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Conserving an underappreciated heritage resource: The rural landscape

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ABSTRACT

Rural landscapes make up a significant percentage of the planet's lands and waterways and must be included in any efforts to address climate change and habitat loss. However, the contribution of these landscapes to cultural heritage and nature conservation is not always appreciated. While there are multiple international designation programs and state-sponsored heritage landscape initiatives, these have a relatively small impact around the globe. This is also true for international programs that attempt to take a holistic perspective to conserving rural heritage. There are some promising community-based and collaborative programs in Australia and the United States, although in both countries, overall agricultural policies are not supportive of these approaches. The lack of recognition of cross-disciplinary practices is a barrier to integrated land management as is the failure to understand that a key factor is the role of people and their relationship with the land. The challenge is how to reach out and incorporate culture and natural heritage into the larger field of land policy and conservation practice.

WHY ARE RURAL LANDSCAPES IMPORTANT?

Rural landscapes are variously defined. The United States census focuses on population density and describes them by exclusion as areas that are not urban. The report *Guidelines on Defining Rural Areas and Compiling Indicators for Development Policy* by FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, notes that there is no internationally accepted definition of rurality and hence the definition depends upon geographic context and land use (UN FAO 2018). One thing that is a key component of rural areas is the significant role of agricultural land use. Globally, over 40% of habitable land is devoted to agricultural uses, both crop land and grazing land (Richie and Roser 2019). While the scale alone of these landscapes makes them a critical resource, the contribution of rural landscapes to the world's cultural heritage and natural resources is not always appreciated. It is important to recognize the value of cultural and natural heritage in conserving the biodiversity of rural landscapes managed by traditional agricultural practices and by Indigenous people. Strong arguments can be made that such landscapes are better adapted to slowing climate change and engaging communities in work to conserve soil, water, vegetative cover, connectivity, and environmental health (Fischer, Hartel, and Kuemmerle 2012; Barrett and Mitchell 2017; Jeanneret, Aviron, and Alignier 2021).

Conservation of these landscapes is essential if we are to have any hope of achieving the global "30 by 30" goal of protecting 30% of Earth's lands, oceans, coastal areas, and inland waters by 2030 as established by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD 2022) or the even more ambitious goal of 50% by 2050, as promoted by a number of prominent conservationists (including

Over 40% of habitable land is devoted to agricultural uses. While the scale alone of these landscapes makes them a critical resource, the contribution of rural landscapes to the world's cultural heritage and natural resources is not always appreciated.



Huangjiaping village in Wulingyuan, China. CHEN YANG

the late E.O. Wilson) and by Tony Hiss in his book *Rescuing the Planet: Protecting Half the Land to Heal the Earth* (Hiss 2021). It is also essential to recognize in any conservation scheme that these are lived-in landscapes. Many have been settled for centuries by communities of people who have created a way of life that is adapted to the constraints of a region's geography. The products of these landscapes are important to meeting societal needs for community, human health, and food security. For this reason, to meet our ambitious 21st-century conservation goals, we must engage the people who live in the landscape and who have managed these lands over the long term. This includes recognizing the role of communities, traditional farming practices, and local as well as Indigenous cultural knowledge. Lack of understanding of these factors is a barrier to integrated land management.

How can practitioners in the cultural heritage and natural resource fields assist in supporting rural landscape conservation goals for species protection, climate change, regional food security, and community sustainability? Although this paper is focused primarily on Australian and United States examples, there are a number of international and national designations for the recognition of rural landscapes. While many of these designations and programs make recommendations for rural landscape management, it is not enough to identify effective practices for rural landscapes. These also need to be shared and paired with programs that encourage their implementation by landowners, policy-makers, international and regional interest groups, and Indigenous communities in particular. Heritage practitioners—historians, archaeologists, architects, planners, sociologists—have an important role to play as this human dimension is an essential part of rural landscape conservation. If humanity is to have a hope of addressing global challenges, we must understand and reimagine agricultural practices and the role of community in the rural landscape.

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL DESIGNATIONS OF RURAL LANDSCAPES

A number of international heritage designation programs acknowledge the significance of rural and traditional landscapes. While most such landscapes are not and will never be designated as heritage sites, such recognition can add value by highlighting their importance as places encompassing cultural, spiritual, and natural attributes that contribute to the continuation of biocultural diversity, offering insight into the human and nature relationship.

