**Track Descriptions**

**Climate Change**

Track Chair: Richard Burke, TRC

Climate Change is on the world’s radar as a result of the recent Conference of the Parties summit in Paris, and it continues to be one of the most important issues faced by environmental professionals today.  This year’s NAEP annual conference devotes several sessions to this vital topic.  First, we will provide a summary of the Paris Summit, which will include a review of the latest predictions regarding future emissions and associated impacts.  Panel members will discuss how such impacts are being addressed in NEPA documents, and best practices that environmental professionals can use in their work. In a second session, we will highlight innovative steps being taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and showcase examples of how such measures can contribute to reducing the United States’ contribution to this growing problem.

**Cultural**

Track Chair: Heather Miller, HR Associates

Cultural Resources are often an afterthought in world of environmental compliance and yet by law they are equally important. Indeed, neglecting to address cultural resources (whether archaeological or historic) adequately can lead to anything from project delays, at best, to political black eyes, at worst—and everything in between. The sessions in the Cultural Resources track are designed to assist environmental professionals understand and negotiate some potential pitfalls of cultural resources compliance. This year, there are many sessions in other tracks, especially Visual Resources, that overlap with Cultural Resources.

There are four unique sessions in the Cultural Resources track. The first addresses how various forms of mapping, GIS, and LIDAR technology/imagery can assist archaeologists and historians in completing the research, survey, inventory, and reporting necessary to helping clients meet their NEPA/NHPA requirements. Next, a specific case study—recent modifications to the Chicago “L” Train system—is used to depict a lengthy, complicated transportation-related project in which historic resources played a key role in permitting, design, and construction planning and execution. A third session brings together presentations on how the EPA is managing archaeological resources and historic properties at a large Superfund site in Idaho, how FEMA and the NPS are addressing historic resources in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and how a more holistic approach to cultural landscapes applied to a study of Chicago’s South Side can broaden environmental specialists’ view of the neighborhoods within their projects often take place. Finally, as the recognition of historic landscapes has expanded nationally, federal land management agencies are increasingly initiating landscape inventories and assessments within their holdings to document the qualities and attributes that make these properties significant and worthy of preservation. With this in mind, the Cultural Resources track closes with an important session that discusses new approaches to cultural landscapes documentation. The session will provide a basic overview of initiatives developed by the Park Service for the completion of Cultural Landscape Inventories (CLIs) and Cultural Landscape Reports (CLRs) within the national park system.

**Ecosystems**

Track Chair: Liz Pelloso, US EPA

The successful management of all regulated ecological resources is dependent on partnerships and the commitment of multiple stakeholders, usually requiring both public and private sector involvement.  The Ecosystems track will address a wide variety of natural resource management topics, including Great Lakes ecosystem restoration projects funded under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and examples of the Section 7 ESA consultation process, and case studies on successful urban partnerships and mitigation projects in the greater Chicago area.  This year’s panel and individual sessions will include updates on projects undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), including Asian Carp barriers and the Northerly Island (formerly Chicago Meigs Field Airport) Ecosystem restoration; several panels on the Section 7 ESA Consultation Process, including updates to the ESA and strategies for navigating ESA consultation for eagles, migratory birds, and bats; and presentations on successful urban stewardship and mitigation projects and ecological initiatives undertaken in the greater Chicago area, and the partnerships those projects required.

**Energy**

Track Chair: Richard Burke, TRC

This track devotes two sessions to addressing the transformation that is rapidly occurring in the energy generation and consumption systems in the United States.  One session will address national and regional environmental issues arising from this transformation and will identify solutions being developed to reduce carbon emissions, while protecting the environment and maintaining reliability in power supply. A second session will focus on actions being taken at the local level.  Local governments across the United States desire to prioritize sustainable growth through local jobs and improved quality of life, while at the same time to protect against the potential for climate hazards and resource scarcities. Presenters will show how climate and clean energy planning has the potential to address these needs simultaneously.

**Great Lakes**

Track Chair: James Montgomery, DePaul Universityt

This track will examine critical issues facing the Great Lakes basin from multiple perspective including applied scientific research, policy and case studies. Presentations will include public involvement, regional collaboration to protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River from aquatic invasive species, anthropogenic refuse pollution, case studies on the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern, and early detection of aquatic invasive diseases and pathogens. Each of these issues will be considered from the perspective of mitigation and best practices for practitioners working in the Great Lakes Basin.

**NEPA**

Track Chair: Michael Smith, AECOM

The purpose of the NEPA Track is to provide practitioners with a comprehensive overview of the most important recent NEPA policy and legal updates, as well as tips and techniques for improving NEPA practice and analyses in a number of critical areas. Federal, state and private-sector practitioners and legal experts will showcase real-world examples from project case studies for a wide range of project types and agency actions. This will be a particularly unique and exciting year for the Track, as we will be featuring a special set of sessions focused on the Cohen NEPA Summit. In December 2014, the Environmental Law Institute, the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions at Duke University, and Perkins Coie LLP sponsored a two-day conference in Washington, DC on NEPA Practice. Entitled the Cohen NEPA Summit, the conference honored the work and lifelong service of William M. Cohen who, before his death in 2010, was one of the nation’s leading NEPA practitioners, instructors, and mentors. The dual purposes of the conference were to examine how and whether NEPA has achieved its objectives and to identify possible improvements in implementing NEPA. Approximately 45 NEPA experts attended the conference. The participants represented a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests, including the federal government, states, private companies, non-profit groups, and academia. An initial report on the Cohen NEPA Summit was released in May 2015. NEPA Track conference sessions will focus on disseminating the recommendations generated by the summit and brainstorming ideas on how to bring them into fruition. Each session will include both presentations based on the Cohen NEPA Summit and discussion with the conference attendees. In addition to this special set of sessions, this year’s panel and individual paper sessions will address a wide array of NEPA topics including: Annual NEPA Case Law and Policy Update; Programmatic NEPA Documents; Federal/Municipal Partnerships; Cumulative Impact Analysis; NEPA Best Practices; Ecosystem Mitigation and Post-Environmental Analysis Review; NEPA Case Studies; and NEPA Tools & Techniques.

