2021

Master's Project: The Green Burial Movement & Conservation Burial Grounds

Katherine B. Berdan

MASTER'S PROJECT
THE GREEN BURIAL MOVEMENT
&
CONSERVATION BURIAL GROUNDS

A Graduate Project
By Kate Berdan

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

Committee
Clare Ginger, PhD, RSENR, Advisor
Joshua Farley, PhD, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Chair
Francis Robinson, PhD, Department of Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science specializing in Natural Resources in the Rubenstein School for Environment and Natural Resources
University of Vermont

September, 2021

Abstract

This Master's project investigates the green burial movement and its relevance as a tool for land conservation organizations. This movement has the potential to change the standard cemetery landscape in the United States by informing consumers of alternative practices and materials that support natural environmental processes and sustainable land management practices. Until a decade ago, the green burial movement had largely taken place at the community and individual level. It is now an established and growing national movement with certifying organizations, standards and practices, and strategic goals. Opportunities exist within this movement to develop partnerships between the burial grounds and land trust organizations and in doing so, create burial areas that are protected in perpetuity and sustainably managed.

This project asks: What motivations and perceptions do the conservation burial grounds (CBGs) have of the Green Burial Council's certification process? What forms do partnerships between burial grounds and land trusts take? What are the views of land trust organizations on developing partnerships or otherwise engaging with the green burial movement? What is the role of conservation burial in the green burial movement? Vermont Land Trust has expressed interest in learning more about green burial to better understand whether their organization (a state-wide land trust) is interested in a conservation burial partnership at this time. This project provides background information to contribute to decisions made by the Vermont Land Trust.

In this project, information was gathered from CBG operators and land trust organizations through interviews. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed to identify thematic trends. The results of this analysis indicate that conservation burial plays a relatively small, but key role in the green burial movement. Currently operating conservation burial grounds identified ecological and land use expertise, outreach, and operational support as benefits of having a partnership with a land trust. Partnerships came in different forms and ranged from closely interlinked management to occasional interactions. Data from individuals from land trusts indicate an interest in conservation burial as a sustainable land use tool, but a hesitancy to commit to a project that requires many resources and may result in mission creep.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Green burial is an emerging death care choice for consumers. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the practice of returning the human body to the earth using only natural materials was the norm for burials. However, its current revitalization in the green burial movement is not driven by a return to historic burial tradition. Rather it is driven by the current societal trends of environmental ethics, a rejection of traditional monumentality and materialism, and a desire to create meaningful, personalized rituals around death.

The Green Burial Council (GBC), a joint 501(c)(6) and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, currently acts as the certifying body for green burial grounds and providers. Their definition of green burial includes three categories of burial grounds for the purposes of certification: hybrid cemeteries, natural cemeteries, and conservation burial grounds. This project focuses on the third of these categories, conservation burial grounds. This category requires the following main elements: (1) vaults, liners, embalming, and other non-degradable materials in burials are prohibited; (2) native plants, minimal marker use, and a comprehensive management plan for the burial ground are used to ensure a natural appearance; and (3) an endowment and partnership with an established land trust organization is established to hold a conservation easement (or place a deed restriction on the property) to ensure the perpetual conservation and stewardship of the burial ground. Not all conservation burial grounds are currently certified. Some are weighing the benefits of certification and others have decided that a deed restriction is not necessary at this time. These uncertified burial grounds have been included as participants in this study because they focus on sustainable land management as well as green burial and provide a perspective outside the GBC community. At the beginning of this study, fifteen conservation burial grounds were identified as being in operation in the United States. As of spring 2021, three more are in planning for future operations.

Green burial can provide beneficial environmental, economic, and social impacts, if it is available and people are aware of it. This project considers green burial as an option amongst several. The focus of this project is to better understand why organizations might choose conservation burial as a business venture, environmental mission, or land conservation tool and how that choice is then made operational. It is not intended to promote or judge choices made by individuals about burial. Individual experiences with death are very personal and powerful. They reflect the complexities related to cultural traditions, ties to land and family, the history of segregation in death, and the tragedy of violent deaths. That said, the options the burial industry provides affect individual choices, and the green burial movement is intended to add to the breadth of options.

OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

The green burial movement has existed for several decades in the US but has been slow to expand. It has gained popularity, but by its nature has slower adoption rates as a consumer choice that can only be fulfilled after death. Even so, over the past five years, green burial ground operators have seen increased demand for green burial (NFDA, 2018; NFDA 2019). The Green Burial Council was established in 2005 and currently has eight certified conservation burial grounds. Other conservation burial grounds included in this study are in the process of pursing certification, have opted to remain uncertified, or are certified as natural burial grounds while maintaining some conservation standards for various reasons. The factors behind decisions about certification have not been the subject of a study, nor has how the requirement to partner with conservation organizations for certification affects the choice to certify. The motivations for conservation organizations to partner with burial grounds have also not been studied. It may be noted that green burial, while rooted in historic tradition and cultures around the world, has been the subject of very few recent studies (economic, environmental, or cultural). This subject has large potential for research as it grows. This project focuses on the following objectives to better understand the current challenges and successes of conservation burial and its directions for the future:

- What motivations and perceptions do the CBGs have of the GBC's certification process?
- What forms do partnerships between burial grounds and land trusts take?
- What are the views of land trust organizations on developing partnerships or otherwise engaging with the green burial movement?
- What is the role of conservation burial in the green burial movement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the history of burial practices in the United States and the origins of the green burial movement. It outlines the green burial movement's concerns with standard burial practices and cremation and how green burial aims to address those concerns. It describes the current legal landscape, cultural trends, and explores how the psychology of death affects consumer choices.