The best known of these designations is inscription as a World Heritage site (UNESCO 1972). In 1992 the World Heritage Committee, advised by the International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), recognized a new designation category, cultural landscapes, to better describe those places of outstanding universal value where nature and culture combine to form a significant landscape. This includes landscapes that have evolved through continuous use, such as agricultural production, and are continuing to evolve in response to changing societal and environmental factors (UNESCO 2024). In 2024 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List contained 121 cultural landscapes, 41% of which have some agricultural or pastoral features, even though that may not be the main reason for their inscription. Considering World Heritage sites as a whole, many properties have agricultural and/or pastoral characteristics.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the organization charged with developing criteria for designating World Heritage sites that are significant for natural resource values, also recognizes rural landscapes. Under IUCN's system, Category V Protected Landscapes and Seascapes are defined as places of high and/or distinct scenic quality and with significant associated habitats, flora and fauna, and associated cultural features. Landscapes and

The English Lake District was inscribed as a World Heritage Site of outstanding universal value as a cultural landscape because of its pastoral scenery. BRENDA BARRETT



seascapes that fall into this category should feature a balance between people and nature and can sustain activities such as traditional agricultural and forestry systems on conditions that ensure the continued protection or ecological restoration of the area. This classification can accommodate some contemporary developments while at the same time maintaining the historical management practices that sustain both agrobiodiversity and aquatic biodiversity (Phillips 2002).

Biosphere Reserves and Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) are two other international designations that maybe applied to rural areas. In 2002 FAO launched the GIAHS initiative for the dynamic conservation of land use systems and landscapes that are rich

in globally significant biological diversity evolving from the co-adaptation of a community with its environment as well as its needs and aspirations for sustainable development. At present, 62 sites in 22 countries are designated as GIAHS. The goal is to promote sustainable agriculture and economic development as well as to improve the livelihood of the farmers in these communities (UN FAO 2023).

UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere is another global program that may include rural landscapes. The program has developed a network of Biosphere Reserves currently totaling 759 sites in 136 countries, covering 7,442,000 sq km, each nominated by a

national government. Designated ecological systems are representative of major biogeographic regions; many of these biosphere reserves are large and may contain considerable agricultural heritage uses such as traditional cropping, livestock herding, and forestry (UNESCO 2024).

Rural landscapes may also qualify for a new designation that originates from the Convention on Biological Diversity: Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, or OECMs. An OECM is "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values." In other words, OECMs are areas that contain significant biodiversity and are managed (even if only incidentally) so as to protect that biodiversity, but which, for a variety of reasons, will not be designated as formal protected areas. Many traditional rural agricultural landscapes could be candidate OECMs, and some have already been so designated (WWF et al., in press). Once designated, OECMs are counted toward global conservation targets, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity's 30 x 30 goal.

These international designation schemes each fill a distinct niche. For example, World Heritage cultural landscapes focus on protecting the outstanding universal values of the resources of the site, Category V protected areas focus on the potential for agro-biodiversity in protected landscapes, the GIAHS objective is to support a system of sustainable agriculture and enriched rural economies as well as the vitality of world economies, Biosphere Reserves target the conservation of natural resources as their primary purpose, and OECMs focus on biodiversity in all its manifestations. However, each program has certain commonalties, such as inclusion of both cultural and natural values, recognition of the dynamic nature of the resource, and validation of traditional practices. Another commonality is scale: taken together, all these designations leave only a small footprint on the planet's rural landscape.

Fortunately, international designations are not the only approach. At the nation-state level, there are a variety of designation programs that have been used to recognize the heritage value of rural and

IUCN Category V Protected Landscapes and Seascapes feature a balance between people and nature and can sustain activities such as traditional agricultural and forestry systems on conditions that ensure the continued protection or ecological restoration of the area.

agricultural landscapes, such as the United Kingdom’s Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (recently renamed National Landscapes), the French Regional Parks, and United States National Heritage Areas (National Park Service 2023).

Established almost 40 years ago, there are now over 60 congressionally designated national heritage areas in the United States. This program is built on the nationally important cultural and natural resources of a region, knit together by storytelling and multiple partnerships, incentivized by the National Park Service (NPS) brand along with some operational funding and limited grant assistance, and, most importantly, locally managed. Many areas include large swaths of lived-in rural landscapes; for example, the Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area covers 20,000 square miles in northeastern Iowa. With the passage of the National Heritage Area Act in 2022, these areas have become part of the US National Park System.

