell, Bland, and Wythe counties in southwest Virginia and are derived from the second cultural attachment study JKA did in 2002 in response to a re-submission for a powerline approval by AEP:

#### Land

"The land will provide water, food, fuel - a home."

"This land isn't mine; I am just taking care of it for the next generation."

"Our people are attached to the valleys and mountains all around us. It's been our home for generations. They have the land, the place...people offer us money for our land but we don't sell it. You just don't want to be cut off from the sacredness of your land."

"How can you tell somebody who's been on their land their whole life that they have to move? They wouldn't know what to do or where to go."

### Sense of Place

"When I need to get away from it all I walk through that pasture and up the mountain to 'my rock' that overlooks the valley. You can see forever from up there. I just sit there until I'm ready to come back down and face the world again."

"During the depression, the mountain took care of us."

"If you take care of this place, it will take care of you."

"Those springs are our lifeline, they keep us healthy."

"This land [referring to home place] connects me with my ancestors and is a tangible symbol of my heritage. It also furnishes a portion of my livelihood."

### Kinship/Social Relations

"That is where I'll be buried. My great-great grandparents, my grandparents, and my daddy are buried there. That's where I'll be when my turn comes."

"Our son wants to build a house for his family right here [standing in proposed corridor] but he can't do that if the power line is going to be almost right overhead."

"Everyone here knows our family history and we know everyone else's."

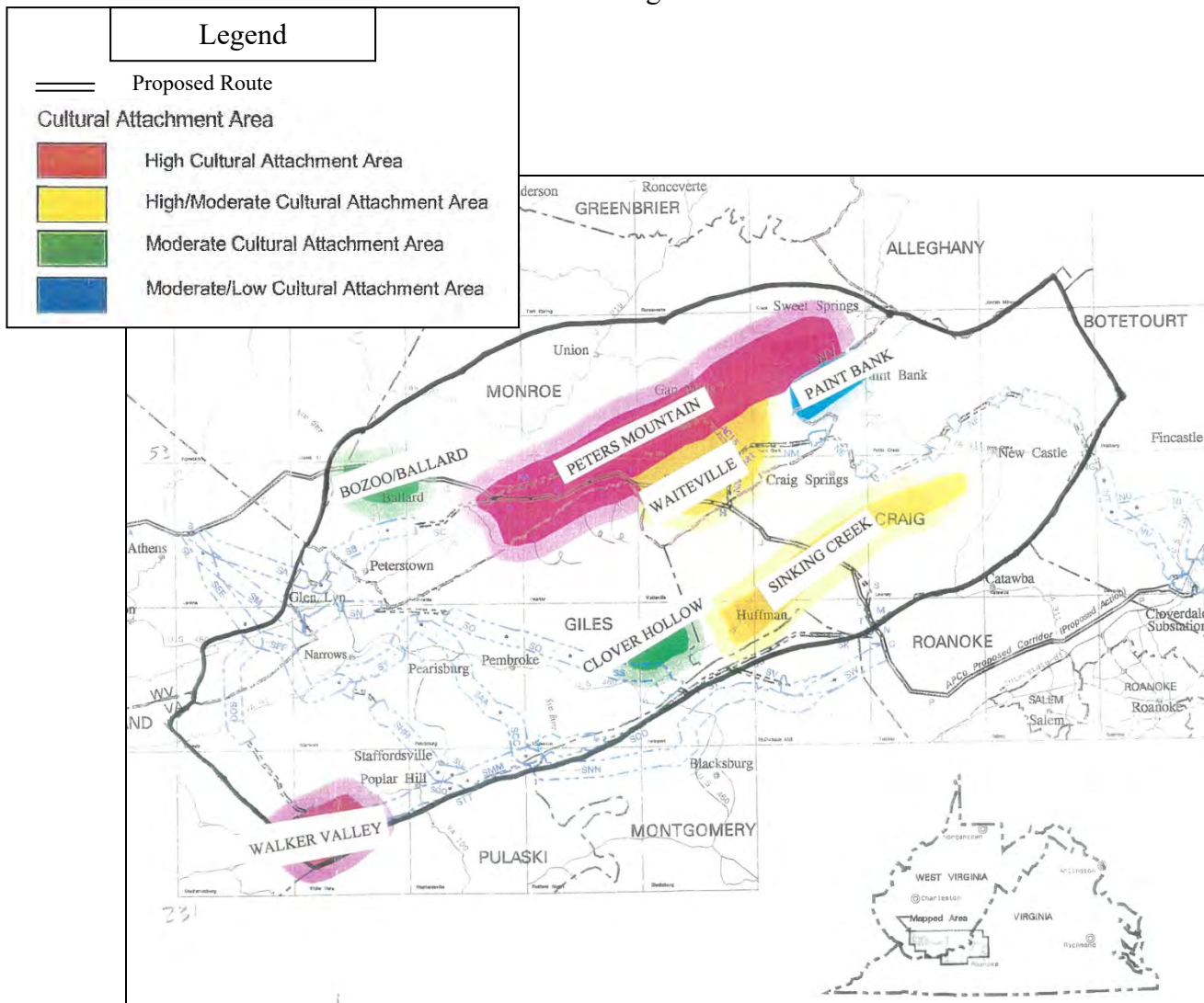
"That's \_\_\_\_\_. He had a stroke a couple of years ago. Now he drives around and delivers vegetables to all of us neighbors. His family has a fit when he sneaks off like that but he can't get into any trouble driving around out here. Everyone helps to keep an eye on him" (Kent et al. 2002)

