

CICR

CONNECTIONS

SUMMER 2024

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*ICON student kayaking trip on the Broad River, May 2024
(Photo credit: Wezddy Del Toro Orozco)*

ICC returns for the fourth time, explores new visions for conservation

Talley Vodicka

On February 16 – 17, 2024, the Center for Integrative Conservation Research held its biennial Integrative Conservation Conference (ICC), which brought together over 90 participants from more than 18 academic institutions and representatives of tribal agencies, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. Attendees convened in person – at the Special Collections Libraries – and online, around the theme of New Visions for Conservation, and explored the past, present, and possible futures of this complex and contested field.

This year's program was incredibly rich, including each of the following:

- An opening plenary panel on “Fire Relationalities in U.S. Forests – Past, Present and Future,” with Dr. Kirsten Vinyeta, Mr. Tommy Cabe, and Dr. Joseph O’Brien, and moderated by Dr. Laura German.
- A closing plenary, “Collaborative Socio-Ecological and Socio-Spiritual Work in Papua New Guinea: An Anthropology of Letting Go,” by Dr. Paige West, The Claire Tow Professorship in Anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University.
- Film screening of and panel discussion on “Awakening Dḥḥ (A-Tsi-Lv), Restoring Land Relations,” a short film created by students and faculty in the Integrative Conservation PhD and Master of Fine Arts programs at UGA, in partnership with the Natural Resources Department of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.
- 37 presentations, 9 posters, a workshop on “Collaborative Storytelling Game: Imagining Alternative Futures for Nature,” and 5 roundtable discussions.
- A closing concert, “Composition x Conservation: New Music Inspired by Current Conservation Research,” which featured original works inspired by current conservation research. These works were a result of collaborations between UGA student composers and ICON PhD students. Organized by Sierra Wojtczack, UGA Arts Collaborative.

We want to acknowledge the outstanding effort and contributions from the conference co-chairs, Christina Crespo, Asa Julien, Behnoosh Abbasnezhad and Suneel Kumar. We are grateful for the support of our 2024 conference sponsors, including the UGA Owens Institute for Behavioral Research, the Graduate School, the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts, the UGA Arts Collaborative, the Departments of Anthropology and Marine Sciences, the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, and the Odum School of Ecology.

Over the upcoming 2024–25 academic year, we will be thinking through ways to improve and innovate ICC; if you would like to brainstorm with us, please reach out to Talley Vodicka (talleyv@uga.edu)

Academic Spaces and Indigenous Places: Native American Dispossession and the University of Georgia

Mariana Matos

To participate in nationwide discussions about the legacies of higher-education institutions in Native American dispossession, CICR released an [Occasional Paper](#) in December 2023 documenting the linkages between Indigenous removal and the University of Georgia. As one of the oldest land grant universities in the country, the history of UGA is closely tied to events and policies that culminated in the forced displacement of Native Americans from their ancestral territories. Drawing on work done by others, including the extensive archival research done by local historian Steven Scurry and the High Country News' "Land-Grab Universities" investigation, this paper delves into this history to explore the linkages between UGA and broader histories of dispossession. These linkages include the entwinement of UGA's establishment and Muskogee dispossession; the involvement of key figures serving as UGA Presidents or Trustees in the historical events that directly led to Native American dispossession in Georgia and nation-wide; and financial transactions linking UGA with processes of dispossession in other parts of the country. Besides offering a detailed and comprehensive examination of the historical events connecting UGA to Native American dispossession, our goal was also to prompt the reader to reflect on our institutional accountability as UGA students, staff, faculty and alumni. This work also brought to light the ongoing legacies of this history. Further, UGA's footprint extends well beyond the state of Georgia, raising the question of whether land acknowledgments recognizing tribal nations that once lived on land that the university is built on are an effective response or do further harm. The report calls on the university community to learn about and reflect on past events as a means to foster deliberation on where our accountability to this history lies. Learn more about this history and access the full report [here](#). Also, stay tuned to our social media to learn more about the ArcGIS StoryMap we are currently working on!