The United Kingdom’s National Landscapes and the French Regional Parks are two programs that have established innovative approaches to rural landscape conservation. The national landscape designation recognizes exceptional landscapes whose distinctive character and natural beauty are worthy of being safeguarded in the national interest. The concept was established in 1949 and today there are 46 covering 18% of the countryside and over a fifth of the English coast (National Landscapes 2023). French regional parks also have a strong focus on rural and agricultural landscape conservation. The 58 parks cover 15% of all French territory and conserve both the scenery and heritage sites as well as supporting sustainable economic development in the area (Federation of Regional Natural Parks of France 2024).

Both European programs and the US national heritage areas have some striking similarities, including a national designation, a nonprofit association that provides advice and assistance, and management that is local. They also have a significant footprint on the rural landscape (Barrett and Taylor 2007).

A heritage farm in northeastern Iowa, USA, tells one of the stories of this rural landscape. SILOS AND SMOKESTACKS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA



BEYOND DESIGNATION

Much thought has been spent defining and then identifying landscapes that meet the criteria of the different designations. These programs can be utilized to highlight rural landscapes that are significant for their cultural or natural values. But how do these designations work in practice? Specifically, how do they conserve places that were created by a long-standing and sustainable connection between people and landscape? Without a doubt, international designations and state-based heritage programs are valuable because they recognize traditional practices that have been developed and sustained over long periods of time and are adapted to the climate and geography of a specific site or region. But there also have been a number of international efforts to fashion a more holistic perspective, one that goes beyond just designating individual rural landscapes and offers a framework that can be applied to address the conservation of these places at a more global scale.

A UNESCO World Heritage Working Paper, *Cultural Landscapes: A Handbook for Conservation and Management* (UNESCO 2009), brings together a range of advice and case studies, and presents guiding principles as a foundation for management. As the value of a cultural landscape is based on the interaction between people and their environment, the people associated with that landscape are the primary stakeholders, and the focus is on guiding change to retain the values of the cultural landscape so that successful management is inclusive and transparent, and governance is shaped through dialogue and agreement.

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The Nature-Culture Journey launched by IUCN and ICOMOS at the 2016 World Conservation Congress in Hawaii builds on the growing evidence that natural and cultural heritage are closely interconnected in most landscapes and seascapes, and that effective and lasting conservation of such places depends on better integration of philosophies and procedures (Mitchell, Brown and Barrett 2017). The *Connecting Practice* reports (e.g., Buckley, Bourdin, and Wigboldus 2019) have documented that traditional ecological and agricultural practices can make a significant contribution to the resilience of lived-in landscapes, sustainability, and ecological diversity, all of which can play a part in combating climate change.

Aside from helping launch OECMs, at its 2022 meeting in Montreal the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a plan of action to explicitly recognize the role of people in managing landscape, with particular focus on local and Indigenous communities (Badman 2023). Findings at this recent convening upheld the concept that cultural diversity supports biological diversity. The action plan, called the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, includes a number of conservation targets, including 30 x 30, an increase in biodiversity funding, a tenfold reduction in the rate of extinction, and the elimination of \$500 billion of subsidies harmful to biodiversity by 2030 (Living Landscape Observer 2023).

Perhaps most relevant of these international efforts is the development of a set of World Rural Landscape Principles. Based on UN and UNESCO declarations and charters going back to 1949, these principles such as understanding heritage values in the rural landscape, protecting these values through better policy and monitoring, sustainably managing the landscapes, communicating, and engaging the next generation, were adopted by ICOMOS in 2017. They recognize that these landscapes are a vital component of the heritage of humanity, providing multiple economic and social benefits, multifunctionality, cultural support, and ecosystem

services for human societies. ICOMOS and the International Foundation for Landscape Architecture through their International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes developed these principles as a more targeted response to the common challenges of managing heritage in rural lands, such as aging work force, consolidation of agricultural holdings, urbanization and loss of arable land, and climate uncertainty. The principles offer common-sense solutions for implementation by agencies and communities working together (ICOMOS 2017).

Unfortunately, most of these globally developed principles and policy solutions to conserve and sustain rural landscapes have not been implemented in any significant way. For example, the World Rural Landscape Principles would seem to be the most applicable, but have not been incorporated into any on-the-ground programs. At least the individual designation programs, World Heritage inscriptions, and national landscape designation programs draw attention to the value of these resources and in many cases recommend traditional and sustainable conservation practices within the boundaries of the identified area. They provide powerful examples of how, over time, communities have worked to sustain these landscapes for the benefit of culture and nature. In addition, heritage recognition could add more robust justification for the work of local initiatives.