To conclude this section, we maintain that a cultural orientation to human attachment to land, place and social networks is a sensible way to conceive of cultural attachment. The interconnected nature of these phenomena, which are so central to human experience, makes a cultural orientation appropriate and useful. Indeed, use of the term "cultural" has been used academically for generations to infer a holistic, multi-dimensional quality to the various features of human society.

### **The Rest of the Story**

JKA had two projects related to cultural attachment in the Peters Mountain region, the first in 1995 (Kent et.al. 1995) and the second in 2002 (Kent et.al. 2002). As we described earlier, the Forest Service had the obligation in 1995 to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed American Electric Power (AEP). Figure One shows a map of this area of West Virginia/Virginia. It shows the proposed route bifurcating the high cultural attachment area of Peters Mountain, the High/Moderate attachment area of Waiteville and Sinking Creek, and the medium attachment areas of Bozoo/Ballard.

Figure One  
Map of Peters Mountain Area Showing Proposed Project Route and Areas of High Cultural Attachment



The first cultural attachment study for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) found that in the corridor for the AEP power line, as shown in Figure One, several communities were highly culturally attached. This was especially true in the Peters Mountain geographic area. On June 19, 1996, at a press conference in eastern Montgomery County, with Brush Mountain in the



background, Forest Supervisor Bill Damon announced the choice of the No Development Alternative. He specifically pointed out that the cultural attachment study had a major effect on his decision. He reinforced his decision by stating in the final Record of Decision (ROD) that “Alternatives 1 through 6 would cross several areas where cultural attachment, or the way people relate to their surroundings and interact with each other within the community, was pronounced” (Damon 1996: 2).

Supervisor Damon by his action created a decision-making framework for addressing project impacts within the three federal agencies involved in the decision, the Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The framework recognized that because the project crossed the GW&JNF, the Forest had the responsibility to address the impacts on the total length of the 115 miles of the proposed corridor, including effects on private lands. This decision was consistent with the Forest Service traditions and regulations that compel the Forest Service to address “off-site” impacts in its analysis and decision-making. Supervisor Damon acted consistently with the intent of NEPA and other federal regulations.

In an article published in the Points West Chronicle, Rhey Solomon, Deputy Director for Ecosystem Management Coordination at the National USFS Headquarters, stated:

“The GW&JNF ‘no action’ alternative for the AEP DEIS reflects a relatively new and growing trend in federal decision-making: to give more consideration to community, people, and place issues in addition to economic and environmental or biological considerations—it’s the third leg of the stool [along with physical and biological]” (Wurmstedt 1997:3).

