Abstract

The professional and personal experiences of natural resource managers in the Caribbean, during and following extreme weather events, often go unexamined. When captured through oral histories, these narratives become valuable tools, documenting perishable information. Oral testimonies preserve knowledge of weather, plants, animals, ecosystems, and natural and cultural resources that are conveyed through storytelling.

Objectives

- Capture and share the unique experiences of individual resource managers and their communities
- Reveal gaps in resources, witnessed firsthand
- Examine how past oral traditions inform the present
- Describe first person observations of plants, animals and people before, during, and after events
- Consider what communities lose when perishable testimonies are not collected and shared

Methods

In May 2018, the project team conducted oral history interviews with nine resource managers working in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Interviews focused on Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, the extended drought of 2015, and ancestor weather stories.

"One of the things that we know about the way that we absorb information is that there is no better way to absorb information than storytelling." — Aranzazu Lascurain on the impact of oral tradition

Results / Conclusions

Each resource manager shared stories unique to their lived experiences. They connected experiences to past information handed down through the years from family, friends, and community. Hurricanes, drought, and climate change are shaping oral narratives. Climate stories inform us about the past, but also provide lessons to develop resilience for the future.

"When I got in town I was … amazed to see trees that I grew up with us as a child, and my parents told me that they were there when they were children, and those things had all gone." — Arthur Petersen describes Hurricane Maria’s destruction

"When I go out to teach the farmers, or to teach the students in the schools, or to teach the homeowners, I always try to teach them to remember that drought… has always been a part of us, but we seemed to have forgotten it... we need to remember it. It’s easy, and I know, in my mind to keep teaching them ways to, again, conserve water." — Vanessa Forbes speaks about drought

Use the QR Code to visit the web site and hear these oral histories. Or contact mhunter@ncsu.edu for more information.

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