COMMON ISSUES AND COMMON STRATEGIES

Despite the challenges of establishing a holistic framework for the sustainability and conservation of rural landscapes, there are reasons to argue for some type of international approach across our planet. These landscapes are facing very similar issues, and overlaying all of this is the change in our climate that impacts agriculture, biodiversity, and water resources. No wonder rural areas are subject to the fraying of community bonds and a waning of cultural and social connections.

The World Rural Landscape Principles and other international proposals prescribe similar solutions to address rural decline such as better policies, knowledge-sharing, improved communications, public involvement, understanding the process of sustainable conservation, national leadership, local management, and, importantly, engaging the next generation. To be

successful, the following capabilities seem to be required: shared leadership to spread expertise and knowledge; a clear achievable goal, as “from little things, big things grow”; regular and strategic activities with effective control and monitoring to demonstrate progress; learning from mistakes and keeping the motivation going; and, above all, maintaining social connection, which are crucial so that inhabitants get as much benefit as heritage managers do from their efforts.

Despite the challenges of establishing a holistic framework for the sustainability and conservation of rural landscapes, there are reasons to argue for some type of international approach across our planet.

What is left unanswered is, who is going to do this essential work? International and national recognition of the cultural and natural values of these landscapes is a step forward. But as heritage agencies, in particular cultural heritage agencies, have a limited reach, the question is still open.

LOCAL SOLUTIONS

There is some good news. At the local level, around the globe there are positive examples of how to conserve the cultural and natural components of the rural landscape. In Australia, sustainable management has usually referred to private lands, and one of the driving forces in this management for the last 30 years has been Landcare Australia. The program supports thousands of individuals and organizations focused on sustainable land management practices



The Bunya Mountains Murri Rangers field day for restoring the grassland habitats of the Bunya Mountains through a combination of contemporary and traditional fire management methods. LANDCARE AUSTRALIA

and environmental conservation, often delivered through hands-on field days. This has also spawned other groups practicing organic, biodynamic, and regenerative farming. The idea has even spread to a version called Global Landcare. Developments such as this can be seen as a response to the many calls for a grassroots revolution, a transformative agriculture on our fragile Earth—managing with nature, not against it (Massey 2017).

Around 10% of Australia’s population lives in rural or remote areas. These comparatively small communities—largely farmers and Indigenous land owners—currently manage most of the country. Some of this work is quite venerable. For example, in old settled areas such as Tasmania, where only 3,000 kilometers of historic hawthorn hedges remain, efforts continue by private landowners to trim the hedges again, lay them over in the traditional way, and bring them back into working order as these living fences are part of the cultural landscape dating from the 1820s.

In the United States, there are multiple examples of landscape-scale conservation efforts initiated by local and regional collaborations primarily in rural landscapes. The Network for Landscape Conservation was formed over a decade ago to promote and advocate for landscape-scale conservation policies and to provide educational programs and assistance to advance the movement. The network has documented over 260 local landscape collaboratives and a number of large regional efforts, including the California Landscape Initiative and the Chesapeake Bay Partnership, all working on the ground to advance the landscape-scale approach to conservation (Network for Landscape Conservation 2018).

In an interview with the network’s Executive Director, Jon Peterson (May 14, 2024), he explained one of the organizations’ key programs, the Catalyst Fund. Supported by private philanthropy, the fund seeks to accelerate the pace and practice of landscape stewardship by investing grant dollars in strengthening collaborative capacity of place-based community partnerships. Notably, a portion of the grant assistance from the Catalyst Fund is reserved to support Indigenous leadership of landscape-scale projects. Over the last five years the fund has awarded over 70



The High Divide Collaborative brings partners together to conserve and restore lands of importance for local communities and to protect the ecological integrity of a landscape of critical importance along the Idaho-Montana state line, USA; here, partners participate in an aspen ecology and monitoring and treatment protocol workshop.

HIGH DIVIDE COLLABORATIVE

grants for local collaborative conservation initiatives, primarily in rural landscapes. In addition, the network manages a Peer Exchange Program, an in-depth and deliberate effort to connect regional landscape conservation leaders for information exchange on successes, challenges, best practices, and emerging innovations. As the network's report *Pathways Forward* noted, the goal of all this work is “to reweave the natural and cultural fabric of the larger landscapes that define and sustain our character and quality of life” (Network for Landscape Conservation 2018).