In 2001, AEP tried again. The Notice of Intent within the EIS process was revised to announce the preparation of the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the new corridor selected by AEP. The list of significant issues was updated and a cultural attachment assessment of the route for the powerline was included in Forest Service requirement. JKA was retained again to conduct this second cultural attachment study along the new route that AEP had chosen in order to avoid geographic areas with high cultural attachment. This document contains a detailed discussion of the methodology used to determine cultural attachment (U.S. Forest Service 2002).

Figure Two below shows the corridor proposed by AEP in 2002 in relation to geographic areas of cultural attachment. The parallel pink lines coming from the northwest represent the proposed corridor that proceeds to the southeast to Jackson’s Ferry Station. It shows that the route does not enter high cultural attachment areas.

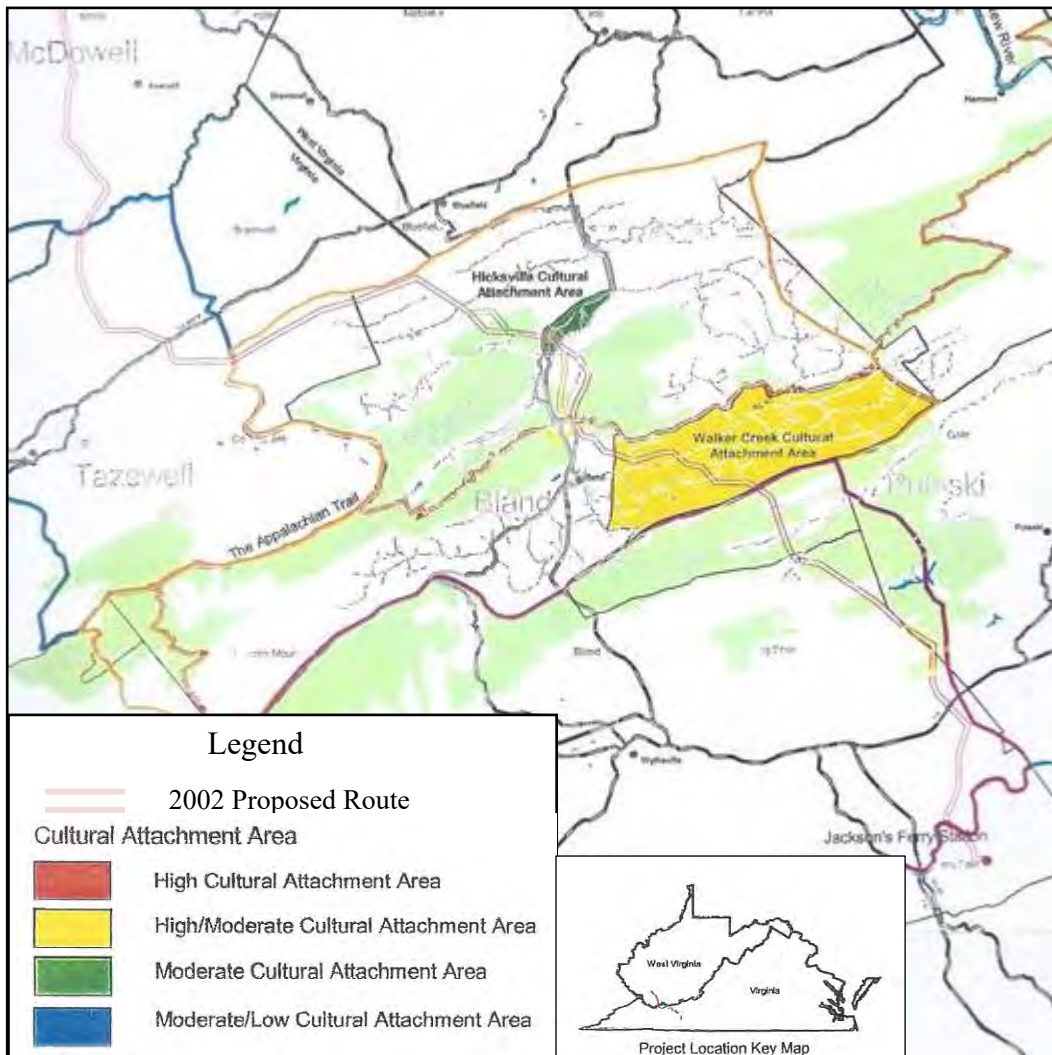
The 2002 study focused on the proposed transmission corridor on portions of Tazewell, Bland and Wythe counties in Virginia. None of the impacted areas scored in the High Range for cultural attachment. Therefore, there were no areas of cultural attachment for this new corridor to encounter. The Final EIS was issued in December 2002, with the cultural attachment study included in the final documents.

