

# SPIRITUAL PILGRIMS AT MOUNT SHASTA, CALIFORNIA\*

LYNN HUNTSINGER and MARÍA FERNÁNDEZ-GIMÉNEZ

**ABSTRACT.** Even the casual visitor cannot fail to notice unusual activity on the slopes of Northern California's Mount Shasta. Prayer flags, altars, and crystals are found in the meadows; drumming, chanting, and meditation are commonplace. Non-indigenous spiritual pilgrims have found Mount Shasta a sacred place. An amorphous group of spiritual seekers, these are sometimes referred to as "New Age" adherents or "Crystal People." Within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, the situation of this sacred site exemplifies the difficulties of reconciling nonsecular claims to public lands with secular management mandates. Spiritual activism at Mount Shasta includes recently successful opposition to development of a Forest Service-endorsed ski area. Using a questionnaire survey and interviews, we compare the characteristics, activities, and attitudes toward resource management of spiritual pilgrims and others who visit Mount Shasta's meadows. Conclusions are drawn about the environmental values and concerns of all visitors and of spiritual pilgrims in particular, including some that bear on pilgrim activities and ecological restoration efforts. *Keywords:* *Crystal People, Mount Shasta, New Age, pilgrimage, power point, U.S. Forest Service.*

*The power of such a mountain is so great and yet so subtle that without compulsion pilgrims are drawn to the mountain from near and far, as if by the force of some invisible magnet, and they will undergo untold hardships and privations in their inexplicable urge to approach and to worship the sacred spot. Nobody has conferred the title of sacredness upon such a mountain; by virtue of its own magnetic and psychic emanations the mountain is intuitively recognized to be sacred. It needs no organizer of its worship; innately, each of its devotees feels the urge to pay it reverence.*

—Lama Anagarika Govinda, quoted in Bernbaum 1990

In 1992 the U.S. Forest Service undertook a meadow-restoration project on the slopes of Mount Shasta, California, within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. The goal was to limit and reverse soil erosion accelerated by the tangle of user-created trails and campsites scattered throughout the delicate high-elevation heathers and grasses. Even the most casual participant in that restoration project could hardly fail to notice an unusual use of the meadows and springs. Crystals were placed in and near the water, particularly Panther Spring, sacred to the Wintu Tribe. Prayer flags were tied to tree branches, and pictures and poems were left on small rock altars in the meadows and near springs. The crisscrossing trails led to altars and to the denuded edges of Panther Spring, where many people came to collect water. Nude sunbathing, drumming, and chanting were frequent activities nearby. Be-

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✱ DR. HUNTSINGER is an associate professor of environmental sciences, policy, and management at the University of California, Berkeley, California 94720. DR. FERNÁNDEZ-GIMÉNEZ is an assistant professor of renewable natural resources at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721-0043.

cause we believed that restoration of the meadows was impossible without greater understanding of these public land users, we conducted a survey of visitors to Mount Shasta over the following year, asking people why they visited, what they did there, and what they believed about the mountain. We also interviewed local residents, Forest Service land managers, and community leaders.

The Mount Shasta vicinity hosts a concentration of what are often referred to as "Crystal People" or, sometimes, "New Agers." This is an amorphous, diverse, and poorly defined group whose spiritual beliefs fall outside the bounds of mainstream religion and who are found in every corner of the globe. Their beliefs can be described as a synthesis and creative expansion of various branches of religious thought, including Christian, Buddhist, Taoist, and, characteristically, neo-Native American belief systems. The use of crystals and herbs for various purposes is almost ubiquitous, as is the designation of power points or sacred sites, often based on the native sacred sites of local indigenous people. Mount Shasta has long been such a spiritual center.

Federal lands such as the national forest that includes Mount Shasta have been described as a fluid mosaic of shifting formal and informal claims (Fairfax and others 1999). The New Agers can be considered one such claimant, although they have been the subject of little formal study as users of public lands. It can go almost without saying that this "user group" has met with a mixed success in convincing the U.S. Forest Service, which operates under a strictly secular mandate, of the legitimacy of their nonsecular claims. A major battle over a permit to develop a ski area on the mountain, granted in 1991 and rescinded in 1998, brought the various claims to the mountain into sharp relief. Herein we report the results of our research and discuss conflicting claims to the mountain that involve local development interests, Native American tribes, recreationists, and the spiritual pilgrims.

#### A HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL USE

Delineating the belief systems of Shasta-area Native American peoples is beyond the scope of this essay; suffice it to say that Mount Shasta has an important role in the cultural and spiritual life of the Wintu, whose tribal territory includes the mountain's western slopes, and a number of other Northern California tribes, including the Pitt River, Shasta, and Karuk. A system of springs and meadows now known as Panther Spring, Panther Meadow, and Panther Creek is of particular importance to the Wintu (Theodoratus and Evans 1991).

Mount Shasta's history as a spiritually important site for non-indigenous people began in the nineteenth century. The naturalist John Muir wrote in 1875 that the peak is "a colossal cone rising in solitary grandeur and might well be regarded as an object of religious worship" (Muir 1988, 72). In 1899 a text was channeled by an ancient being named Phyllos the Thibetan to one Frederick Spencer Oliver: *A Dweller on Two Planets* describes mystical experiences involving Mount Shasta and spiritual journeys to subterranean empires beneath it (Phyllos 1991). In 1931 Harve Spencer Lewis, under the pseudonym Wishar H. Cerve, first published *Lemuria: The Lost*

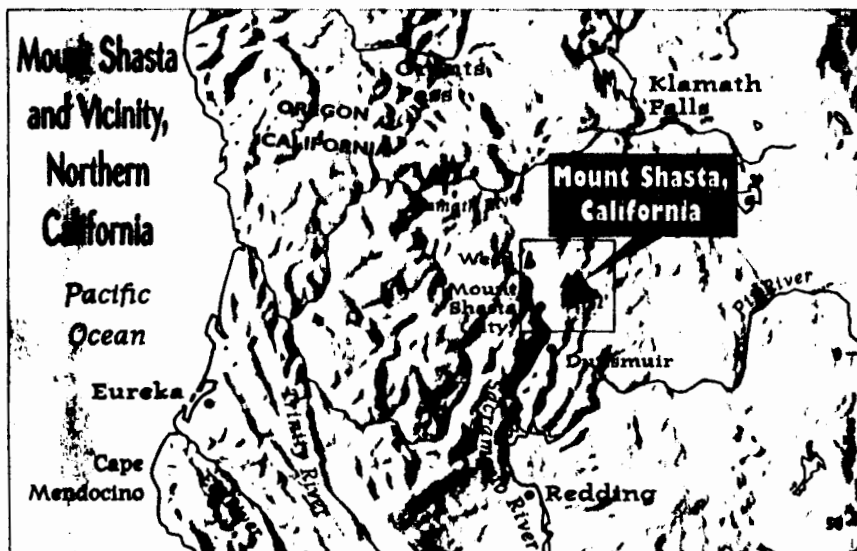


FIG. 1—The city of Mount Shasta lies between the Sacramento River and Mount Shasta. Interstate 5 follows the course of the river. (Cartography by Paul F. Starrs)

*Continent of the Pacific* (Cerve 1983), which describes spiritual beings from the lost continent of Lemuria who have taken refuge in caverns beneath Mount Shasta. These beings, known as Lemurians, still contact some modern pilgrims to the mountain. In 1934 Guy Ballard founded the I AM religious movement, based on his revelations during an encounter with the thirteenth-century mystic Saint Germain at Panther Spring in 1930 (King 1986).