We want to acknowledge and thank Steven Scurry for the time dedicated to understanding the early stage of this history and lending that knowledge to this project through ongoing exchanges with ICON students Mariana Matos and Bruno Ubiali and CICR Director Laura German. This work would not be complete without the deep knowledge he brought to the table. We also want to acknowledge the contributions of Savannah Guenther, a UGA alumnus from the Department of History, for her intellectual and editorial contributions to the report. Finally, we would also like to thank all of the interviewees who lent their time and expertise to this project, and the graphic design work of Jeff Walker.

Annual ICON Awards



◀ ICON Agile Scientist Award

Alli Hofner

ICON & Anthropology PhD Candidate

J. Peter Brosius Research Award ▶

Dr. Cydney Seigerman

ICON & Anthropology PhD



◀ ICON Faculty Service Award

Dr. Jesse Abrams

Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources

Awakening DᎠ Ꭰ (A-Tsi-Lv), Restoring Land Relations: Collaborative Film-Making between ICON and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

Laura German

Since 2020, Integrative Conservation PhD students have been partnering with the Natural Resources Department of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) to place science at the service of tribal aspirations in forestry. Past students developed a suite of written products with the guidance of EBCI partners on topics ranging from clarifying harvesting rules for tribes on national forest land (2020), to a review of the history of relations between Native Americans, fire and vegetation in the Southern Appalachians (2020), and burn prioritization models geared towards restoring culturally significant plants on tribal and federal land (2022), among others. This year, EBCI partner Tommy Cabe (Forest Resources Specialist) had another objective: to produce a film that would help create awareness of the evolving relationship between the EBCI and the USDA Forest Service among Tribal members, whose distrust of federal agencies runs deep. It was also hoped that the film would serve as a platform for the EBCI to articulate their visions for the future of Tribal-forest relations throughout their homelands, which includes vast swaths of national forest land in western North Carolina.

The resulting film uses the return of fire (DᎠ Ꭰ) on the landscape as a focal point to tell the story of the shifting relationship between the EBCI and federal partners. Nearly a century of fire suppression and exclusion throughout the United States on tribal lands coming under federal management and oversight has substantially changed forest composition and ecology. In the southern Appalachians, it has driven an ecological shift towards increasing dominance of more mesic species such as maples (*Acer spp.*) and a decline in species adapted to frequent fire and drier conditions such as oaks (*Quercus spp.*, Nowacki and Abrams 2008). This has raised concerns over the decreased resilience of eastern forests to a variety of disturbances and negative impacts on ecosystem functioning, timber value, and wildlife habitat (Woodbridge et al. 2022). Yet the EBCI has been especially hard-hit, with the progressive loss of a host of species key to their diets, art, material culture and identity (Balasubramanian et al. 2022; Sharma et al. 2020). Put succinctly, “the dynamic equilibrium in the ecology of upland oaks that existed for thousands of years has been destroyed in the few centuries following European settlement” (Abrams 2003: 927).

Through interviews with tribal members and USDA Forest Service scientists and leadership, the film narrates this history and how Forest Service thinking and relations to fire have changed. The film was directed by MFA Film, Television, and Digital Media Graduate Student Chelsea Wilson and produced by the 2023 Integrative Conservation cohort, in collaboration with the EBCI Natural Resource Department and with the support of Theater and Film Studies professor Leandro Tadashi and Anthropology Professor Laura German. The film was first shown at the 2024 Integrative Conservation Conference in February.

The Center for Integrative Conservation Research (CICR) inspires new visions for conservation and environmental decision-making.



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(CICR 2024 Retreat, pictured from L to R: Talley Vodicka, Seth Wenger, Jennifer Thompson, Jesse Abrams, Pete Brosius, Roberta Salmi, Sonia Hernandez, Brock Woodson, and Laura German)

The CICR Executive Committee held a strategic planning retreat on February 26, 2024, to think collaboratively about what the Center aspires to be and how to get there. Faculty articulated CICR’s core purpose, and several key strategies for achieving it. The core purpose articulated by attendees consists of three core elements: (i) **being in diverse interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary dialogue** to (ii) **re-define conservation** so that we can (iii) make a meaningful contribution to **addressing grand socio-ecological challenges**. Key strategies for achieving our core purpose include the following:

- **Training** – maintain a thriving ICON program, in which we continue to train diverse students;
- **Research** – lead conversations on key issues and debates and secure grants for innovative and collaborative interdisciplinary research;
- **Partnerships** – play a convening and incubation role in bringing together faculty affiliates and diverse non-academic partners (scholarly, local, historically marginalized) to broaden the conceptual landscape and enact meaningful change;
- **Cross-cutting strategies** – orient all of our activities around grand challenges, and do a better job communicating what we do to foster recognition; and
- **Support to structural changes** – strive to transform the systems of rewards in academia to incentivize and enable innovative, transdisciplinary work, while promoting greater diversity in academia.

We also discussed “low-hanging fruit” that could be addressed in the near-term as a pathway to longer-term goals. One idea was to develop continuing education programming on the core principles in integrative conservation, to generate revenue and expand our reach. Courses could be marketed to professionals working in NGOs, local and state governments, and the private sector. We have reached out to the Carl Vinson Institute, the Georgia Center for Continuing Education, and UGA Online Learning to explore options for moving this idea forward. We also plan to contact relevant NGOs and the UGA Office of Business Engagement. A second idea was simply to communicate better what we do to internal and external audiences, for example by organizing our communication products by grand challenges and focusing one or more ICON research assistants on research communication.

With support from ICON, Kanchana Chinnannan Balasubramanian and Wezddy Del Toro organized social and professional events this year, including:

Bird banding and hiking with ICON students

A bird banding and hiking event was held at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in October 2023. ICON students observed bird banding techniques from experts Cody Cox, Clay Delancey and Heather Gaya, who set up mist nets to show students how birds are captured and tagged for research purposes. The event also included a morning hike along the Oconee River, providing more birdwatching opportunities. Thanks to the experts and all participants for a memorable and educational experience.



ICON writing retreat

Following the bird banding event in Fall 2023, Kanchana organized an ICON writing retreat on November 16. The retreat started with the viewing of a recorded webinar titled 'How to Develop a Daily Writing Practice' from the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity (NCFDD), focusing on academic writing. Attendees also received a [writing resource packet](#) encompassing various writing tips and resources compiled by Kanchana. The retreat featured a productive discussion on best practices for writing, followed by dedicated time for the participants to engage in their writing projects for the day.

“Career Conversations” with ICON alumni

In response to interest from ICON students, Kanchana also organized an alumni engagement event in spring 2024. The panel featured ICON alumni Emily Yeager, Kristen Lear and Jeffrey (Jeff) Beauvais, chosen to represent diverse job profiles including academia, non-profits, and federal agency positions. The discussion covered various topics such as the impact of ICON Ph.D. training on their careers; essential skills; career trends, hiring insights and job search strategies; and lessons learnt from their Ph.D. and job experiences. Presentations by panelists were followed by an interactive Q&A session. Kanchana extends her gratitude to the alumni panel members for their valuable time and insightful discussion, as well as to all the participants for their engagement.

Writing Buddies Program launched

In Spring 2024, Wezddy created and ran the Writing Buddies Program, as part of ICON Student Welfare and Events programming. The goal was to provide a space with a collective atmosphere dedicated to writing and making progress on dissertation chapters, papers, prospectuses, proposals, etc. The group met during March and April, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 – 2:00 pm (hybrid mode). ICON students and guests from other departments joined some of the sessions either in person or online. We would like to have this program as an ongoing ICON activity if students, faculty, and/or staff are interested, and encourage our community members to pair up with other writing buddies and explore alternative meeting times and locations. For further details on how to participate, please contact Wezddy Del Toro (wezddy.deltoro@uga.edu).

“Convergent Pyroscaapes”: A Partnership to Catalyze Innovative and Inclusive Wildland Fire Science and Education in Western North Carolina

Laura German
Lizzie King

This year, Laura German and Lizzie King secured a two-year planning grant from the National Science Foundation in response to their [call](#) for proposals to catalyze innovative and inclusive wildland fire science through diverse collaborations. The funding program recognizes the value of relationship-building and co-construction to catalyzing the necessary innovation and inclusion in fire science and stewardship. This need is particularly acute for collaboration with Tribal nations, agencies and individuals, given the history of physical and cultural oppression that has characterized settler–Native relations and the deep distrust that has resulted.