In many countries there are examples of community-led landscape-scale conservation projects, ranging from tree planting, to soil enhancement, to weed and feral animal eradication. In China, for example, in the Wulingyuan Scenic and Historic Interest Area World Heritage Site, most farmland landscapes have maintained the appearance of traditional mountain agriculture, with water channels leading down from the mountains and ritual structures interspersed among terraces. The entry village has retained its traditional farming production and lifestyle. Identification of the elements constituting the heritage value of this village helped define its goals of landscape preservation and creating a rural landscape that reflects its people's cultural identity (Jing Li et al. 2023). While these examples are focused primarily on land conservation, it is critical to consider them in the context of the people who manage and care for the land. No efforts to conserve the rural landscape can succeed without engaging those making a living in the landscape, those benefiting from the products of landscape, those choosing to visit and recreate in these places, and those who wish to conserve both their cultural and natural values. Since people are central to managing these dynamic landscapes, a better understanding is needed of how to share information on international, national, and local approaches. Presenting case studies of local solutions is one key way to broaden the impact of heritage management by sharing practices such as techniques to halt soil erosion, for revegetation, or the heritage branding of produce from these areas.

Even more challenging than making the connection between local programs and heritage designations is directly connecting with the busy on-the-ground managers—and more difficult still, connecting with farmers and traditional

users of the land. Simply put, how can heritage practitioners with their knowledge of the local history, its tangible evidence, and suitable conservation techniques get the word out? Both Landcare in Australia and the Network for Landscape Conservation would benefit from more explicit recognition of cultural and natural heritage in their work on the ground. Heritage values can be present in all rural areas, both outstanding and ordinary, traditional and recently transformed by modernization activities; and, depending on the location, heritage can be present in different types and degrees and related to many historic periods so as to act as a palimpsest. Awareness of these identified values is a necessary step in promoting the sustainable conservation of such rural landscapes and transmission of their associated knowledge and cultural meanings to future generations.

OTHER POTENTIAL DELIVERY SYSTEMS

As heritage practitioners, we need to look beyond the boundaries of our own programs and engage with associated programs such as those described above, as well as with regenerative agriculture, farmland preservation programs, eco-agriculture, and other ideas. It is the larger embracing environment in which these landscapes are situated that needs to be considered, and heritage practitioners should be part of a broader multidisciplinary and cross-cultural approach. Stronger links to such programs as Landcare and the Network for Landscape Conservation are one answer.

While locally driven rural conservation initiatives show promise, many state-sponsored agricultural policies and programs have been major barriers that heritage practitioners have a difficult time influencing, much less changing. Today's version of large-scale agriculture is the biggest source of land conversion. It drives deforestation that worsens climate change, uses 70% of the world's freshwater supply, and relies on fertilizer application practices that pollute our waters. As the need to feed a billion more people increases, continued agricultural expansion in this vein could devastate habitats, release even more carbon into the atmosphere, and dry up rivers. We need to produce food where it is most likely to thrive, which will use less water and less land. We need to up-end "business as usual" in the next decade and act boldly to advance conservation by fixing agricultural production, stopping overfishing, and producing more clean energy (The Nature Conservancy 2024). This is challenging.

In Australia, for example, there is no sustainable agriculture policy despite two decades of a fragmented, stop-start approach. After the change of national government in 2023, the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) is the Australian government's key investment platform for achieving its natural resource management, sustainable agriculture,

Cotton crop in Australia Cubbie Station, Queensland—considered Australia's most valuable farm. AAP, CUBBIE GROUP



and environmental protection outcomes. Through NHT the Australian government has established the AU\$302.1 million Climate-Smart Agriculture Program over five years. This program will drive agricultural sustainability, productivity, and competitiveness and has the following investment streams: partnerships and innovation grants; capacity building; small grants for on-ground-focused projects led by a range of community groups, Landcare groups, First Nations groups, and research organizations; soil capacity building; soil health information; regional delivery partners; and Landcare. Through the program's on-ground projects, the government aims to support farmers to manage climate risks and invest in their on-farm natural capital and effective natural resources management, helping the sector to respond to climate change; better withstand future bushfires, floods, and droughts; and protect its productivity (DAFF 2024). It remains to be seen how this detailed new program is taken up by farming groups and whether the cultural heritage of rural landscapes found in vernacular buildings, fences, and yards, and historic plantings and practices, will be incorporated.