HISTORY OF BURIAL IN AMERICA

Through history and around the world, cultures have developed varied methods to honor and dispose of their dead. These practices range from sky burials in Tibet, to jar burials found around the world, to the modern process of alkaline hydrolysis (a form of flameless cremation). In the northeastern United States, records, oral traditions, and archeological sites indicate that Native American tribes such as the Abenaki and Haudenosaunee created burial grounds throughout the Northeast where the dead were buried in the ground with items of significance (Bushnell, 1920; Moody, 2011). European colonists generally used wooden coffins for burial, a practice they continued into the 19th century. These approaches left relatively little impact on the landscape, as the decedent and materials used typically returned to the soil within a century, depending on the environmental conditions of the burial site. Major changes to these practices began around the time of the US Civil War in the 1860s.

Up until this time, embalming was not viewed as an acceptable practice by society and religious institutions due to its invasive nature. However, with the large distances between the battlefields and the hometowns of deceased soldiers, the practice of embalming bodies became popular to transport bodies back home. In addition, the 1870s brought societal changes that promoted increased distancing between the living and the dead. Prior to this, cemeteries were constructed around churches in urban areas (Sloane, 2018). However, frequent disease outbreaks, a large influx of European immigrants, xenophobia amongst the upper classes and increasing urban density in the 1870s led to fears of the dead acting as disease vectors. Research has since shown that infection rates from deceased bodies are far lower than those resulting from contact with the living as long as simple practices such as washing hands are followed (Kelly, 2015). While there are a few highly infectious diseases that can persist in the changing conditions of a dead body such as Ebola, it is unlikely that an epidemic would result from exposure to a body (Morgan, 2004). In the 1870s, these fears, combined with the rising value of land located in the center of urban areas, and the aesthetic influences of the Romantic era resulted in the construction of many cemeteries outside city limits (Kelly, 2015; Sloane, 2018). The shift to rural areas outside cities allowed for more space and fit with the era's emphasis on nature and the sublime. The minutely planned, park-like cemetery filled with statuary and gardens rapidly grew in popularity over the crowded, haphazardly planned graveyards of cities (Sloane, 2018). It created a new space for the living to interact with the dead.

Simultaneously, a shift occurred to distance the living from the deceased preceding burial. Previously, the common practice was for the family of the deceased to bath, dress, and arrange the body of their loved one at home. Mourners would visit the home, or the local church, before the procession to the churchyard or burial ground. With the popularity of embalming came the creation of funeral homes where embalming and other services could be provided. Funeral homes offered to take what was beginning to be viewed as macabre, and even dangerous, out of the home and offer expertise for embalming and funeral arrangement services (Kelly, 2015).

By the mid 1900s, funeral homes and the death care industry had become the established method for care of the dead. In 1963, Jessica Mitford published *The American Way of Death*, an exposé on what she saw as the failings of the death care industry (expense, commercialization, use of sentimentality for monetization (Mitford, 1998). The same year, the Catholic church accepted the practice of cremation, a previously frowned upon method. Mitford's popular critique and the new ability for Catholics to choose cremation led to the adoption of cremation during the remaining 20th century. By 2015, cremation had outpaced burial as the most popular choice for Americans. It continues to be the most popular choice today, primarily due to cost but also because of the ability to tailor the location of the cremains (Cremation, 2018). Options today include keeping ashes at home in an urn, scattering them at a favorite location, infusing ashes into jewelry, mixing with tattoo ink, or as part of structures used to rebuild coral reef habitat. The broadening of options for cremation is not unique; other creative practices include human composting, tree pods, and donating bodies to scientific efforts (a practice that was codified by the US Congress in 1968 with the first Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA, 1968). This diversification of death care options includes the green burial movement. This social movement grew rapidly in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, and has seen increased growth in the U.S. and Canada with the creation of the Green Burial Council (GBC) in 2005 (Clayden et al, 2015). Currently the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States are the only countries with existing certifying or guiding green burial organizations.

GREEN BURIAL AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Today, the green burial movement has emerged as an alternative to both cremation and standard burial. To understand the environmental aspects of green burial, compare them with the components of a standard burial that may be obtained from a funeral home. Today, a standard burial consists of three key aspects; embalming, a casket made of durable materials such as hardwood or metal, and a concrete vault to further reduce the body’s contact with the natural elements and to allow for extensive landscaping above the grave without any depressions forming on the surface. To accommodate these materials, the burial depth is typically between 4 and 5 feet deep (GBC “Conservation Burial”, 2020).

In contrast, in a green burial the body is not embalmed, a biodegradable casket or shroud material is used, and no concrete vault is used. Aboveground landscaping is not managed as a manicured lawn. This promotes biodiversity, reduces carbon emissions, and allows for a more natural landscape aesthetic (Clayden et al, 2018). The body may also be buried at a shallower depth of 3.5 feet rather than 4 to 5 feet, as this depth is where many mycorrhizal and bacterial decomposers reside. The natural materials used for the casket or shroud decompose at a similar rate to the deceased, allowing the body's nutrients to return to the soil. Depending on the location, monuments may be allowed. Typically, hybrid cemeteries may allow more standard headstones and markers, while natural and some conservation cemeteries may require only local stone or wood be used for small, discreet markers. Many conservation cemeteries ask that no markers be used GIS or other mapping technology are instead used to mark each location. Green burial utilizes ecosystem services of decomposition (a regulating service) and nutrient cycling (a supporting service) and aims to enhance, rather than degrade them. At this time, there are few studies that have examined the impact of standard burial and long-term effects on the surrounding environment. However, when it comes to ecosystem services, both standard burial and cremation prevent or slow the services that green burial embraces. In terms of environmental pollution, sealants used on vaults and caskets have been found in groundwater and soil samples of cemeteries (Van Allemann, 2017). Embalming fluids have not been shown to travel a significant distance from the body, as formaldehyde breaks down in the soil within a matter of days to weeks depending on the environmental conditions (Oliveira et al, 2013; Van Allemann, 2017), but the materials used in embalming fluids are recognized carcinogens and pose a health risk to those caring for the body (CDC, 2008; Chiappelli, 2008). In addition, eliminating the use of embalming fluids allows the body to retain its natural bacterial communities, which helps begin the natural decomposition cycle (Kelly, 2015). In brief, green burial embraces the process of decomposition, while a standard burial focuses on delaying that process for as long as possible.