Mount Shasta gained national and international notoriety as a pilgrimage site during the 1987 Harmonic Convergence, when tens of thousands of people went to special spots on the globe to observe an alignment of the planets that was to herald a harmonious New Age. Three to five thousand people journeyed to Mount Shasta.

Many of Mount Shasta's visitors consider themselves spiritual seekers and the mountain sacred. They object, however, to being called New Age and fail to share many typical New Age beliefs and attitudes. In this essay we refer to non-indigenous visitors who hold that the mountain is a sacred place and seek to be near it as "spiritual pilgrims," and we strive not to obscure the generous diversity in the attitudes of these pilgrims.

#### MOUNT SHASTA TODAY

Shasta's sharp white volcanic cone rises at the north end of the Sacramento Valley, usually with a lenticular cloud or two clinging to the 14,162-foot summit. The peak is visible 200 miles away on a clear day. The city of Mount Shasta, a small commu-

nity of some 3,500 people, is perched on the mountain's shoulders at about 5,000 feet above sea level (Figure 1). An examination of the town's bookstores and cafés reveals flyers and guidebooks that give voice to common themes: The mountain is riddled by the network of caves that are home to Lemurians; lenticular clouds serve as cover for spaceships and more or less tangible transfers of personnel or thought from outer space; viewing the cone of the mountain gives one strength and spiritual power; Mount Shasta is a power spot of international significance.

Local artists and writers sell photographs, paintings, and a wealth of books testifying to the spiritual qualities of the mountain, including posters of "solar angels" said to frequent the mountain and its environs. Keepsakes for sale range from crystals to items that mimic Native American arts, though they generally have no relationship to Indian arts native to the Shasta region. Wall advertisements offer activities oriented toward spiritual experience and personal growth. It is no coincidence that at the local breakfast nook in this rural outpost, "yogi tea" is a common drink.

The mountain is pivot and home to retreats and workshops advertised all over the United States, but most commonly in California (Figure 2). A small but vigorous local industry ushers people up to the mountain to regain lost spiritual harmony and to "get in tune" with the earth.

From the city of Mount Shasta the Everett Memorial Highway winds its way up the slope, in summertime coming to an abrupt end at about 8,000 feet elevation at a parking lot with a commanding view of the treeless, glaciated peak. The parking lot is a relict of a small ski area built in 1957 that was quite summarily eradicated in 1978 by an avalanche.

Less than a quarter-mile from the parking lot is the edge of Panther and Squaw Meadows, alpine and subalpine interconnected meadow systems that range in elevation from 7,800 to 9,000 feet and vary in size from 1 to 5 acres. The meadow soils are derived from glacial outwash materials of cinders, pumice, and ash, and are cold and wet. Although the soils are of moderate drainage, they are highly subject to gullying where surface water is concentrated (Allen-Diaz, Phillips, and Fernández-Giménez 1992). The lower meadows, Panther Meadows, are only a few hundred feet and an easy stroll from the parking lot. Squaw Meadows begin about 2 miles farther up the trail on a gentle contour and are within the bounds of the Mount Shasta wilderness. Within an hour's time, it is not difficult to set out from the city of Mount Shasta, drive up to the parking lot, walk to Panther Meadow, gather water from Panther Spring, and drive back down to town. During the winter, the road is plowed to a lower parking area, Bunny Flat, about 1 mile below the meadows.

Typical recreation activities at Mount Shasta are climbing and cross-country or backcountry skiing, sledding, hiking, and backpacking. Many visitors head straight for the Shasta summit from the parking lot, a rigorous hike. Yet in the summertime, on any given weekend when the road is open, people can be observed sitting and talking in the parking lot and in the meadows themselves. Forest Service employees

in the meadows observe people praying or meditating, leaving offerings, collecting water, sunbathing nude, singing, drumming and playing other instruments, chanting, and doing yoga. Tents are set up right next to the parking lot and inhabited for several days, if not weeks, at a time. In 1991 and 1992 a few individuals spent the entire summer living in cars and vans in the parking lot, a practice locals and Forest Service personnel attributed to a desire to be close to the spiritual emanations of the mountain. There is also considerable social interaction.

Aside from this consistent, daily pattern of spiritual pilgrimage to Mount Shasta, at certain times of the year there are larger pulses of spiritually oriented visitors to the area. In August, as has been the practice for more than forty years, the I AM Foundation holds its annual pageant at Mount Shasta. This quasi-Christian group yearly attracts a few thousand people. The event, staged in an outdoor amphitheater at the foot of the mountain, is a reenactment of Christ's life without "negative" aspects, such as the crucifixion. And in August, at the time of the full moon, members of the Rainbow Family, a seminomadic group, often converge on the mountain. Several hundred people devote a few days to drumming, dancing, and celebrating and then move on to other camps.

Spiritual pilgrimage to Mount Shasta is not without controversy. According to a report solicited by the Forest Service, Native Americans are disturbed by both the environmental effects of trampling and heavy use and the "lack of respect" for sacred sites they feel that some New Age activities indicate (Theodoratus and Evans 1991). One example is the placement of crystals in Panther Spring and the collection of water from it. And recreational users sometimes complain to the Forest Service of nudity, drumming, or chanting in the meadow areas and of the construction of altars and medicine wheels, saying that they detract from their nature experience (Fernández-Giménez and others 1992). The Forest Service, charged with managing the area, is also concerned about the impacts of heavy, repetitive use of the meadows, damming of the creeks for bathing, and placement of objects in the creeks.