In addition, many rural areas in Australia have local government planning schemes with zoning prescribing protection of identified cultural heritage (Aboriginal and historic) and natural heritage values, especially in Victoria with its ecological vegetation mapping, New South Wales with 89 rural complexes listed on the State Heritage Register, and South Australia with its Environment and Food Production Areas and Character Preservation Districts (Lennon 2017).

In the United States, agriculture is heavily subsidized by government funding. National agricultural policies tend to favor large industrial-scale production of commodities. Tolerating the loss of farms, of productive farmland, and of specialty agriculture, an industrial model of production with a focus on efficiency and productivity defines the

Mount Roland, northern Tasmania, Australia: maintaining 150 years of “traditional” agricultural patterns, techniques, crops, and plant varieties. JANE LENNON



primary support system for the United States agricultural economy. Under this model fewer farms are needed to produce the same level of regional output. The United States Department of Agriculture's policy is focused largely on supporting the farmers of commodity crops, such as wheat, corn, rice, and soybeans and managing the issues related to overproduction. Traditional family farms and specialty farming have fewer support systems. In addition to increasing intensive agriculture, the country's agricultural economy is heavily influenced by globalization. Trade agreements and tariffs further distort agricultural markets and cause instability (Mitchell and Barrett 2015).

A limited number of programs are targeted specifically to conserve farm and forest land, some funded by the United States Department of Agriculture while others, such as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Clean and Green program, are funded at the state level. A few states have funded buy-outs of development rights to conserve prime farmland for the future. There are also farmland trusts, non-profit organizations that support sustainable and organic agriculture. Unfortunately, many are just stand-alone grant programs that do not develop community connections or a landscape-scale approach (Mitchell and Barrett 2015).

An example of taking a more holistic approach is the European Landscape Convention's (2000) agreement to implement four general measures at national level: recognition of landscapes in law, implementation of landscape protection policies, public participation in landscape planning, and integrating landscape into regional and town planning, cultural, environmental, agricultural, social, and economic policies, as well as any others with possible direct or indirect impact on the landscape (European Landscape Convention 2000). Although these principles promote policies and incentives to support the dynamic conservation and potential of rural landscapes, less work has been done to follow up with specific management strategies to conserve and sustain them.

LOOKING AHEAD

The current existential crisis of climate breakdown and the global responses to the Covid epidemic and supply chain issues resulting from the war in the Ukraine, one of the bread baskets of the world, has galvanized public attention. Hopefully this will result in more active concern for and action in conserving sustainable rural landscapes.

What are the next steps heritage practitioners can take? There are untapped opportunities to harness heritage designations and heritage values by engaging local stakeholders, encouraging collaborative efforts, and reinforcing the value of these landscapes as a resource. Heritage recognition could add more robust justification for the work of local initiatives, such as collaborative landscape conservation in the United States and for Landcare in Australia.

As cultural heritage practitioners we can add value to these programs by assisting people to recognize that they have agency in conserving rural landscapes in the face of industrial-scale agriculture and mining. We can identify the key elements of cultural heritage and then focus our limited capacity on engaging people. Cultural heritage practitioners should activate the World Rural Landscape Principles, which delineate a comprehensive approach to conserving rural lands. The practicality of implementing the principles has been shown in a series of Australian case studies covering identification and understanding of rural landscape heritage values, protection of these through sustainable management, and communication of the connected values through shared learning, field days, educational programs, and research (Lennon 2024).

As cultural heritage practitioners we can add value to these programs by assisting people to recognize that they have agency in conserving rural landscapes in the face of industrial-scale agriculture and mining. We can identify the key elements of cultural heritage and then focus our limited capacity on engaging people.

Heritage designations bring awareness of the outstanding universal values of the rural landscape and will be most effective if supported by local, regional, and national policies that incorporate these values and practices. But



Kangaroos on the hop across remnant brigalow forest, near Carnarvon Ranges, Queensland, Australia. JANE LENNON

to conclude, people are the key to success. Commitments, rights, traditions, political will, well-being, economic prosperity, and hard work define the realm of the possible when it comes to saving the planet. People craft the projects that protect nature and ground them in local realities, including Indigenous and traditional practices that have stewarded lands and waters for generations. Their landscapes give them an identity, and it is they who act and tell the stories that inspire others to follow in conserving their landscapes. Only in this way do we have a chance of conserving 50% of our planet to protect the future for all.

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