Cremation is often viewed as more sustainable than traditional burial, as cremated remains take up less space, are typically not embalmed, and do not require the use of many nondegradable materials like concrete (Louise et al, 2013). However, crematoriums typically use diesel oil, petroleum gas, or electricity to cremate bodies, releasing CO_2 from both the fuel and the body (Achawangkul et al, 2016; Keijzer, 2016; Nebhut, 2016). It is also popular to scatter or bury cremains in nature but should be noted that cremains are highly alkaline and contain sodium, which can damage plant and soil ecology (Barrett, 2019).

The green burial movement is first and foremost an environmental response to unsustainable practices within the death care industry (GBC, 2020). Despite death care choices continuing to be a somewhat taboo topic to discuss in ethical terms, some people are interested in the immediate and long-term impact that their death could have on the environment. This interest has, over the past two decades, given rise to today's green burial movement. Green burial is a more environmentally sustainable choice than cremation or standard burial as it uses fewer resources and only resources that are biodegradable (Harris, 2008; Kelly, 2015). It aims to maintain or enhance, rather than degrade, soil nutrients, water and air quality, and natural landscapes. However, the choice for a green burial for many people goes beyond a simple utilitarian comparison of resource use. It also emphasizes a connection with the land. A prevailing philosophy amongst the green burial community is one of connection and reciprocity between the deceased, their community, and the earth. At the core of this ethic is the idea of giving your body and its nutrients back to the earth that has provided sustenance, shelter, and inspiration throughout your lifespan (Harris, 2008; Kelly, 2015; Conservation Burial, 2019). This connection to the land may also create an increased sense of responsibility and stewardship towards it, a valuable relationship in the face of climate change and habitat fragmentation.

THE ECONOMICS OF GREEN BURIAL

In addition to offering a more environmentally sustainable burial option, the green burial movement seeks to provide access to affordable burial (GBC, 2020). The price of the materials used in standard burial has made it challenging for average Americans to afford without significant financial planning (Harris, 2008; Kelly, 2015). In Vermont, one of the least expensive options at a Montpelier funeral home costs between $8,000 and $10,000 (Funeral Pricing, 2019). The green burial option provided at the same funeral home costs between $2,500 and $5,000. This price difference is due primarily to the materials and services that are not needed in green burial, such as embalming, vaults, deeper graves, headstones, and expensive caskets. Cremation services can cost less than $1,000 and remain the least expensive option overall (Harris, 2008), though some green burial providers can match the low costs of crematoriums due to the simplicity of green burial.

The absence of expensive material resources in green burial is a challenge to the theory of monumentalism, or using imposing, expensive, or beautiful objects to represent a person’s socioeconomic position in life. Practices that support the theory of monumentalism are found both in today’s modern funeral practices, and throughout history. While spending large sums of money on material things is at first glance, the antithesis of the simplified approach that green burial promotes, wealthy consumers may still wish to show their standing through donations towards land purchases for conservation, development of accessible trails or signage, or restoration of natural habitat. These ‘monuments’ are not necessarily material in the traditional sense of the word but are nonetheless significant. Private landownership in the United States is a foundation for wealth, and accessible recreation and healthy ecosystems are increasingly recognized in environmental economics as vital ecosystem services (MEA, 2005). To popularize funding monuments such as these that give back to society and the environment would be a departure from material monuments that focus primarily on the decedent’s position in society, while still achieving the intent to leave a lasting reminder (and a positive impact) of their time on earth. For the average American citizen, large donations for land purchases or accessible infrastructure is unlikely, even with the reduced cost of green burial. However, each individual that chooses to participate in conservation burial is actively supporting the creation of perpetually protected and sustainably managed natural spaces; a gift to future generations.

While studies on avoided costs of green burial methods are lacking, it is important to recognize the economic value in preserving the environmental processes and ecosystem services that standard burial may be damaging through the production, use, and burying of non-biodegradable materials.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND INEQUITY

It is a common sentiment that in death we are all equal. However, in reality the way we are treated in death follows socio-economic and racial hierarchies of society. The services and park-like cemeteries that emerged during the late 1800s were not available to all. Poor or immigrant bodies were often relegated to less desirable space within cemeteries (reserving the best locations for wealthy, white residents), or even unmarked burial grounds known as ‘potter’s fields’ (Kelly, 2015). During this time it was also common for old cemeteries, particularly those in poor or minority neighborhoods, to be relocated or built over. These practices are not relegated to the past; New York City currently utilizes an active potter’s field on Hart Island to bury unclaimed bodies or those who were unable to afford burial elsewhere (Rosen, 2020). Indigenous and Black cemeteries throughout the country have been and are vandalized or developed for residential or commercial structures (Gaffney, 2020).

This disparity in how the dead and their families were treated also existed in the services offered by the funeral home industry. During the era of Jim Crow laws, funeral homes run by white undertakers could refuse service to members of the black community or were known to disrespect black bodies (Micale, 2016; Stanley, 2016; Kelly, 2015). This led to the creation of black-owned funeral homes that acted as a community gathering spaces and provided an assurance that the deceased would receive respectful treatment. Today, many people of color have large, elaborately adorned funerals, resulting from both cultural traditions and a need to offer the respect and opulence that they were not afforded in life. As Dr Holloway, a professor of law and African American studies at Duke University stated, homegoings, or the tradition of having ornate, celebratory funerals in the Black community is “a contradiction to the ways in which many black bodies come to die (quoted in Stanley, 2016).”