Figure Two shows that the new approved corridor did proceed through the Walker Creek cultural attachment area which was determined to be an area of “High/Moderate” attachment. Our project document distinguished between “High” and “High/Moderate” cultural attachment in the following way:

**High** - Cultural attachment is the dominant culture. All indicators show that without intrusion, the culture will have a long-term sustainability.

**High/Moderate** - Cultural attachment is the dominant culture; however, the culture has begun to face intrusion from internal or external forces. One or more indicators are showing a weakness that could affect sustainability (Kent et.al. 2002).

Figure Two  
Map of Culturally-Attached Areas of Virginia Showing Three Counties and the  
Second Proposed Route of 2002



The Record of Decision (ROD) approving the second route for the AEP power line was issued by the GW&JNF, National Park Service and U.S. Corps of Engineers in December of 2002. The ROD dealt directly with Wythe, Pulaski, Bland, and Tazewell Counties in Virginia, as well as Wyoming and McDowell Counties in West Virginia. In the ROD, Supervisor Damon, in keeping with his recognition of cultural attachment as an Issue of Significance, brought forth the “Rationale in

Relation to Alternatives Described in the Draft EIS.” It is rare for the findings in a DEIS to be brought forward into a ROD, unless they have special significance in the decision. Cultural attachment maintained its special significance through all these studies from 1995 to 2002 and occupied a central place in the ROD.

These projects have taught us that cultural attachment is a social phenomenon that ties people to their physical surroundings and to the landscape around them. Unlike some other attachments, such as attachment to view or a particular lifestyle, cultural attachment is not transferable to another place. Therefore, if a culturally attached resident is required to move to another place with similar physical characteristics, they will lose their cultural attachment to land, place and kinship networks, never to be recreated or recovered. This upheaval is not just a rural phenomenon. Fullilove (2016) demonstrates how infrastructure projects in several American cities severely impacted people of color, in part by eliminating “mazeways” with access to supportive networks.

In a culturally attached area, land is not valued as a commodity or an investment. Where people are culturally attached to specific land and place, normal mitigation of the loss is impractical. Since cultural attachment is non-economic and non-transferable, its loss cannot be mitigated through monetization, or by the receipt of comparable land as determined by an appraiser. By definition, by usage, and by meaning, there is only one “this place.”

The interaction between cultural attachment and a powerline corridor (and associated rights of way) is essentially one of intrusion on the cultural landscape. An intrusion is an outside force brought into an area that may create an adverse long-term change in the relationship between people and their surroundings that cannot be absorbed into the existing culture without changing that culture. In areas where cultural attachment is strong because individuals have consistently made choices over time that support their culture, an intrusion is a threat to the living culture.

### **Other Applications of the Cultural Attachment Concept to Policy Arenas**

#### 1. The State of Hawai`i

While the federal agency EIS work was taking place over this seven-year period, cultural attachment began to be picked up by other individuals, governments, and agencies. In Hawai`i in 2001, Kepā Maly, a respected cultural historian, wrote:

“In the Hawaiian context, these values—the ‘sense-of-place’—have developed over hundreds of generations of evolving ‘cultural attachment’ to the natural, physical, and spiritual environment. This attachment to environment bears direct relationship to the beliefs, practices, cultural evolution, and identity of a people. In Hawai`i, ***cultural attachment*** is manifest in the very core of Hawaiian spirituality and attachment to landscape. The creative forces of nature which gave birth to the islands (e.g., Hawai`i), mountains (e.g., Mauna Kea) and all forms of nature, also gave birth to nā kânaka (the people), thus in Hawaiian tradition, island and humankind share the same genealogy” (Maly 2013, no page given, emphasis added).