#### SPIRITUAL PILGRIMS: WHO ARE THEY?

Mount Shasta has several characteristics that make it an appropriate venue for examining spiritual use: Not only is it a recognized center of spiritual pilgrimage (Bernbaum 1990; McRae 1991), but most visitors to the meadows pass through a single access point, the parking lot. To gather data, we verbally administered a questionnaire to visitors on one randomly selected weekend in each of the three summer months, when Forest Service officials believed pilgrimage to be most common. Our objective was not to generalize about all types of use on the mountain, or about patterns of use on Forest Service land, but to characterize spiritual pilgrims and their behaviors, so we chose times when we would be likely to obtain an adequate sample within a brief period—between 10:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. And, to gauge whether non-indigenous pilgrimage was seasonal, we also randomly selected one winter weekend (Figure 3).

## ASCENSION POWER WEEKENDS ON MT. SHASTA

◆ Ascension is mastery, learning to co-create your life, consciously, with the inner God-Self you are.

*Ascension is the permanent lifting of body, mind, & heart into Light, into oneness with Source. The body itself is so filled with Light and universal life that it is really known as holy, as a life-form so clear that the life within it is not really distinguishable from the life all around it. In the evenness and oneness of universal life the body feels ageless, exquisitely sustained.*



*If Ascension is your calling, come to Mt. Shasta!*

FIG. 2—Mount Shasta is a perennial favorite of the schools of self-improvement, as advertised by this handbill. Its draw is now also on the World Wide Web, where advertisements abound for workshops, seminars, and products designed to help a customer develop spiritually by spending time at Mount Shasta. See, for example, [<http://www.LightandLove.com>].

The survey instrument comprised six series of questions—pretested in San Francisco Bay Area recreation areas—about activities, environmental conditions, restoration options, group memberships, values, and demographics. Responses were on a Likert-like scale from 1 to 4; “Don’t knows” were always an option and were generally treated as missing in the analysis unless otherwise specified. More than 95 percent of the visitors we asked to complete the survey at Mount Shasta did so, resulting in 152 completed questionnaires. Of these, 115 were from the summer and 37 were completed in March, when the area was snow covered. We used chi-square analysis to evaluate categorical responses.

We asked every group with adult members and every adult individual heading to or from the meadows, or in the meadows, to take a few minutes to answer some questions. For groups of three or more people, we requested an individual volunteer. We made no attempt to select a particular type of user or users engaged in any particular kind of activity. Our interviews took place in the parking lot at the end of the highway, in the meadows themselves, and in the nearby Forest Service campground. In March the highway was plowed to within about 1 mile of the terminus, so we interviewed visitors there.

Using open-ended questions, we also conducted interviews lasting from one to three hours with twelve residents of the city of Mount Shasta: a prominent investor

with interests in the development of the mountain as a ski area; a journalist with the local paper who had written about New Age activities in the area; the author of a book about recreation on the mountain; three Forest Service employees, ranging

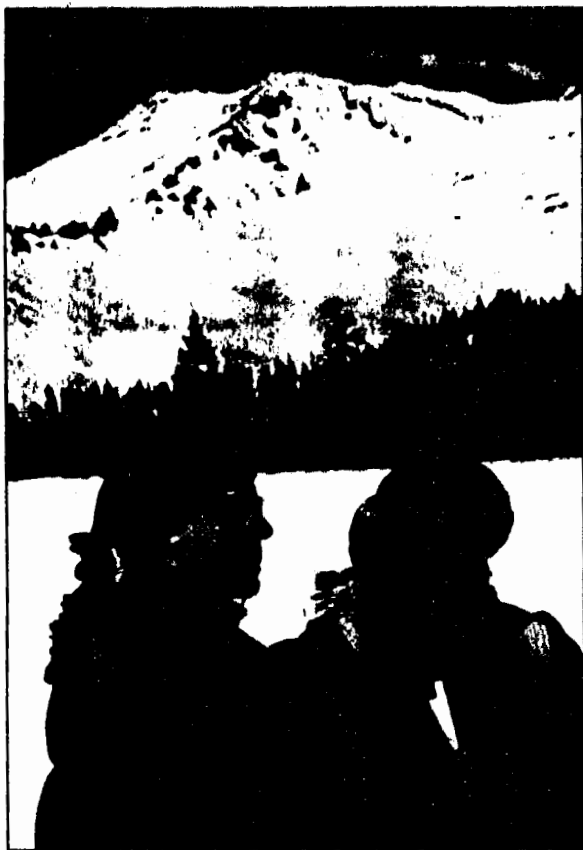


FIG. 3—The authors, accompanied by young Genoa Starrs, pause between interviews at Bunny Flat, on Mount Shasta. More than one-third of the visitors we surveyed on a weekend in March were spiritual pilgrims, even though snow covered the ground and access to Panther Meadows and Panther Springs required an uphill hike of more than a mile. In any season, visitors were quite willing to participate in our survey. (Photograph by Paul E. Starrs, 1993)

from field personnel to administrators; the leader of a group fighting development on the mountain; a Native American who leads activities that include spiritual pilgrims; the owner of a New Age bookstore; a prominent New Age artist; and two well-published New Age authors. The goal of the interviews was to help us develop the questionnaire and to interpret or expand our results.

## PILGRIMAGE PARSED

At least half and perhaps more of the visitors to Mount Shasta could be termed "spiritual pilgrims," depending on the response chosen as an indicator. For example, in response to the question, "Do you agree with the statement that 'Mount Shasta is a major center for spiritual power?'" 50 percent of our respondents agreed strongly, 22 percent agreed somewhat, 4 percent disagreed somewhat, and only 13 percent disagreed strongly. An additional 11 percent of those surveyed responded that they did not know. In response to the question, "How important is it to you to worship the meadows or mountain or gods within or near them?" 45 percent said it was extremely important, 14 percent said it was fairly important, 5 percent said it was not too important, 36 percent said it was not at all important, and one person did not know. A total of 69 percent of the respondents said that prayer was an extremely or fairly important activity for them when visiting Mount Shasta. For the purpose of distinguishing spiritual pilgrims from other visitors to the meadows, we chose strong agreement that Mount Shasta is a major center of spiritual power because it did not contain terms like "gods" and "worship," which, according to interviewees, are not necessarily applicable to spiritual use of the mountain. Of the visitors we interviewed during the winter, 37 percent met this criterion, indicating that spiritual pilgrimage continues even when the meadows are snow covered and difficult of access.

Visitors surveyed were on the average in their mid-thirties, slightly fewer than half were female, and they were overwhelmingly Caucasian (Table 1). Pilgrims tended to be less well educated than other visitors, and they were less likely to be from a city of more than 100,000 people, or its suburbs. The income of pilgrims was also significantly lower. Roughly three times as many pilgrims reported that, rather than having a permanent residence, they "traveled from place to place." During the summer we observed several persons living out of vehicles in the parking lot.