Gender roles in caring for the dead have changed over time. Women across many different cultural backgrounds were the caretakers of the dead in the home prior to the changes seen in the late 1800s. The advent of funeral homes led to a shift in gender roles, and for much of the 20th century funeral businesses were owned and operated by white men. Even today 76% of funeral home directors, morticians, and undertakers are men, and 86.2% are white (Morticians, 2019). At this time, the green burial movement does not have a unified statement addressing unequal representation within the death care industry. This project provide an opportunity to ask about the current demographics of the conservation burial community and their motivations for being involved by collecting voluntary demographic data during the interview process (see Appendix A, question 1d).

Many actors within the green burial movement have stopped short of condemning standard burial, as burial practices are a personal choice affected by many factors such as culture, religion, economic status, and geographic location. The movement generally has instead depicted green burial as the best option for those concerned with environmental impacts. However, some supporters of green burial have taken the stance that standard burial (a largely western practice) is immoral and disrespectful towards the living and the dead, as it makes our last act one of pollution and consumption (Stowe et al, 2001). Regardless of which stance is taken by green burial advocates, it is important to recognize the differences and rectify the inequalities in the ways we experience death and burial if the conversation around green burial is to be one that is inclusive.

A SHIFT IN THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT DEATH

The green burial movement largely embraces the goals of the death positive movement, a separate but related movement calling for the living to interact more with the dead, whether it's caring for the body, interacting with deathscapes, or participating in dialogue about death (Order of the Good Death, 2021). All of these approaches are ways to confront and acknowledge the uncertainty and fear that come with death, while also encouraging more discussion and creativity when it comes to death care options (such as green burial). Cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs can help people cope with fear of death, but may also increase death avoidance, slowing environmentally beneficial innovations and changes in the death care industry (Sloane, 2018).

The stigma in America around death can be traced back to cultural shifts in the 1800s and, with the development of the modern funeral industry, death has increasingly been separated from our lives (Kelly, 2015). The death positivity movement theorizes that this practice of death avoidance increases our fear of death and may prolong bereavement when we cannot connect or interact with those we have lost (Order of the Good Death, 2021). The green burial movement aims to not only change physical requirements of burial, but also spark more conversations around death and sustainable, creative approaches. It is also generally thought within the movement that a more hands-on approach to caring for the deceased, for example, bathing or dressing the deceased in a shroud, is a loving gesture and healthy approach to losing someone. Some participants in green burial have reported a greater sense of connection to the land, and to their deceased loved one after participating in the preparation and the burial (Harris, 2008; Conservation

Burial, 2019). While these non-material aspects of green burial are difficult, if not impossible to fully describe or quantify, spiritual connections and spaces for grief, reflection, and recreation are significant cultural ecosystem services provided by green burial (Clayden et al., 2018; MEA, 2005; Quinton et al., 2019).

Abstaining from the use of material possessions and resources in burial is also a significant shift from current practices. Americans are increasingly choosing meaningful experiences over material things, even in death (Caprariello et al, 2013; Kelly, 2015). For much of the 20th century, funeral homes have emphasized the importance of ritual and lasting material items as part of caring for the deceased individual (for example, ornate hardwood caskets and monuments). This practice offered the comfort of providing for the deceased and the illusion of protecting them from decay, but in recent times rising prices, environmental concerns, and shifting societal values towards an increasingly secular and individualistic culture have left Americans looking to other options for meaningful death care (Harris, 2008; Kelly, 2015). One way that green burial meets that need for meaningful death care is by recognizing societal need (largely environmental) and addressing it through the personal choice of using the body to create and give back. In this regard, green burial is reflective of changing societal values and is an individual act performed out of a shared community value.

LEGAL CONTEXT

One of the common questions about green burial is whether it is legal. While green burial is not expressly illegal in any state, it may not be possible with existing legislation. For example, in Vermont, a previously standing regulation required that burial in Vermont was a minimum of 5 feet, a depth at which there is little biological activity to facilitate decay for a green burial. In 2017, the legislature adopted a key provision to allow burial at the depth of 3.5 feet, enabling effective green burial (18 V.S.A. § 5319 (b)(1)). In addition to individual state laws, it is also difficult to navigate the rules set by cemeteries. In no US state is it required to embalm a body, but a private cemetery may require it for a body to be buried there. State specific regulations and private cemetery requirements make for a challenging puzzle for green burial operators and individuals interested in green burial. For example, requirements for transportation of deceased across state lines may differ by state.

The conservation burial standards set by the Green Burial Council require a deed restriction or conservation easement be placed on the property and held by an organization such as a land trust. The land trust is expected to monitor the easement to ensure that the burial ground is following the restrictions placed on the property by the easement. This approach to land conservation is novel, and has not yet been tested over the long term. Conservation easements are in perpetuity, which has increasingly been a point of concern in the conservation world. Managing and ensuring the care for a property in perpetuity is difficult to plan for, expensive, and not without legal risks. There are also concerns over the conflict between the changing natural world and the obligation to enforce the unchanging perpetual land uses laid out in the conservation easement for conservation burial (Owley, 2013).

Vermont regulates burial through Title 18: Health of the Vermont Statutes, established by the Vermont General Assembly. In 2015, Vermont allowed the creation of natural burial ground with the addition of 18 VSA § 5302 (10) and (11), permitting and defining it as a natural burial ground "… maintained using ecological land management practices and without the use of vaults for the burial of unembalmed human remains or human remains embalmed using nontoxic embalming fluids and that rest in either no burial container or in a nontoxic, nonhazardous, plant-derived burial container or shroud." This legislation was adopted prior to changing the burial depth, with was adopted 2 years later, making green burial feasible. It has now been three years since Vermont adopted these statutes. With these changes in state law, traditional cemeteries are beginning to allow green burial.