Another Hawaiian reference is a policy paper written in 2013 for the Office of Hawai`i Affairs (OHA), by Group 70 International, titled: “Strategic Management Framework Kaka`ako Makai” (an older, mixed-use neighborhood very near downtown Honolulu). The significance of this use of

cultural attachment is that the OHA is considered a fourth arm of Hawaii State Government. In addition to the executive, legislative and judicial functions, the fourth arm deals directly with the health, welfare and well-being of the native Hawaiian population. The document states:

“... the concept of cultural attachment can be defined as follows: ‘Cultural attachment’ embodies the tangible and intangible values of a culture—how a people identify with and personify the environment around them. It is the intimate relationship (developed over generations of experiences) that people of a particular culture feel for the sites, features, land, kinship, and natural resources that surround them—their sense-of-place. This attachment is deeply rooted in the beliefs, practices, cultural evolution, and identity of a people. The significance of cultural attachment in a given culture is often overlooked by others whose beliefs and values evolved under a different set of circumstances” (Group 70 International 2013: 10).

The OHA report represents an effort by a government unit to create a policy framework that extends assessment of “Traditional Cultural Properties” (TCP) to cultural attachment as a means to protect Hawaiians from development intrusions. TCP assessments are required by the National Historic Preservation Act (1966) and are used to document traditional uses of the land and to protect historical and archeological features. Cultural attachment for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs extends Traditional Cultural Properties to include living culture and the intertwining aspects of the vast social research that links attachment to land, place, and kinship as well as social networks in a necessary, integrated fashion.

The concept of cultural attachment was applied in a master’s thesis to an endangered species by La Pierre in 2013. He explicitly used the framework from the Peters Mountain research to examine an endangered tree species in Hawai`i, the Uhiūhi, which was deeply rooted in cultural practices of Hawai`i during indigenous times. Over time, it had become “culturally detached” to the point that few Hawaiians were aware of the many ways the tree was part of Hawaiian culture in the past. La Pierre developed the concept of “cultural re-attachment” to describe some of the many uses of the tree in the past, the ways it was re-established in the Islands, and how it is being re-incorporated into Hawaiian life as part of a broader pattern of cultural revitalization occurring presently in Hawai`i (La Pierre 2013).

It is not our intent to imply that cultural attachment in Hawai`i is the same as in parts of Appalachia, but it is noted that analyzing cultural attachment was recognized and being utilized by Group 70 International, a prominent architectural/planning/engineering firm in Honolulu, in 1999. Further, when analyzing cultural attachment, there are similar functions by the local people’s traditions, attitudes, practices, and beliefs in both Hawai`i and in parts of Appalachia.

## 2. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

This law was established in 1966 to protect historical and archeological resources. Over time, through interpretation and case law, it has been extended as a tool to assist living culture as well. By documenting their Traditional Cultural Properties (TCP), people have been able to offer a defense of cultural practices that has led to curtailing destructive development or the mitigation of its impacts. The term “traditional,” for the National Park Service (NPS), refers to “those beliefs, customs and practices of a living community that have been passed down through the generations, usually orally or through practice” (Parker and King 1992: 1).

Under Section 106 of NHPA, agencies must consider the effects of their actions. Effects can only occur on National Register properties (aka “Historic Properties”) so if advocates get a property or landscape registered with the National Trust, or at least have it designated as “eligible”, Section 106 is triggered. Adverse effects to Historic Properties must be mitigated. The mitigation is identified in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is signed by the agency and the State Historic Preservation Office or a Tribal Historic Preservation Office, and sometimes the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the affected group.