More than half of the other visitors considered themselves professionals of some sort (we were surprised at the number of physicians). Pilgrims were more often self-employed, in everything from running a New Age bookstore to soliciting donations in return for some kind of spiritual guidance.

New Age-spiritual pilgrim interviewees saw themselves as independent or as part of small groups that pursue spiritual growth and enlightenment. "What people experience depends on their own circuits" was one comment; "The mountain stimulates creative energy, and empowers individual spiritual growth" was another. Although interviewees stressed that their movement has no particular leader, adherents drew from a canon of authors and teachers in varying degrees. In general, interviewees believed that their spiritual path, though based on many religious and philosophical ideas from the past, represented an advancement in spiritual growth; hence the term "New Age" is often applied. "I respect Native American truths but don't adopt them all," one spiritual pilgrim told us. "Evolution goes on so things change—traditions are reinterpreted every few hundred years." Estimates of what proportion of the local population could be called spiritual pilgrims varied. One prominent non-pilgrim interviewee believed that only 200–300 people fell into this

TABLE I—CHARACTERISTICS OF MOUNT SHASTA VISITORS SURVEYED IN 1992–1993

VARIABLE	PERCENTAGE OF PILGRIMS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	PERCENTAGE OF OTHER VISITORS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	SIGNIFICANCE ( <i>x</i> <sup>2</sup> )
Mean age (Student's <i>t</i> -test)	38	36	N.S.
Female	47	40	N.S.
Caucasian	82	88	N.S.
Postgraduate education	18	33	**
High-school education or less	24	13	*
From a city of more than 100,000 residents, or its suburbs	25	42	**
No permanent residence	14	3	***
Annual income of less than \$20,000	47	15	***
Annual income of more than \$75,000	25	46	***
Employed	68	87	***
Self-employed	34	21	*
Professional	32	55	**
Planned to stay three nights or more	28	5	***
First visit to Mount Shasta	24	49	***
Visited five times or more in the past year	42	11	***
Did not know which area was designated as "wilderness," or gave a wrong answer	82	93	**
Agreed that Native Americans live in perfect harmony with nature	51	33	**

<sup>a</sup>The number of responses varies slightly by question because of "Don't know" responses and refusals to answer.

N.S. = Not significant. \* =  $p < .1$ . \*\* =  $p < .05$ . \*\*\* =  $p < .01$ .

category. More than one New Age interviewee said that about half the community was engaged in a spiritual quest based around the mountain, though many were "in the closet," and one interviewee believed that "everyone who lives here has some spiritual connection to the mountain."

Spiritual pilgrims visited Mount Shasta more frequently and stayed longer than did non-pilgrims. Perhaps as a result, they were more familiar with Forest Service land classifications than were other visitors, though neither group's knowledge of this was impressive. Pilgrims were more likely to agree that Native Americans live in harmony with nature (Table I).

We asked our respondents what kinds of groups or clubs they might belong to, and one-quarter reported that they did not belong to any of the types of groups we mentioned (Table II). The organizations that were most popular among respondents were conservation and environmental groups, with slightly fewer than half of all respondents belonging to one such group. Many respondents belonged to church groups and groups associated with the Forest Service. Significant differences in group memberships reflected the orientation of spiritual pilgrims: About half belonged to a spiritual group using Mount Shasta, one-quarter to a Native American organization, and one-fifth to the Rainbow Family. Other visitors were more likely to belong to a church group or to a hunting and fishing organization.

TABLE II—GROUP MEMBERSHIP OF MOUNT SHASTA VISITORS SURVEYED IN 1992–1993

GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF PILGRIMS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	PERCENTAGE OF OTHER VISITORS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	SIGNIFICANCE ( $\chi^2$ )
Conservation group	40	32	N.S.
Environmental group	44	50	N.S.
Special group using Mount Shasta	44	5	***
Native American organization	24	8	***
Church group	17	29	*
U.S. Forest Service–associated group	17	12	N.S.
Rainbow Family	18	3	***
Veteran's group	4	8	N.S.
Hunting or fishing group	3	15	***
Livestock or farm association	0	3	N.S.
No group membership	24	26	N.S.

<sup>a</sup> The number of responses varies slightly by question because of "Don't know" responses and refusals to answer.

N.S. = Not significant. \* =  $p < .1$ . \*\* =  $p < .05$ . \*\*\* =  $p < .01$ .

#### ACTIVITIES

A series of questions about activities allows comparison of what pilgrims and non-pilgrims do at Mount Shasta (Table II). Both pilgrims and other visitors reported that they liked watching wildlife, hiking, talking with friends, nature study, camping, and "spending time with a dog." Pilgrims less often backpacked, perhaps because many of them camped near or in the parking lot, so they had no need to backpack to visit the major foci of pilgrim activity. Prayer and worship were very common among pilgrims, as were visiting or creating an altar or shrine (Figure 4), bathing in the creek, playing an instrument such as a drum or flute, and looking for UFOs or evidence of their presence, but photography was comparatively rare (Table III).

People we spoke to in town, and Forest Service interviewees, often opined that pilgrims simply did not understand that the self-made trails and the heavy use of springs and meadows were harming meadow ecosystems. We decided to examine this idea by seeing whether the two groups viewed meadow conditions differently, as has been found in other studies of conflicts over resource management (Hunt-singer and Heady 1988).

We asked meadow visitors about the severity of ten environmental problems at the site, ranking them in increasing severity from 1 to 4. Trampling had a median score of 4, "a very serious problem"; erosion, user-created trails, and "too many people" drew median scores of 3, "a somewhat serious problem"; litter, water pollution, waste, built structures, and dams had a median score of 2, "a minor problem"; and air pollution had a median score of 1, "not a problem." Using a chi-square analysis, no difference between pilgrims and non-pilgrims was found for any part of the question series ( $p < 0.05$ ). A Student's *t*-test of a summed score of all responses also revealed no difference, with the mean for pilgrims of 24 (SD) = 7.8,



FIG. 4—An altar built near Panther Springs, on the slopes of Mount Shasta, surrounded by photographs, tarot cards, crystals, and other objects. A sign explains that the spring is important to Native Americans and should not be disturbed. Note that soil in front of the altar is bare. (Photograph by Paul F. Starrs, 1992)

$n = 37$ )<sup>1</sup> and for others of 25 ( $SD = 8.4$ ,  $n = 67$ ). The possible range was from 0 to 40, so in both cases the mean was at the midpoint. These views of meadow conditions were about the same as those of scientists on a restoration project in the meadows at the time (Allen-Diaz, Phillips, and Fernández-Giménez 1992).