In addition to green burial within cemeteries, the state of Vermont permits the burial of "immediate family" members on private land through statute 18 V.S.A. §5319 (a). The burial may not violate any state health laws and local government regulations, and the location of the burial ground must be recorded with the town clerk's office. Private burial of immediate family members may also be a natural burial ground as defined in 18 VSA § 5302 (11).

GREEN BURIAL AND LAND CONSERVATION

While cemeteries are slow to change practices out of concerns for tradition and respect (Clayden et al, 2018; Sloane, 2018), they often are in very visible places. These places of remembrance play key roles in developed areas as islands, corridors, and biodiversity hotspots in otherwise fragmented landscapes (Barrett, 2001; Sloane 2018). They also provide potential areas within walking distance of area residents for recreation. From a conservation standpoint, these areas are not frequently brought into planning discussions. This is a missed opportunity. For conservation, green burial offers an opportunity to connect people to the land in a very personal and emotional way.

Conservation burial grounds can provide unique outreach opportunities, as well as a potential source of funding for conservation projects, or another option for landowners looking to place a conservation easement on their land but still have sustainable uses. Vermont Land Trust has encountered parties who are interested in or who have created a family burial plot on their land (personal communication).

At this time, no conservation burial grounds (certified or uncertified) are located in Vermont. Preliminary search results estimate that there are approximately 20 conservation burial grounds (certified and uncertified) operating in other locations in the United States. While the GBC does outline conditions that certified conservation burial grounds must reach, there are no operational standards for prices, facilities, or use of the property as long as it is in accordance with the purposes of the conservation easement. Some conservation burial grounds approach the challenge of funding operations by having a set price for a burial plot that solely goes to maintaining and operating the conservation burial ground. Other conservation burial grounds require a donation towards conservation in the will of the deceased. Still others use sliding scales of payment. Approaches to management plans also vary by location without a uniform set of guidelines. This project seeks to better understand the diversity of approaches to operating and managing conservation burial grounds, and what new approaches are being explored.

METHODOLOGY

For this project, I conducted an exploratory and qualitative investigation of conservation burial grounds to address the questions posed in the opportunity statement.

The following describes methods used for identifying participants, data gathering and analysis, and the limitations of the study. This project was granted IRB approval by the University of Vermont.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide land trusts with an understanding of the current conservation burial field and to conduct exploratory research on a relatively new subset of green burial. Useful information for land trusts was taken from this research and analysis to create a short document outlining existing approaches to operating structures, partnerships, and certification options (Appendix B). This project will be shared with the Vermont Land Trust and available for other land trusts through UVM ScholarWorks. This research is also intended to provide information to burial grounds operators and may support the formulation of hypotheses about the green burial movement and conservation burial. Identifying motivations for partnerships may help land trusts or other entities decide if conservation burial is a good tool for their own organization to use, whether for conservation or other reasons.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To achieve the goals of this project, I have referenced Tracy's (2019) criteria for 'excellent qualitative research'. Based on these criteria, this project is a worthy subject, contains transferrable information, and will provide a significant contribution to this body of research.

Conservation burial grounds, while not a common conversation topic or well-established field, are a worthy topic of research as they signal a shift in consumer choices, cultural practices, and represent a novel conservation tool. The green burial movement is a relatively slow environmental and social movement due to the culture of death avoidance in America. A challenge to tradition and a shift in the norm for burial traditions and practices is both significant and interesting. Conservation burial grounds are particularly interesting as land trusts and other conservation organizations embrace human-nature relationships and look for creative ways to approach conservation compatible land uses.

This research aims to be transferrable and assist conservation burial ground operators and land trusts interested in learning more about developments in this field. While there is potential to generalize using a small set of interviews (Flyvbjerg, 2006), my results may not be generalizable for all conservation burial grounds. I instead aim to highlight unique or frequent aspects that are of interest or value to other burial grounds and land trusts. The use of semi-structured interviews ensures that participants testimonies are personal and descriptive, as opposed to impersonal and statistical (Tracy, 2019). This approach is particularly important in a small field that grapples daily with concepts of death, love, and loss within the setting of a business operation and natural space.

Finally, my research provides a significant contribution to understanding the certification process for conservation burial grounds and land trusts. Conservation burial grounds have the highest standards for certification as set by the Green Burial Council, and so typically require the most time and resources to meet the certification standards. This research provides testimonies and guidance for other conservation burial grounds and land trusts considering certification, and identifies areas that require further research.

The research aims to be practically significant for these parties by providing a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, and benefits that arise from certification or lack of. Tracy (2019) describes this type of significant research to be problem-based, but in the case of this research I find it more accurate to frame it as opportunity-based. There is not a known problem with the certification process or partnership development between conservation burial ground and land trusts, but there is an opportunity to provide insight. In addition to my target audience, this research provides a significant contribution to my own learning process and research skill set as I prepare to work in the field of land conservation (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

I interviewed individuals from two groups to collect qualitative data: conservation burial grounds and land trusts. I collected the majority of data from sixteen interviews with operators of conservation burial grounds during the summer and fall of 2020. To identify the participants, I used non-probability sampling methods as opposed to random selection due to the small population of conservation burial grounds. My sample of participants was based on two dimensions: (1) certified versus uncertified conservation burial grounds and (2) within the uncertified burial grounds, locations that are interested in certification at a future date, and those that are not. The Green Burial Council currently lists eight certified conservation burial grounds operating in the United States. I identified an additional eight that fit my criteria operating at this time through the Conservation Burial Alliance, working with the GBC, word of mouth, and online research. Among the sixteen operators I interviewed, eight were from certified burial grounds, four from uncertified burial grounds, and four from burial grounds seeking certification.