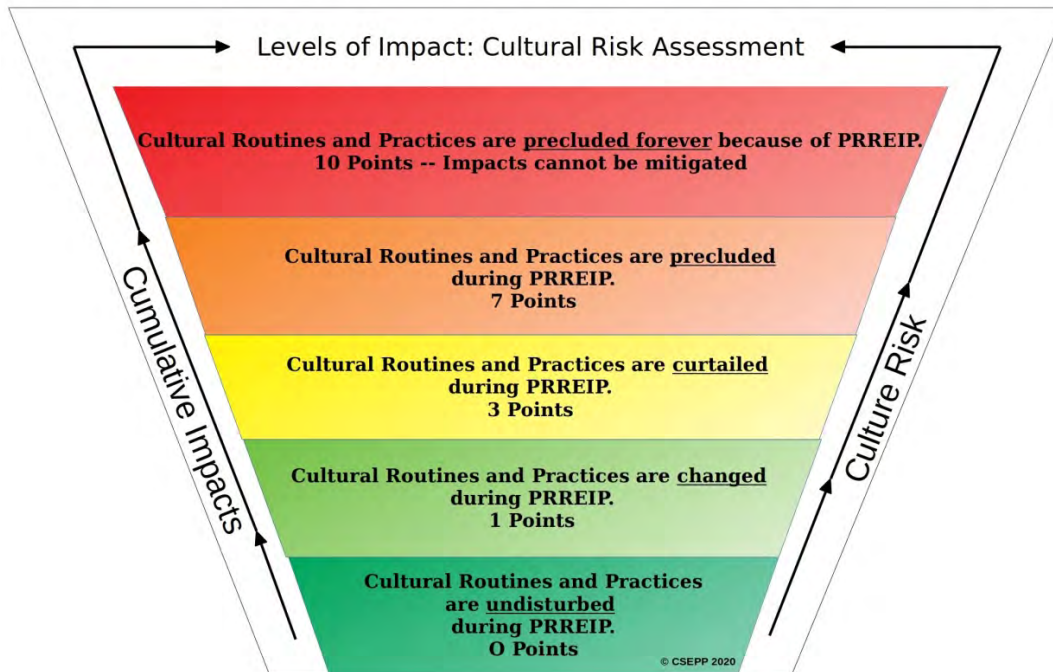
These MOAs are legal documents; they require the Agency to do certain things; they enable the Agency to expend federal funds on certain activities. Local people and their representatives can expect that agencies must be responsive to terms of the MOA. If it is determined that certain properties are eligible for the National Register, the agency would fund additional studies of those areas. If an agency promised consultation, it is accountable for the appropriate follow through. Or an MOA may call for the agency to develop a revegetation plan in consultation with a tribe, for example (personal communication, Dr. Darby Stapp, Northwest Anthropology LLC, September 11, 2015).

The importance of the National Historic Preservation Act, and its interpretation and evolution over time is that “living cultural landscapes,” (i.e., “cultural attachment”) have been given legal weight and agency responsibility. There is weight as well with the term “traditional cultural landscape,” for which a case can be made in areas with high cultural attachment. If local residents use these terms to document their concerns about proposed federal actions, federal agencies, by virtue of the NHPA, must pay attention.

The application of NHPA to cultural attachment in a policy context becomes immediately clear in considering the example of a dam re-development project in central Washington State in 2020 and its effects on local indigenous people, the Wanapum Native American Tribe. The Wanapum Village is located on right bank of the Priest Rapids Dam which must be re-built due to seismic weaknesses. The Priest Rapids Right Embankment Improvement Project (PPREIP) was proposed by the dam’s owner, the Grant County Public Utility District, which hired JKA’s nonprofit company, the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy (CSEPP), to conduct a Social Impact Assessment. Traditional Cultural Properties were conceived as living culture in living communities, and Section 106 MOAs were developed in detail with Wanapum villagers which invoked the force of law regarding the management of project impacts on the Wanapum Village. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) accepted this framework, setting the stage for detailed mitigations both day-to-day and through the seasons over the lifespan of the project.