Pilgrim interviewees claimed a different way of appreciating and relating to nature. We used a previously tested and published scaled score of ecological values to compare pilgrims and non-pilgrims (Steel, Soden, and Warner 1991, as adapted from Dunlap and Van Liere 1984). The scale examines where respondents place humans in relation to nature by asking them how much they agree with statements ranging from "Humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature" to "The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset by human activities." Responses were rated on a Likert scale. Once again, we found no difference between the two groups: Each had a mean score of 22 out of a possible 24.<sup>2</sup> Both groups had strong environmental values by this criterion.

#### RESTORATION OPTIONS

We asked respondents about the acceptability of closing the meadows to all use and of closing them to use by everyone except Native Americans. More than two-thirds

of spiritual users thought it was a bad idea to close the meadows (Table IV), and the option of permitting access by Native Americans made no real difference to them. Almost half of the other users approved of closing the meadows, but when asked if the meadows should be closed to everyone but Native Americans, more than two-thirds opposed closure.

Spiritual users would find it more difficult to shift their activities to another site because they believe that Mount Shasta is the unique place of worship or pilgrimage. Other users often commented that closing the meadows to everyone except Native Americans would be unfair and opposed closing them under that stipulation. They found it comparatively easy to accept closing the meadows to everyone.

Respondents were asked about removing all user-made structures, including dams, fire rings, altars, and shrines, from the meadows. Spiritual users were less likely to agree to this option than were other users. But when asked about removing all structures except those used for worship, almost two-thirds of the spiritual users thought it was a fairly good or a good idea. On the other hand, fewer than half of the other users agreed, often indicating that they considered it unfair to remove some but not all user-made structures.

Pilgrims objected to restoration options that limit the access they need to carry out their specific activities: worship, camping, bathing in the creek, and visiting or constructing altars or shrines. Other users framed their responses in terms of what is "fair" to all users, considering all claims to be somewhat equivalent.

#### SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE: NOT THE SOUL ANSWER

Our Forest Service interviewees believed, as do natural-resource management professionals in general (Brunson 1992), that greater scientific understanding of ecosystem function leads to improved management and better ecological conditions on forest lands. Our non-pilgrim interviewees sometimes pointed to the meadow damage caused by pilgrims as indicative of hypocrisy—pilgrims harm the meadows by overusing them but say they are seeking greater harmony with the earth. Spiritual pilgrims assert their claim to make use of the meadows in the ways they believe are important, despite their observations of ecological problems, their own environmental values, and the discomfort to other users that their practices can cause. Within their own belief system, this is not hypocritical. Pilgrims believe that conditions on earth will improve when balance and harmony in personal lives and in relationships with nature are achieved, so their activities are needed. Martin Gray, in his essay subtitled "A Pilgrim's Journey for Planetary Healing," provides an illustration of this way of thinking:

One reason [to undertake a journey] concerned the direct effect of healing Earth by visiting the power points. This was the first time I learned of the practice of planetary acupuncture whereby a human being with a loving heart may function somewhat like an acupuncture needle for earth. My vision revealed that many people would begin to visit the power points for this purpose in the final years of the twen-

tieth century . . . their presence at the power points transmitting an essence of love and gratitude to the planetary being as well as a spark of vital energy which would stimulate the planetary energy grid. (Gray 1991, 25)

Several of our interviewees came to their beliefs as they coped with personal tragedy. "Spiritual ecology" has been described as "a product of a profound sense of crisis in the ways that twentieth century humans relate to the environment" (Merchant 1992, 110). In certain belief systems, "rituals of affliction . . . are performed to solve problems and mend broken relationships between humans, between humans and nature, and between humans and the supernatural" (Helman 1994, 36). Visits to power points, construction of medicine wheels and altars, and leaving material offerings in wild places each count as an effort to create this harmony with the earth and in personal lives. "Medicine wheels and rings protect the mountain," commented one interviewee. These activities and artifacts can also be viewed as an attempt literally to reconstruct a relationship with nature by an individual who feels alienated from the natural world.

Pilgrim interviewees, while expressing appreciation for Native American traditions and often studying and emulating them, also frequently volunteered that their belief system was a further evolution, hence more advanced than Native American cosmology. According to one respondent, "Native American values are not necessarily superior; there is a whole new generation of caretakers who are just as profound." This caretaking extended to the very practical, for we observed some spiritual seekers picking up trash in the area every day over the course of our study. Some interviewees strongly believed that the mountain would heal and take care of itself. "We will see what the trail does to the mountain, and then we will see what the mountain will do to the trail," said one. The avalanche that obliterated the old ski area in 1978 was sometimes viewed as the mountain protecting itself from intrusion.<sup>3</sup>

Spiritual pilgrimage to a place like Mount Shasta results from a particular personal or collective interpretation of that landscape. This social construction of nature can result in very tangible changes in vegetation and landscape because of pilgrim activities. For the purposes of anticipating and evaluating environmental impacts, recreationists are typically classified by how much time they spend at a site, whether they are on foot, on horseback, on a bicycle, or using a vehicle, and by a standard set of commodity versus noncommodity uses. The methods commonly prescribed for mitigating environmental impacts are developed accordingly. As our study illustrates, the kinds of ecological impacts that people have on an area may be significantly affected by group characteristics traditionally not classified or even recognized as having particular environmental impacts by ecologists and recreation planners. In turn, this may lead to mitigation measures that are unacceptable and ultimately unenforceable.

Recreation planners have developed strategies for reducing recreation impacts in areas with susceptible vegetation and soils, including encouraging dispersed use, constructing boardwalks through fragile soil areas, redirecting trails, and increased

TABLE III—ACTIVITIES IMPORTANT TO MOUNT SHASTA VISITORS SURVEYED IN 1992–1993

ACTIVITY	PERCENTAGE OF PILGRIMS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	PERCENTAGE OF OTHER VISITORS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	SIGNIFICANCE ( $\chi^2$ )
Watching wildlife	95	95	N.S.
Hiking	87	92	N.S.
Talking with friends	76	72	N.S.
Nature study	81	79	N.S.
Camping	68	68	N.S.
Spending time with a dog	23	22	N.S.
Photography	47	75	***
Backpacking	45	61	*
Praying	89	47	***
Worshipping meadows or the mountain, or the gods inside or near them	89	30	***
Visiting or creating an altar or a shrine	49	8	***
Bathing in a creek	45	25	**
Playing a musical instrument	39	11	***
Looking for UFOs or for evidence of them	35	7	***

<sup>a</sup>The number of responses varies slightly by question because of "Don't know" responses and refusals to answer.

