



Beth Rose Middleton (1979-Present)

**Associate Professor
University of California, Davis**

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Early Life

Growing up in a rural area of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Beth Rose Middleton spent a lot of time outdoors. She recalls the outdoors being as much a part of her home as her family's house. Middleton says, "I spent a lot of time outside. My parents encouraged it...I was always walking the hills, always had a garden, and always watched the animals." Spending a lot of time outdoors also exposed her to many of the negative impacts, both environmentally and culturally, of activities such as rapid growth of land use and conversion, unplanned development, mill closings, and gold mining. These early experiences gave Middleton a passion for the environmental field and influenced her future career choices.

Education

Middleton graduated from the University of California, Davis in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in nature and culture. In 2008, she earned a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, in the Division of Society and the Environment. Throughout her undergraduate and graduate studies, Middleton held a variety of positions that shaped her current research and work interests.

As a McNair Undergraduate Research Fellow with the McNair Scholars Program at University of California, Davis, Middleton had the opportunity to shape and conduct her own research project on attitudes toward resource management in rural northern California. Dr. M. Kat Anderson, an ethnoecologist whose work focuses on traditional Native American land stewardship, served as Middleton's faculty mentor in the McNair program. It was through Dr. Anderson that Middleton was introduced to many tribal and community members. Additionally, Dr. Anderson introduced Middleton to what it is like working in academia and has continued to provide advice on navigating an academic career.

Working as a research associate with the Dr. Jonathan Kusel at the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment before and during her graduate career allowed Middleton to investigate rural and environmental justice issues, particularly the impacts of transitioning from resource related economies in

the Pacific Northwest. In addition, Middleton compiled a Rural Environmental Justice Sourcebook, a project she is still working on. The book is intended to raise awareness of rural environmental justice issues and includes information on issues such as the contamination remaining from the gold rush, nonpoint pollution sources, impacts of dams, pesticide use in mountain and wood gathering communities, and non-native fish kills.

After earning her Ph.D. in 2008, Middleton accepted a position as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of California, Davis where she has recently accepted a faculty position in the university's Department of Native American Studies. Middleton is currently involved in several research projects that explore Native American environmental policy issues. These issues include documenting how conservation easements may be used for the preservation of land and culture, including enabling access to land and protecting Native American cultural sites. Middleton is also working on a project to map Indian allotment lands affected by hydroelectric projects. This particular project is garnering agency attention and the information she and Maidu colleagues are highlighting has been incorporated into training programs for cultural resources protection.

Highlights

Thus far, it is the opportunity to conduct research in native and other rural communities of color that Middleton cites as the highlight of her career. Of her work in the community, Middleton says, "Being in the community every day and working with people on everyday issues and going out on the land has been a highlight....Every time I am out meeting with elders and youth, I feel it is a privilege to be there and this inspires me."

While working directly with communities has been rewarding, it has also led to some challenges. Middleton explains, "Sometimes you may think you are doing something that can be helpful, but it can be problematic for an opposing group. You have to be careful of the impacts your work might have." Despite the challenges, Middleton has continued her work in the tribal environmental field because the environment and cultural sustainability are so important, and she cannot imagine doing anything else, "It [the environment] is everything that keeps us alive and that we can leave for future generations."

Middleton is excited to begin her work as an assistant professor at the University of California, Davis. She is not only excited about the research she is doing, but also about working with students. She says, "I am excited to move into the department. I have already been spending time with students, getting books to them and connecting them with different people...I love working with students who are so motivated and inspired to give back to their communities."

Importance of Mentoring to Career

While Dr. M. Kat Anderson is still an important mentor to her, Middleton also acknowledges her graduate advisors and current colleagues as important mentors. Of her graduate advisors, Middleton says, "Louise Fortmann and Jeff Romm really guided me through the academic process." She also appreciates the guidance of two of her post-doctoral mentors: Professors Ben Orlove and Steven Crum. Middleton says, "Orlove is always available to help look over papers, make connections and offer resources." She

appreciates Steven Crum's tremendous expertise, particularly on working with archival data in her field, and finds that he and Orlove are very complimentary mentors.

Advice to Young Professionals

To minorities who may be considering a career in the environmental field, Middleton says, "Everyone has a relationship to the environment, whether you know your culture or not. It can be very powerful to bring your own experience to the field...It is a gift to yourself, your family, the earth, and those you will work with."

For More Information

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This interview was conducted in 2015.