I contacted participants through email with an overview of the project and an attached document providing information on procedures, confidentiality, and voluntary participation in this project. Participant identities are kept confidential unless otherwise stated or given permission by the interviewee (for example, for a quote). There was a 100% response rate for the emails sent to burial ground operators. I offered two options for conducting the interviews: a Zoom meeting call, or a phone call. I requested and obtained Participants' permission before recording the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately an hour. The interview guide is provided in Appendix A.

I transcribed interview recordings using Transcribe, an online automatic transcription program provided by Wreally Studios. I then downloaded these transcripts as Word documents to review and compare them to the audio for inconsistencies. I uploaded the edited transcripts to NVivo 12 Pro and an Excel Matrix for analysis.

These interviews contribute to this case study, defined by Orum et al. (1991) as "an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, on a single social phenomenon". In addition to the interviews, iterative and collaborative review[1] and networking have also been key aspects of this project. Through informational conversations during the preliminary research phase, I gained knowledge of a variety of strategies related to green burial and conservation. The questions for the semi-structured interview guide were shaped by these initial conversations and preliminary research.

The questions created for the interview guide were open-ended to allow operators to explore themes most relevant to their location and experience. The questions posed to both certified and uncertified burial grounds aimed to identify the challenges and

[1] This was accomplished by following up with interviewees for any clarifications or questions and using material brought up in other interviews to further explore the objectives of the interview.

opportunities presented by various conservation burial ground approaches. The interview guide questions for these two groups focused on the areas of partnerships, operation structures, certification, management approaches, motivations, and changes in the field. While the open-ended questions of the interview guide were intended to allow interviewees to expand on topics, follow-up prompts ensured that key points were discussed.

As this project also sought to gain a better understanding of conservation burial to inform land trusts, I gathered information about the land trust perspective on partnerships. I identified relevant individuals to interview from land trust organizations that operate at three levels: a national land trust, a state land trust, and a local land trust. This comparison looks at these three levels to better identify how scale and organizational capacity may influence decisions to partner from the land trusts' perspective. Interview questions addressed awareness of conservation burial within the conservation field, the fit of conservation burial with land trusts, and the opportunities and challenges seen by the conservation field for burial partnerships (Q8 through Q12). These characterize the interest and motivations for conservation organizations that are already connected to green burial either through a direct partnership, or that have expressed interest in such a partnership (for example, the Vermont Land Trust).

I coded all interviews based on themes from the interview guide and emerging themes. In analyzing the data for patterns/trends, I considered frequency, omissions, emphasis, and uniqueness. This helped me identify converging and diverging ideas and themes across and between the different organizational settings (LeCompte, 2000). I also identified themes that were unique to a specific location. These themes were grouped into a matrix, which I used to code themes and concepts (Appendix C).

To break down my research approach using the comparative case study approach proposed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), the first level of analysis is horizontal comparison. For my own research, this is achieved initially through interview questions 1 through 3 for conservation burial ground operators. These questions and prompts aim to collect specific units of analysis from all conservation burial ground operators to compare and contrast business models, management strategies, and motivations. While this is named as the "smallest scale" of comparison, the semi-structured prompt format encouraged interviewees to provide their own context to the answers. These questions also lay the foundation for larger comparisons and discovery of contexts involving the actors and influences involved in conservation burial operations over time and across scale.

The matrix divides the group of sixteen participants into certified, noncertified, and seeking certification to better understand the factors and decisions that are important (or not) within each section. By grouping and comparing participants based on certification status, an additional comparison element is added to the analysis of conservation burial grounds. The interviews conducted with land trusts were a smaller sample size and the primary purpose was a comparison based on scale (local, regional, and state).

To create a comparative case study of conservation burial based on relationships, the process of coding uses frequency, omissions, emphasis, and uniqueness. This aims to gain a better understanding for the contexts and relationships surrounding certification that may be harder to convey in an interview session (LeCompte, 2000). Paying close attention to the ways in which interviewees describe the relationships and connections across place and time help portray a dynamic system influenced by people, power, and place rather than by pre-determined units of analysis.

REFLECTIONS ON LIMITATIONS AND SUBJECTIVITY

This study is exploratory and seeks to make a practical contribution to this growing field. While the small sample size of conservation burial grounds does limit the range of perspectives available at this time and the strength of themes, it is also a sufficient sample size given the limited population of existing conservation burial grounds (LeCompte, 2000; Tracy, 2019). The use of purposeful sampling ensures that I can gain insights from both uncertified and certified organizations. The number of land trusts interviewed (three at varying geographical areas of focus) is also a limitation. As previously mentioned, uncertified conservation burial grounds not listed with the GBC were found primarily through online research and word of mouth. Using these sampling methods there may be additional uncertified conservation burial grounds that were overlooked. While it also would be possible to identify additional land trust organizations to interview and conduct a deeper look at land trust perspectives, the scope of information gathering has been limited to just three due to time.

My subjectivity as the researcher is influenced by being an intended self-practitioner of green burial. While I personally find green burial to be a positive option for my own burial choice, I recognize that it is not the only option, nor is it necessarily the right option for other individuals due to their own beliefs, values, or preferences. I do not have a similar positive position on certification, as I am still learning and hearing from perspectives on both sides. I am currently a board member with the Green Burial Council and have consulted with conservation burial grounds interested in becoming certified. This unique position is a strength in that it has provided me with insights into the certification process. This position has not persuaded me of the necessity to certify though, nor given me reasons to have a negative view of it.

ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This analysis looked closely at partnerships between operating burial grounds and land trusts. The majority of participants used this word, “partnership” during our interviews. One participant referenced their relationship with a land trust as being “allies”, rather than partners, as they viewed their work to be separate but aligned. Other participants stated that their relationship with a land trust was separate in paperwork only, and that “partnership” may not encompass the closely interwoven arrangement between two organization entities with shared staff. For ease of reading and clarification, I have chosen to use “partnership” to describe all of these different styles of burial ground and land trust relations and will highlight these differences as they occur.