N.S. = Not significant. \* =  $p < .1$ . \*\* =  $p < .05$ . \*\*\* =  $p < .01$ .

TABLE IV—RESTORATION OPTIONS FAVORED BY MOUNT SHASTA VISITORS SURVEYED IN 1992–1993

OPTION	PERCENTAGE OF PILGRIMS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	PERCENTAGE OF OTHER VISITORS ( <i>n</i> = 76 <sup>a</sup> )	SIGNIFICANCE ( $\chi^2$ )
More public education and information	96	96	N.S.
Have a ranger present	59	74	*
Have a volunteer present	92	87	N.S.
Restrict campsites near Squaw Meadows	76	93	**
Prohibit campfires in Squaw Meadows	51	85	***
Eliminate some user-created trails	79	83	N.S.
Prohibit dogs	71	78	N.S.
Prohibit bathing in creeks	55	74	**
Remove dams, altars, prayer wheels, etc.	39	65	***
Remove all nonworship constructs	60	49	N.S.
Restrict the use of water at springs	55	67	N.S.
Allow sunbathing only on rocks	53	67	N.S.
Make trails that avoid meadows	46	51	N.S.
Use raised boardwalks for trails	27	40	N.S.
Fence areas to protect plants	40	53	N.S.
Let nature take its course	39	44	N.S.
Close to all for two years	25	48	**
Close to all but Native Americans for two years	17	27	N.S.

<sup>a</sup>The number of responses varies slightly by question because of "Don't know" responses and refusals to answer.

N.S. = Not significant. \* =  $p < .1$ . \*\* =  $p < .05$ . \*\*\* =  $p < .01$ .

patrolling and education programs (Chi 1989). Such approaches have been successful in many situations, but they fail when confronted by unanticipated or misunderstood user values or behaviors.

Attempts by restoration workers and Forest Service personnel to remove religious and nonreligious structures at Mount Shasta have been frustrated by the immediate reappearance of altars, dams, and fire rings. Interviewees and respondents commented that "yogis needed to take baths" in order to benefit from spiritual energies carried by the water. More than one pilgrim interviewee commented that the Forest Service, in the construction of trails and other structures, "moves rocks all the time, so why shouldn't we?" Another interviewee pointed out that everybody feels the same way: "New Age folks think they are moving rocks in the right way, so it's OK, the Forest Service thinks they are moving rocks in the right way, so it's OK, and scientists think they are moving rocks in the right way, so it's OK."

Pilgrims were less likely to favor the presence of a ranger in the meadows than were other users, perhaps because, as interviewees commented, they believe that the Forest Service is insensitive to the spiritual values of both Native Americans and pilgrims (Fernández-Giménez and others 1992) (Table IV). On the other hand, pilgrims found the presence of a "volunteer" much more acceptable. During the summer of 1992 a well-educated man in his mid-forties who had been drawn to Mount Shasta by the power of the mountain approached the Forest Service with a desire to serve the mountain. The Forest Service positioned him at the trailhead to the meadows to inform people of the need to stay on trails and avoid damaging the plants and waterways. Forest Service personnel reported that this eliminated illegal camping and vandalism and reduced "offensive behavior" at the meadows. Several interviewees, New Age and otherwise, felt that the volunteer significantly improved communication and that this was what was essential to smooth out the management problems on the mountain. One interviewee believed that "restoration programs should be tied to the beliefs and values of the people using the mountain, including spiritual seekers." This has global resonance: A study of sacred forests in India concluded that finding agreement and complementarity between secular policy and the beliefs of a user group could significantly improve conservation efforts (Chandrakanth and Romm 1991, 754).

One community leader and spiritual pilgrim commented to us that pilgrims and the mountain would benefit from improved communication and that pilgrims wanted and needed to learn more about ecological values, as well as Native American values, stating that "the longer I live here, the more important the Native presence is." Spiritual pilgrims clearly wanted to protect the meadows from adverse ecological impacts, but many also firmly believed that the healing rituals they performed were just as important to the health and condition of the mountain and the world.

#### POWER ALLIANCE FOR A POWER POINT

In a newspaper article in the *Mount Shasta Herald*, Siskiyou County Supervisor Phil Mattos is quoted as having said that "when I went to Washington, D.C. in 1984 with

the proposal [for a ski-area development on Mount Shasta], the Chief Forester, two Congressmen, and the Regional Forester all agreed the project could get started immediately" (Manley 1998a). The Forest Service accepted the bid of a local development company and completed the required environmental impact statement (EIS) for the ski area in 1990. Based on the EIS, the Forest Service issued a record of decision approving the ski-area development, finding it in compliance with the multiple-use classification of the mountain.

In 1998, after a prolonged battle and a series of appeals, the Forest Service reversed course, determining that the ski area would not go forward. Charles Miller, one of the attorneys working with groups opposed to the development, reported on the *News from Native California* World Wide Web site that "Never before has a major federal government project or sponsored project been stopped because of its adverse impacts on Native American cultural properties. The victory is the result of the work of Save Mt. Shasta, and the Native Coalition for Cultural Restoration of Mt. Shasta, two nonprofit Native and non-Native organizations" (Miller 1998).

Save Mt. Shasta led the fight against the ski area. A broad coalition of environmental and cultural interests, the organization garnered considerable financial and volunteer support from members of the New Age community and other non-indigenous spiritual seekers who considered the mountain sacred. The organization's literature argued that the entire mountain was a historic, cultural, and spiritual site for Native Americans and "non-Native cultural visitors." In 1993, Save Mt. Shasta's literature complained that the Forest Service routinely ignored non-Native American cultural values and, instead, considered only Native American values relevant. To the contrary, Save Mt. Shasta rejoined, numerous studies gave clear evidence that Mount Shasta had been "significant to explorers, naturalists, artists, and spiritual seekers for over a century." Save Mt. Shasta called for more research into non-Native cultural significance (Berditschevsky 1993).

Save Mt. Shasta wound up looking to the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) to challenge the ski-area development. Gathering information on Native American and non-indigenous cultural uses of the mountain, the group appealed the decision on the basis that it failed to meet the provisions of Section 106 of the NHPA (16 USC 470F). The court case, however, distanced itself from non-indigenous claims to the sacredness or historical and cultural significance of the site. The legal case was made on the basis of Native American use, bolstered by a Forest Service-solicited report on indigenous use of the mountain that concluded: "Contemporary Indian uses of Mt. Shasta are clearly rooted deeply in traditional values and beliefs. The spiritual and secular activities being practiced today on Mt. Shasta are consistent with historic Native American activities" (Theodoratus and Evans 1991, 10).