Because of historic fire suppression and the ongoing prohibition of Native land stewardship practices, vast fire-adapted forest landscapes in the Cherokee homelands are approaching a tipping point of ecosystem change. Unless regular burning is reintroduced across the landscape, forests will rapidly shift to less desirable states in which numerous wildlife and plant species that are important to biodiversity conservation and to Cherokee diets, health and identity will fail to thrive. Due to misguided federal policies suppressing fire and EBCI forest relations, the EBCI are facing a collapse of access to harvest important plants on forests owned by the EBCI and the USDA Forest Service alike.

While Indigenous-led fire stewardship and Tribal-federal cooperation is increasingly recognized as a path forward, achieving it is undermined by (i) conceptual blinders within fire science, management and education that narrow the decision space within forest management, (ii) shifts in forest conditions under federal management that make it more difficult to restore Native forest values, and (iii) barriers to STEM education among Native youth. Approaching the problem through a deep convergence of Native and Western fire science, technology and education is therefore critical.

The project will support a partnership between the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Center for Native Health, the University of Georgia, the Prescribed Fire Lab of the U.S. Forest Service and TERC (a STEM education research organization) to integrate Native and Western scientific knowledges into Native STEM education and wildland fire science, training and practice in western North Carolina. The project will use Indigenous-led, culturally responsive facilitated workshops and collaborative co-design methodologies to broaden and build equitable partnerships, share and synthesize foundational knowledge and perspectives, and co-develop robust plans for a Phase 2 proposal. In the first few months of the project, team members have been consciously heeding the call by Dr. Kyle Whyte (Citizen Potawatomi) to “move at the pace of consent,” but realizing in the process that the work calls for more than this – namely, “moving at the pace of relationship and trust.”

Congratulations to our 2023-24 ICON Program Graduates!



Behnoosh Abbasnezhad | *PhD, ICON & Forestry and Natural Resources, Major Professor: Jesse Abrams*

“Conservation Planning As a Transdisciplinary Process: Integrating Social and Spatial Science Into Forest Conservation In The Upper Flint River Watershed, Georgia, USA”

Current position: Postdoctoral Research Associate, The Jones Center at Ichauway



Denzell Cross | *PhD, ICON & Ecology, Major Professor: Krista Capps*

“Shifting Paradigms of Urban Watersheds: Exploring Changes in Stream Ecosystem Structure and Function and Patterns of Community Engagement in Urban Restoration”

Current position: Postdoctoral Researcher, Community–Soil–Air–Water (CSAW) research program, Georgia State University



Katie Foster | *PhD, ICON & Anthropology, Major Professor: Laura German*

“Translating Indigenous Rights: A Multilevel Analysis of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in Peru”

Current position: Postdoctoral Researcher, Network for Engineering with Nature (N-EWN), Institute for Resilient Infrastructure Systems, UGA



Alec Nelson | *PhD, ICON & Forestry and Natural Resources, Major Professor: Nate Nibbelink*

“Integrating Social and Ecological Values for Spatial Prioritization of Private Land Conservation in the Savannah River Watershed”

Current position: Postdoctoral Researcher, Spatial Analysis Lab, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, UGA



Cydney Seigerman | *PhD, ICON & Anthropology, Major Professor: Don Nelson*

“Fluid Inequities: The Dynamics of Water Relations and Water Insecurities in Ceará, Northeast Brazil”

Current position: Postdoctoral Researcher, Social Sustainability of Agriculture and Food Systems Lab, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, UGA



Jorge Rojas-Jimenez | *PhD, ICON & Forestry and Natural Resources, Major Professor: Sonia Hernandez*

*“Social and ecological factors influencing human–tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*) interactions in a fragmented landscape at the Tenorio–Miravalles Biological Corridor, in northwestern Costa Rica”*

Current position: Associate Researcher, Costa Rica Wildlife Foundation (CRWF); Nai Conservation Program Manager