Other general information collected at the start of each interview included voluntary demographic information. Of those who provided this information, the composition of burial ground staff seems to skew slightly towards male-identifying individuals, while the make-up of consumers interested in green burial is made up noticeably more by female-identifying individuals. One participant commented that while there were few LGBTQ+ identifying participants (as well as little outreach to that community specifically), lesbian partners were interested in green burial in significantly higher numbers than gay partners. Studies on gender and the environmental movement as a whole follow this trend and suggest that women are more likely to be engaged in environmental activities than men (Brough et al, 2016, Tindall et al, 2003). No conservation burial ground operators identified themselves as a person of color, and several spoke to a need for increased conversations with communities of color. One participant spoke to specifically reaching out to funeral homes run by people of color, while another participant stated that much of their engagement from non-white communities has come from word of mouth after a member of that community attended a green burial. Others spoke to high interest from Muslim, Jewish, and Bahá'í groups due to reglious practices that require direct contact between the deceased and the earth, forbid embalming or cremation, or have need of burial and funeral services within 1-2 days after death. All participants characterized the majority of interested consumers as white and middle class, with some variation based on geographic location. Generally, consumers were travelling to the burial ground from within a 2 to 3 hour travel radius. Some participants did note that due to the lack of other conservation burial grounds in their region, they received interested consumers travelling from distances greater than 3 hours away.

MOTIVATIONS

When asked what first interested participants in conservation burial, nearly all spoke of a personal experience with death or spirituality. Some mentioned attending a loved one's green burial and discovering that this was the option they wanted for themselves as a way of giving back to the earth. Many spoke to the beauty and respect in the act of digging a grave and personally conveying the deceased back to the earth, as opposed to the formality and detachment of a standard burial. A common refrain was that at the burials they've attended or performed, there was a healing aspect to being outside, participating in the burial, and an understanding that their loved one was now a part of this landscape. Only a few interviewees (three) came from a background in the funeral industry in some way, though many later partnered with those in this field. The majority of others were involved or interested in conservation and were initially drawn to it from an environmentalist perspective. Many participants stressed the importance of balancing these two aspects of conservation burial: the environmental goal and the death of a loved one. For example, several participants recognized that by conservation burial standards, nonbiodegradable materials were not allowed in burials. Despite this, there were multiple examples of families approaching burial grounds wishing to bury their loved one in their favorite clothing or with a small personal item made of nonbiodegradable materials. These types of decisions fall into what one participant categorized as a "gray area" where the burial ground operators may use their discretion to allow an action that may result in a small negative environmental impact but will greatly help those who are in the midst of grief. As another participant stated, "it would be heartless not to (allow)".

Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned using conservation burial as a method to protect a specific piece of land that might otherwise not be conserved. The choice to use conservation burial seemed to be rooted in the dual goals of providing a service for a community and conserving land through a financially sustainable approach. A feeling of urgency was not present, as the amount of time it took to create a CBG ranged from 2 to 7 years in the making. Environmental and scientific terminology also varied. Participants with a background in conservation were more likely to discuss topics of restoration projects, the challenges of perpetuity, and specific conservation language with a positive, or opportunistic emphasis. Participants with a different background were more likely to talk about the impact they had on grieving families with a positive emphasis, and sometimes used negative emphasis when discussing the challenges of restoration projects, conservation funding, and ensuring perpetual care. Interestingly, only one participant spoke in-depth on their perception of green burial as an ecosystem service. While this subject was brought up in each interview, most participants did not address it, while some used it as a segue into the topic of reciprocity and giving back to the earth. This may be a result of accessibility, a lack of consumer interest (and as a result, provider interest), or an absence of ecosystem service research or projects as applied to conservation burial specifically. Ecosystem services has primarily been used for an anthropocentric focus, rather than a biocentric one (Schröter et al, 2014). Conservation burial is focused on the land and other organisms and has a complex and often difficult emotional benefit to humans. With this current emphasis on benefits to humans, ecosystem services may simply be a framework that does not currently seem applicable to burial. Currently, the low cost of conservation burial does offer some avoided costs, but there are no direct economic incentives (such as payments for ecosystem services) to choose green burial over standard burial.

While each participant shared similar goals of caring for and protecting the land in perpetuity, all participants also referred in some way to the fact that every conservation burial ground is unique, and each situation is different. Several participants stressed that what may work in one location may not work in another, for reasons of community involvement, environmental conditions, or financial stability. As one participant stated, "there's no one-size-fits-all" approach to conservation burial.

PERCEPTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS OF CERTIFICATION

The Green Burial Council acts as the certifying organization for green burial grounds. Conservation burial grounds are currently subject to the most stringent standards set by the GBC, as they are required to meet all the standards for a hybrid and natural burial ground, such as developing a Maintenance and Operations Manual and conducting an Ecological Impact Assessment, as well as additional standards focused on the perpetual conservation of the property. The standards specific to conservation burial grounds state that in order to obtain certification, conservation burial grounds must "guarantee preservation of the burial ground by deed restriction, conservation easement, or other legally binding and irrevocable agreement that runs with the land and is enforceable in perpetuity." They must also "operate in conjunction with a government agency or a nonprofit conservation organization that has legally binding responsibility for perpetually monitoring and enforcement of the easement." Largely, this standard has been met by partnering with an accredited land trust and placing a conservation easement on the land, but a deed restriction or land patent specifying conservation use would also meet this requirement.