Contributing to Save Mt. Shasta's efforts, the NHPA was amended in 1992 to provide for the protection of Native American sacred sites, if in a limited way. In fact, the Indian activist movement reaped some significant rewards in the 1990s—also useful were the *National Register Bulletin* "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties," the president's 1998 Executive Order 13084

requiring federal agencies to consult with tribes on the protection of sacred sites, and the investigation by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights into the state of religious freedom in the United States (Miller 1999). Two Mount Shasta areas were eventually proposed as eligible for the Natural Register of Historic Places in the revised determination of 1993, on the basis of their importance to the cultural history and identity of American Indian groups: The entire mountain above 8,000 feet was deemed eligible as the Native American Cosmological District,<sup>4</sup> and Panther Meadow was found eligible as a "power place" (Lee and Townsend 1993). All sites from 4,000 feet elevation up were considered eligible for a while, but eligibility was revised to the 8,000-foot contour when the keeper determined that, in particular, the large geometric patterns left by timber harvest and the symmetrical tree plantings on the lower slope had damaged the historical integrity of the site (Mount Shasta Herald 1994).

The legal case did not raise the issue of non-indigenous spiritual values for several reasons. Overt spiritual pilgrim participation might have compromised the Native American participants, who have at times objected to New Age appropriation of Native American sites and cultural practice. There is also much public skepticism about the validity of spiritual pilgrim beliefs, as well as documented legal skepticism. At least one federal district court decision held that the New Age movement is not a religion protected under the First Amendment (Miller 1999).

Reasons given by the forest supervisor for the 1998 revocation of the ski-area development permit were the eligibility of the site under the National Register of Historic Places, the nearby presence of a ski area on private land that had not existed when planning started for a downhill ski facility in the national forest, and the fact that the development was so controversial that to go forward would be highly expensive and, probably, highly unproductive (Heywood 1998). In her eleven-page report recommending permit revocation the supervisor wrote that, "were the Forest Service to proceed with this project, even if common ground or consensus could be found it would absorb a significant and disproportionate amount of staff time for a number of years. . . . The public could not be certain of getting final clearance for a ski area for ten years or more, even assuming we were able to defend the project successfully against appeals and litigations" (Heywood 1998, 6). Proponents of the ski area pointed to Save Mt. Shasta's "efforts on behalf of Native Americans as a major stumbling block to the project's development" (Manley 1998a).

Non-indigenous activists, many of whom believe in the spiritual importance of the mountain, contributed to stopping the ski area by supporting and coordinating its designation as a Native American cultural site. Although non-indigenous cultural claims were ignored in court, a very broad base of support was obtained for fighting the ski area from spiritual pilgrims. The forest supervisor acknowledged that Mount Shasta was "sacred to many Indian people and is a *very special place* to non-Indians as well." In her recommendation for permit revocation she wrote, "[I] spent a considerable amount of time meeting with the permittee, Indian tribes, environmental organizations, cultural resource preservation organizations, and

many others. I am convinced that Mt. Shasta is a *very special place*. The adverse effects of the Mt. Shasta Ski Area project on this special place are too great to support proceeding further" (Heywood 1998, 9). "Special place" seems an obvious reference to spiritual pilgrim belief. Although the ski-area development is officially dead, Save Mt. Shasta and Native American groups intend to guard against other threats, such as the expansion of existing development, logging, and road building.

#### THE MOUNTAIN'S CALL

A young woman in Arkansas loses her eight-year-old son in a tragic accident. In great pain, she endures sleepless nights and meaningless days. One dawn, she wakes up from a dream and is compelled by a nearly physical force to start driving. When she sees the white cone of Mount Shasta, she knows she has reached the mountain that called to her in her dream, the place where she will find the strength to come to grips with her sorrow and undergo spiritual transformation and growth.

This composite account is not unlike the stories told to us by several interviewees.<sup>5</sup> "I know someone from India who comes here every year," said one interviewee. "I had a friend called [to Mount Shasta] in a dream from England, and he comes here a lot," said another. "I needed a belief that something else was possible, and my search began out of the painfulness of a rigid society unconnected to nature and the land," a third person explained.

Describing the results of the 1981 emergence of Catholic pilgrimage to a peak in strife-torn Bosnia, James Jurkovich and Wilbert Gesler argue that pilgrims to the site find peace and meaning in their lives through religious pilgrimage in four ways (1997). First, the pilgrimage and the common site for it, or place, establishes a form of community and identity that counters rootlessness and meaninglessness (Mol 1983). Pilgrims leave old relationships and establish new ones during the journey or at the site. In *Geography of Religion* David Sopher wrote, "To the religious person, place may become sacred space, associated with a particular aspect of nature or with a sacred person or event" (1967, 105).

Second, religious beliefs and pilgrimage help to distinguish an "other," non-pilgrims and nonbelievers, which further leads to development of identity. The performance of rituals is a third feature. In the case of the peak in Bosnia, ritual behavior included climbing to the top at dawn, perhaps barefooted, visiting Stations of the Cross on the way up, and saying particular kinds of prayers. Finally, myths and stories unify and distinguish the pilgrims. Those who climbed the Bosnian peak "expected supernatural events," such as "sun miracles," when a person can look into the sun, and visions of the cross (Jurkovich and Gesler 1997).

Spiritual pilgrimage to Mount Shasta shares all of these traits. A number of our interviewees had traveled long distances after being "called by the mountain," and some had settled permanently in the area. Others visited as part of a journey to several power points or sacred peaks. The Forest Service and those who would injure the mountain seemed to the pilgrims an easily identified example of the "other." Rituals, prayer, and meditation are important activities. Myths,

stories, and supernatural events have widespread credence among Shasta's spiritual pilgrims.

In a study of European pilgrimage, the German geographer Gisbert Rinschede noted that pilgrimages and other religious journeys are tied to other types of tourism, such as holiday and cultural tourism, perhaps more closely than ever before (Rinschede 1992, 52). National Parks and other natural wonders have often been described as connoting spiritual meaning to Americans (Nash 1985; Runte 1987). At Mount Shasta, pilgrims still engage in typical recreational activities even when visiting the mountain primarily for spiritual purposes.

Pilgrimage at Mount Shasta can be seen as not unrelated to the transcendentalist beliefs that were a major force behind the establishment of American nature conservation and protection policies. Despite this, secular governmental institutions such as the U.S. Forest Service are ill equipped to cope with religious or spiritual claims. Public policy is designed as if a Forest Service acknowledgment of secular motives alone should suffice to satisfy public interests (Chandrakanth and Romm 1991, 741). The difficulty Native Americans have had in enforcing their claims to spiritually important territory and objects, even with formal institutional mechanisms for doing so, is illustrative of this problem (Boyles 1991; Deloria 1992; Ward 1992).