**Public Involvement**

Track Chair: Renee Kuruc, Burns McDonnell

Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations”, was signed by President Clinton in 1994. Federal agencies were required to develop strategies for fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income. No longer were cities able to locate their landfills in only areas of low income, they were now required to locate them in areas of high income. Public transportation was now expected to be provided and serviced in high minority, low income areas as well as high income areas. As each federal agency worked on creating initiatives, EPA issued their action document, “Environmental Justice Strategy: Executive Order 12898”. EPA’s goal was to offer everyone the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work. In this session one of EPA’s Region 5 staff will provide an overview of EPA’s EJ 2020 action plan and demonstrate the new EJSCREEN tool. Come watch and learn how to maneuver through EPA’s geospatial tool to create meaningful environmental justice analyses on federal projects.

**Remediation**

Track Chair: Bill Johnston, Linebach Funkhouser, Inc.

The Remediation Track will focus on innovation technologies as they relate to environmental remediation and sustainability. We, as technical professionals, need to figure out and focus on more innovative and less invasive ways to assess and remediate subsurface contamination. We also need to share in-situ technologies, both mechanical and chemical, not only domestically but internationally and especially with emerging countries where these worldwide problems exist. Another challenge for technical professionals is to be able to incorporate this mindset into sustainability relative to protecting our environment. We need to utilize emerging technologies not only in remediation, but also into other applications such as the mining industry as well as in waste reduction and management.

The Remediation Track in this conference will detail examples of some of these innovative technologies and how they have been applied domestically as well as being shared with partnering technical professionals in emerging countries. In addition, the sustainability (i.e. protection) of the vitally important labor resource will also be discussed during this track. One of the sessions will focus on how it specifically relates to the waste management employment sector, overall environmental sustainability and climate change.

**Sustainability**

Track Chair: Renee Kuruc, Burns McDonnell

What is your definition of sustainability? Ask ten people and you will get ten answers, the term is used as the cause of many problems and as the reason for a solution. In ecological terms, sustainability is the capacity to endure, plain and simple. Despite the increased popularity of the use of the term "sustainability", the possibility that human societies will achieve environmental sustainability has been, and continues to be, questioned—in light of [environmental degradation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_degradation), [climate change](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_change), [overconsumption](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overconsumption), population growth and societies' pursuit of indefinite [economic growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_growth) in a [closed system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closed_system). One session will focus on sustainability in transportation planning. Learn how the Illinois Tollway’s *Move Illinois* capital program is the cleanest and greenest program in agency history. This track will focus on how state agencies and project teams use FHWA’s INVEST tool and ENVISION to lessen transportation impacts. Also included in this track is a success story, Bloomington-Normal, McLean County, Illinois implemented sustainability aspects through the NEPA and design process in an Environmental Assessment.

This track will also examine Industrial Ecology, a vision for sustainable societies where industry is organized like a natural ecosystem, where there is no waste, and where energy and materials are continuously cycled in a circular economy. Come hear from five higly respected Chicago-based industrail ecology scholars from several disciplinary areas (business, engineering, policy and planning) and explore how industrial ecology can inform professional environmental practice by improving our understanding of society’s impacts on the environment and pathways to transition towards sustainability, with a focus on industrial and urban systems. The panelists will first share insights from their areas of expertise.

**Transportation**

Track Chair: Stacey Woodson, HR Green

The transportation track includes three different sessions covering a variety of transportation related topics. The panelists from the first session will provide an overview of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiently (CREATE) program describing how the private-public partnership manages rail infrastructure projects in the area. The second session includes best practices of streamlining approaches in the Atlanta and Seattle areas. In Atlanta, categorical exclusions (CE) prepared for the Federal Highway Administration were reviewed and ways to improve CEs were found. In Seattle, the agency in charge of expanding the light rail system, Sound Transit, found ways to streamline the NEPA process per MAP-21 requirements. During the final transportation session, the panelists of environmental trainers will share their experiences in what confused people the most while learning about the NEPA process.

**Water Resources**

Track Chair: Jonathan Welker, SurvTech Solutions

Water is one our most delicate, non-renewable, natural resource that requires an exceptional amount of participation from government entities, engineers, environmentalist, and the public. Providing the appropriate regulation, and developing suitable controls and remedy solutions to treat, clean, and recycle water will be the solution to the inevitable water shortage in the future. This session will examine how local governments and corporations invested their water resources can successfully protect and plan for future use through the use of conventional methods and new technology. Presentations will consist of innovative solutions to reducing impact to ground and surface waters. This session will also provide a thorough discussion of the recent updates to US EPA’s Clean Water Act

**Visual Resources**

Track Chair: Bob Sullivan, Argonne National Laboratory

Recent years have seen important and exciting developments in the field of visual resource management, and these advances are the focus of this year's Visual Resources Track. Several federal agencies have or will be issuing updated program guidance, and are initiating interagency collaboration to address visual resource management issues, including impacts to enjoyment of night skies. The National Park Service (NPS) has developed and is implementing a new visual resource inventory system, and in 2016, the 100th anniversary of the agency, NPS will launch its new visual resource management program. These NPS activities are highlighted in a special session. The Track also features panels and individual presentations devoted to advances in visual resource inventory and impact assessment methodologies, and several case studies that highlight results and lessons learned when conducting inventories and impact assessments in the field. A panel session will also discuss a new book addressing the impacts of renewable energy on the American and European landscape.