This effort to create relevant MOAs was aided by a cultural risk assessment tool displayed in Figure Three (below). What CSEPP’s Social Impact Assessment showed was that the Wanapum people exhibited high levels of cultural attachment by virtue of living on the middle stretch of the Columbia River since, as they say, “time immemorial.” The Wanapum defined their culture through behavior—through the doing of cultural practices on a day-to-day and seasonal basis. At various points in the day and night, Wanapum can be observed going up hunting in the nearby hills, fishing in the Columbia River, drying fish or meat, stretching hides, sewing clothes, preparing funerals, gathering roots and medicinals, taking care of elders, and participating in community events in the longhouse. These cultural behaviors, being observable, are measurable and lend themselves to detailed monitoring.

Figure Three:  
 A Monitoring Tool for Cultural Risk Assessment for the  
 Priest Rapids Right Embankment Improvement Project (PPREIP)  
 Grant County, Washington



The displayed monitoring tool is used to assess cultural risk in an ongoing fashion and can make use of the agreed-upon MOAs to ensure responsiveness. As the Figure shows, a gradation is possible that shows different levels of impact. A cultural routine or practice can be changed, curtailed, precluded or precluded forever through the development and operation of the project. If the scoring becomes too high, significant impacts on the ways of life employed by the Wanapum to sustain their culture will be apparent. The tool becomes a way of assessing and managing endangered cultures (Preister et.al. 2020). If people affected by a project are unable to engage in their traditional activities that have meaning for them and which are central for the perpetuation of their culture, they have a basis for protest and resistance to the project that not only has a moral claim, but now, an administrative and legal claim.

### 3. Australia

Australia is the third example of a non-Appalachian application of cultural attachment. Government units and non-profit agencies have been researching the concept of cultural attachment as it relates to the well-being of indigenous people. The Australian government's Department of Education, Employment, and Workforce Relations reported on research into cultural attachment that "was gauged by each person's sense of their own identity and their connection with, and participation in, traditional activities (such as ceremonies and dances, rituals, art, stories, and customs)" (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 11).

While traditional wisdom would hold that attachment to culture would lead to lower educational achievement, the research showed that those with strong attachments to their culture did better in the educational system. In 2011, the newsletter for the New South Wales Parliamentary Library Research Service in Australia contained an article by Lenny Roth posing the question of whether fostering strong cultural attachment would “close the gap” of indigenous disadvantage. In reporting on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), Mr. Roth summarized research that showed a strong correlation between indigenous cultural attachment and socio-economic outcomes such as educational achievement, mental health and physical health. He cited Canadian research that showed that strong “cultural continuity” was associated with lower rates of youth suicide (Roth 2011).

Roth cites a primary researcher on the question in Australia, Michael Dockery. Dockery reviewed the NATSISS survey data described above and takes four behavioral measures as proxy for cultural attachment—participation in cultural events and activities, cultural identity, language and participation in traditional economic activities. He confirmed the strong relationship between cultural attachment and a range of mainstream socio-economic indicators. He concludes:

“The findings suggest that traditional cultures should be preserved and strengthened as a means to both improving the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians and to ‘closing the gap’ on mainstream socio-economic indicators” (Roth 2011: 3).

#### 4. The U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS)

USGS is the fourth instance of other applications of the concept cultural attachment. In November of 1995, about the time JKA’s first cultural attachment work was being published in the DEIS, the US Geological Survey (USGS) issued a statement on cultural attachment in reference to USGS Programs in Hawaii, “Beach Loss in the Hawaiian Islands.” Quoting from the article:

“While the JKA work was much more detailed, the fact that more government agencies with the status of the NPS and the USGS, as well as governments (the State of Hawaii, Australia) have recognized cultural attachment as a viable concept in dealing with social, cultural, economic and well-being of people is significant” (USGS 1995: 6).

The finding of detailed use of the concept of cultural attachment among many diverse entities in different settings prepares the stage for more research and action, including a search for cultural attachment in other geographic areas and situations.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

In this paper, we have shown that cultural attachment has a workable definition that is observable and measurable, accentuating its practical value. Its constituent parts are widely represented in the academic literature, and it now has a track record in assessment, administration, and decision-making. In our fieldwork settings, residents often express powerlessness—they have low confidence they can affect decision-making in a way meaningful to them. In their view, large organizations and regulating agencies seem remote and are supported by a coterie of attorneys and technical experts whose interests are not their own. The assessment of cultural attachment can effectively reflect the social realities of affected people, promoting a sense of empowerment in local communities and improved decision-making.

