

AFCEC Cultural Resources Workshop goes virtual amid pandemic

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The Department of Air Force trained more than 120 cultural resources specialists and debuted a new tribal relations tool during the Air Force Civil Engineer Center's annual Cultural Resources Workshop held online June 8-10.

"The workshop continued the tradition of bringing together cultural resources specialists from across Air Force and our partner organizations to discuss changes to the cultural resources program and leverage best practices," said Alison Rubio, Air Force Cultural Resources subject matter expert. "While disappointed that we could not host an in-person workshop for the second year in a row, the virtual platform has allowed for broader participation."

Participants included members of AFCEC, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Headquarters Air Force, Secretary of the Air Force, the Air Force Institute of Technology, the Air National Guard, six installation support squadrons, and more than 30 installations and joint bases.

Speakers shared recent news and pending initiatives of the Department of Defense and Air Force Cultural Resources Programs, presented additional training opportunities, discussed topics such as wildland fire management, public outreach and partnership opportunities, and showcased a new tribal relations tool.

The new GIS-enabled Tribal Relations Viewer, an initiative led by the AFCEC Environmental Quality Technical Support Branch's cultural resources office, is an interactive tool allowing users to explore tribal relations data and contact information.

The workshop also carved out time to recognize Schriever Air Force Base, Colorado, as the 2020 Thomas D. White Cultural Resources small installation award winner.

Air Force officials cited many accomplishments leading to Schriever's award. The installation rewrote their Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan and implemented a new Installation Tribal Relations Plan, to capture new data and best practices, and help establish strong relationships with Native American tribes and the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office. For the first time in almost 30 years, the team also conducted walking surveys of the entire installation for archaeological and architectural resources, discovering dozens of new indigenous and non-indigenous sites and associated artifacts.

"All of our cultural resources data was at least 30 years out of date," said Charlie Lawton, Cultural Resources Manager at Schriever AFB. "Thankfully, I had a pre-existing relationship with Mark Owens and Pam Miller at the AFCEC Installations Support Section

over at Peterson Air Force Base. With their very extensive help, we essentially began to build a cultural resources program from scratch.”

In addition to highlighting successes such as Schriever’s, the workshop provided a unique forum for cultural resources collaboration.

“The conference gives a diverse group of cultural resources specialists an opportunity to come together and discuss their perspectives, while sharing best practices and challenges with the team,” Rubio said. “Over the course of the three days, we were able to engage on various topics and share innovative ideas for further enhancing the Air Force Cultural Resources Program.”