

Historical Landscape Ecology of Arcadia Plantation

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Plant ecology has traditionally emphasized natural processes and mechanisms acting within the natural world with little recognition of the role of humans. During the mid 20th century, cultural ecologists and historical geographers began to embrace the significant role humans have played in shaping much of the world's ecosystems. Within the last twenty years, plant ecologists have also developed an appreciation and interest in how humans have manipulated plant communities through time. This growing field of ecology has been designated as historical ecology. The term historical ecology literally means documented ecology and has come to refer to the investigation and documentation of environmental change in a given region through time. Studying historical ecology is an interdisciplinary collaboration that can involve the analytical skills of people from various disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, forestry, history, geology, and geography, as well as the expert knowledge of locals in order to create a detailed landscape history. This detailed description of past ecology can guide us in our understanding of current challenges and can aid us in predicting how our actions will affect the future health of our land; it can enhance the effectiveness of our human design efforts.

All societies face decisions about the relationship between environmental protection and economic development. Local knowledge about the environment, culture, and history can serve both as a practical basis for regionally appropriate solutions, and as a means of increasing familiarity with and support for eventual policies. The proposed study is an attempt to research the landscape history of Arcadia on a local scale and includes written (diaries, books, published papers, government documents), oral (stories about storms or pest invasions), and visual (dated drawings, maps) documents.

A Master's level graduate student will be recruited in a nationwide search to conduct the study. The student will work in collaboration with Ms. Lucille Pate to compile the historical ecology of Arcadia from its original land grant to the present day. It is planned for the work to be completed in two years (a typical Master's level program). The results of this project will lay the groundwork for many of the ecological studies conducted on the Arcadia property. It is envisioned that the final product will be prepared and submitted for publication (either as a monograph or book). Dr. Conner will serve as the graduate student's advisor.

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