Many authors have written about the rational-scientific orientation of the Forest Service (Kaufman 1960; Schiff 1962; Behan 1975) and about resource managers in general (Brunson 1992). At the local level on Mount Shasta, there is a "culture clash" between pilgrims and Forest Service personnel that augments conflict (Fernández-Giménez and others 1992). One Forest Service interviewee commented to us that "it is difficult to deal with people with no names, no address, and no regular leadership. We didn't learn about this in college." Another interviewee stated that the final report to the Forest Service of the pilgrim volunteer who took care of the mountain during the year of our study would be ignored because of its "New Age" framing. Cultural and spiritual claims are difficult to balance in a multiple-use context, and more difficult still to verify or validate. One datum that a secular organization can use to measure the validity of cultural claims is the age of the use, its historic duration. Native American use is old, and that can be used as a criterion for validating it. Spiritual pilgrim use is relatively new, though by some definitions it predates the Forest Service. How can these claims be measured, defined, and balanced against other uses, like ski areas and logging?

#### SHARING SPACE

As found in studies of community protest against development of natural areas (Fortmann and Starrs 1990),<sup>6</sup> there is reason to believe that the opposition to the ski area benefited from the skills and backgrounds of those heeding the mountain's call. Among the spiritual seekers we interviewed were prominent artists and writers and other highly educated people who had been social activists before coming to Mount Shasta from New York and other urban areas.

The propensity of some spiritual pilgrims to appropriate Native American practices and to use sacred sites causes conflict with the Native American community. In the *Atlas of the New West*, the Lakota Sioux Tribe "declares war" on New Agers for this reason (Riebsame 1997, 102). Universalist approaches to Native American belief systems have been criticized by the academic community (Nabokov 1985). One Mount Shasta spiritual pilgrim argued that "I feel really good about Native Americans on the Mountain, but they can be too fixed, too tied to the old ways. I feel Native, and therefore I believe I am Native." "We have as much right to the area as the Native Americans did," stated another.

Yet the spiritual pilgrim community was firmly allied with the Native American community in opposing the ski area, and it gave more credence to indigenous claims than did many people in the non-pilgrim category. One spiritual seeker was quite adamant that indigenous uses be studied and protected, even suggesting that Native American guides might be used to take people to particularly fragile or sacred areas. A leader of Save Mt. Shasta explained it this way in 1994: "I think it is vital to our conscience to find harmony with the first inhabitants of the land. I feel that a profound historical current is working through the Shasta issue, a current that seeks to set right a relationship with the land and its original dwellers" (Siskiyou Daily News 1994). A more typical way of thinking by spiritual pilgrims was that "A ski area can go on any ridge. It doesn't need to deface a major shrine," in recognition of both Native American and non-Native spiritual values.

In contrast, nonseekers in the local community sometimes dismissed Native American claims completely. One stated flatly that "Indian claims to using the spot are not supported by physical evidence"; another, that "the mountain was only used as a hunting ground during the warm time of the year and has no special meaning to the Indians." Local citizens formed a group opposed to historic designation, ENOUGH (Enraged Natives Opposing Underhanded Governmental Hanky-Panky). One representative stated that this kind of historic designation meant that "mythology or cosmology will be able to be used to lock up lands across America if this eligibility stands" (Mount Shasta Herald 1994).

At a 1994 ceremony honoring the designation of the area as a historic district, Wintu spokesperson Gloria Gomes said: "For the Wintu, Mt. Shasta being our spiritual mountain, we would like to have the respect of other people for our sacred areas and for the mountain as a whole, for Native Americans and all people who come to it from around the world to seek a higher understanding. The mountain is there to help people in a spiritual way" (Siskiyou Daily News 1994). The non-Native coordinator of Save Mt. Shasta, a spiritual seeker—albeit with a firm belief in the precedence of Native American concerns and culture—also acts as secretary to the Native Coalition for the Cultural Restoration of Mount Shasta. In short, at Mount Shasta the Native American and New Age—spiritual pilgrim groups share a large-scale goal—protection of the mountain from development and logging—and many share the belief that the mountain has transcultural spiritual significance, despite localized disagreements about the day-to-day management and use of the site. In

fact, a significant proportion of the spiritual pilgrims do not engage in behaviors that are objectionable to Native Americans.<sup>7</sup>

Places are meaningful to people in ways unanticipated by existing policy and practice. Are public lands to be managed only with secular or historic uses in mind? There is an implicit assumption that management for preservation can meet the spiritual needs of users, but the Mount Shasta case makes it apparent that this is not always true. When we pretested our questionnaire in San Francisco Bay Area regional parks, many people told us that nobody had ever asked them about the spiritual side of their reasons for visiting the parks and that it was a significant motivation for their use.

Gradually, with much contention, Shasta-Trinity, like most of the national forests, has become a place managed more for recreation and nature conservation than for production of commodities, such as timber and minerals. Currently, the rights of Native Americans to resources both tangible and spiritual on ancestral lands are coming to the fore. Spiritual pilgrims to Mount Shasta have also staked a claim to its federal lands and demonstrated that they can support this claim when necessary, albeit indirectly in the courts (Fairfax and others 1999). They are a major component of the users of Mount Shasta's Forest Service lands, with characteristic uses, beliefs, and needs.

#### NOTES

1. The lower *n* reflects respondents who had not yet been in the meadows.
2. Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset by human activities"; "The earth is like a spaceship with only limited room and resources"; "Plants and animals exist primarily for humans to use"; "Modifying the environment for human use seldom causes serious problems"; "There are no limits to growth for nations like the United States"; and "Humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature." Possible responses ranged from 1, strongly disagree, to 4, strongly agree.
3. We are certain that the avalanches that occurred in 1995 in the same area are viewed similarly.
4. The designation of an area, rather than a specific spot or object, is considered groundbreaking by many concerned with protection of Native American cultural sites and resources.
5. Not to mention a common cinematic and literary trope, as in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.
6. Louise Fortmann and Paul Staris (1990) studied opposition to a proposed wood-fired power plant in a small Sierra Nevada town. They found that urban refugees who had moved into the area in recent years had brought organizational skills that enabled the town to successfully reject the development.
7. Cluster analysis of the data in Table III shows that about half of the pilgrims engage in altar building or damming of the creek; the other half tend to not do things that change the site but instead engage in meditation and reflection.

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