At the same time, in the face of ever-growing environmental pressures, sustainability has become a global policy goal from small jurisdictions to the United Nations. Attention to cultural attachment offers a way for local residents impacted by development projects to ensure that their culturally based methods of adaptation are understood and recognized as an important resource in promoting continued sustainability of the human experiment.

In the two studies of cultural attachment performed by James Kent Associates in West Virginia and Virginia for Forest Service decision-making purposes, it was determined that in areas of high cultural attachment, negative effects are not subject to mitigation. The elements that comprise cultural attachment cannot be traded away, replaced or compensated for. They reflect cultural knowledge passed down through time about how to make a living off the land, adapt to changing circumstances, and sustain families and communities. In areas of high cultural attachment, this knowledge is irreplaceable.

Cultural attachment does not imply that project effects are fatal for a people. It does make clear that change has to be absorbed into the community. If change cannot be absorbed, it can potentially destroy cultural attachment because the change is imposed from the outside in a manner that cannot be managed or absorbed within the informal networks of the culture. However, in communities where culture attachment is a way of life, intrusions into the human geographic space of the culturally attached area can be absorbed or resisted. Cultural attachment is often invisible to outside forces because it exists in the informal survival and caretaker systems of the people. This invisibility is often an Achilles heel of an intruding force that only views the world through formal power systems. We learned this was the case in the AEP power line project and seems true today of the war in Ukraine.

In the authors' constant monitoring of settings which may potentially exhibit characteristics of cultural attachment (several discussed in this paper), the current war in Ukraine presents an interesting geographic extension of the concept worth our attention. The formal Russian political system, represented by the Russian armed forces, decided that they had the power to invade Ukraine and by sheer force defeat its small army. On February 24, 2022, they launched their invasion with over 100,000 troops, artillery, tanks, mortars, and air power to conquer the country of Ukraine. What the attacking politicians did not understand was the affective bonds Ukrainians have for each other, their communities and collectively for their country. The speed and scale of the Ukrainian response indicate the presence of cultural attachment. This meant that Ukraine citizens as well as their military would be involved in fighting the Russians. The authors observed that the Ukrainian people and their armed forces are operating within the definition of cultural attachment ("the cumulative effect over time of a collection of traditions, attitudes, practices, and stories that ties a person to the land, to physical place, and to kinship and social networks"). Their strength comes from being able to mobilize on their turf (sense of place) and in their diverse environments. This seemingly provides a widespread understanding in the informal and formal systems that they indeed would resist and how they would organize geographically to protect their diverse country and their culture.

In closing, let us assert again that the concept of cultural attachment is useful in policy contexts because: 1) it is observable and measurable; 2) it successfully captures local perspectives and desires; 3) it offers decision-makers guidelines for mitigations which would promote absorption of project impacts in the population; and 4) it points the way forward for socially responsive decision-



making. The authors found that attachment to land, place and kinship/social networks are interrelated in a cultural attachment situation. That interrelationship provides observable ways of describing if cultural practices are 1) changed, 2) curtailed, 3) precluded or 4) precluded forever. In a culturally attached setting, projects must become an extension of the community, and become part of the web of relations by which local people sustain their lifestyles, in order to create successful local benefits.

This paper makes feasible the designation of “endangered cultures.” That designation for the first time makes people in cultural attachment circumstances an “endangered species” from a program and policy standpoint. As practicing anthropologists, we can begin to see how programs, policies and world events can be influenced and/or shaped to be culturally responsive and, further, that we can frame such observations in ways useful for program and policy development. The use of the concept of cultural attachment in decision-making means there is now a track record and precedence that give legal weight to the concept, value to local residents in manifesting their voice, and improved prospects that we can continue to shape life in sustainable and human-affirming ways.

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