These standards were initially created by Billy Campbell, MD and based on standards for green burial that were adopted in the UK. The green burial movement in the UK started in the early 1990s to provide improved woodland and grassland habitat (Clayden, 2015). These natural burial grounds have become increasingly popular in the UK, and there are now more than 270 natural burial sites according to the Association of

Natural Burial Grounds (the certifying group in the UK (List of NBGs, 2021)). Campbell and his wife Kimberley first envisioned the requirements for conservation burial when they developed Ramsey Creek Preserve, the first green cemetery advertised as such in the US (1996) and the first certified conservation burial ground as well (2006). The Campbell's work laid the foundation for conservation burial as a separate category of GBC certification, and their work as leaders in this field has certainly influenced subsequent conservation burial projects. As a testament to their impact, 100% of respondent's referenced Ramsey Creek as a direct or indirect resource when creating their conservation burial ground.

For this research, I started identifying the conservation burial grounds that have completed certification through the GBC. To better understand the partnerships and operating structures of all green burial grounds that have a focus on conservation, I also included those that have not obtained certification from the GBC. Of the sixteen burial grounds interviewed, eight have completed certification and are listed with the GBC as 'Conservation Burial Grounds'. Of the remaining eight, four are currently working towards certification with the GBC or intend to become certified at a point in the future. Four burial grounds do not have plans at this time to pursue certification with the GBC as a conservation burial ground. The following describes the perceptions and motivations related to certification for each of these categories.

<u>Certified</u>

Certification of a conservation burial ground with the GBC currently is a one-time certification process, with annual dues and check-ins. Burial grounds work closely with the GBC to provide documentation of their partnership with a "government agency or nonprofit conservation organization”, their strategic plan, ecological impact assessment, and maintenance and operations manual. All must be in accordance with the conservation easement (or other deed restriction) placed on the property. Following certification, the conservation burial ground is listed as a member of the GBC on their website, given use of the GBC certification logo, and may be featured in newsletters, social media, and other outreach materials. Certification renewal dues are annual.

During the interviews, I asked the operators of the certified burial grounds why they chose to pursue certification. The most common answer was to support the green burial movement. Originally, I anticipated that the main motivation for participating in the GBC would be the benefits offered by the organization (e.g., referral of customers, advertising). Of the eight certified, six operators listed supporting the green burial movement, or community, as their main reason to be involved with the GBC. Thus, the benefits of being a member of the GBC are secondary to the motivation of making a contribution to the larger movement. Being a part of the GBC is one way to further the movement by increasing visibility, networking, and having a set of standards and practices.

Christiansen (2009) describes the four stages of social movements as emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline (whether due to establishment or failure). It appears that the formation of the GBC has acted as the bridge between the two stages of coalescence and bureaucratization, and the movement now finds itself occupying a space where there is increasing structure and organization to the movement. For example, the creation of the GBC established a certifying board that works with funeral product providers and cemeteries. There is also branching bureaucratization, as seen with the recent creation of the Conservation Burial Alliance. The CBA is a subgroup of conservation burial grounds that wish to focus on green burial as a tool for conservation and offer support and information to each other and other interested parties. Of the eight certified burial grounds, five are also members of the CBA.

The perceived benefits of certification with the GBC seem largely to be that of having a large community and network to participate in and support, and using a provided set of best practices to guide their work. Only two certified burial grounds brought up referrals from being listed on the GBC's website as a benefit, and one specifically mentioned that being listed with the GBC brought fewer referrals than they were anticipating. No participants stated that certification was something that their customers were looking for; five noted that customers are frequently unaware that there is a certification standard for green burial grounds, or that the GBC is a resource. The motivation for certification seems largely to be driven by community and industry standards, not consumer preferences or direct benefits. Two participants noted that the GBC certification for conservation burial grounds does require a limited burial density of 300 burials/acre (or 400 burials/acre if other sensitive areas of the property are off-limits). This requirement is something that these participants appreciate the importance of, but also recognize that in the future will be a challenge to meet without expanding their property.

Seeking Certification

At the time of this study, four participants were seeking certification. More recently, that list has grown by an additional two. The process to become certified is one that is often made early on, but may not be acted on until a later date when it makes sense financially or there is time available to focus on it. Of those certified and seeking certification, the average time to obtain certification ranged from approximately four months to twelve months. The process itself is typically an iterative one, where the materials necessary are compiled and sent to the GBC for review, then sent back with any edits that need to be addressed before obtaining certification. Due to the paperwork and requirements for time and resources, two burial grounds have confirmed that they will be seeking certification but are not actively doing so at the moment. One named the time and funds required to donate a conservation easement as their main reason for postponing the process. Typically, land trusts request this monetary donation in accompaniment with a conservation easement donation to cover a portion of the future management fees and any legal work on the easement. The other burial ground recognized this as a factor as well, and pointed out the challenge of placing a conservation easement on the land before establishing a profitable business. The donation of a conservation easement, in exchange for limiting or removing the exercise of certain rights (for example, commercial development or subdivision), offers a potential federal income tax deduction. This deduction is based on the difference between the fair market value of property before and after the exclusion of certain rights named in the easement. If a burial ground is just beginning and has not yet established infrastructure (parking or paths, for example), the fair market value may be lower, resulting in a smaller potential federal income tax deduction upon donation of the easement.

Even with these challenges, these four participants stated that they viewed certification as a bar to set for their own operations, and a way to participate in the larger green burial movement and community. One participant stated that they wanted to participate to further legitimize the work being done by the GBC and within the green burial movement. Another respondent stated that although certification work was just beginning, they were already using "conservation" in the description of their burial ground from the start, as they had anticipated obtaining certification and operating the burial ground with a larger sustainable land use goal from the beginning. This participant had been in contact with the GBC and confirmed this approach with them. All four participants did not feel an urgency based on consumer demand for certification. Based on these responses, the participants seeking certification follow the reasoning of those who have already obtained certification and present a current perspective on the nuances of obtaining it.

Not Seeking Certification

Four participants are not seeking certification and do not have any future plans to do so at this time. All four of these burial grounds essentially function as conservation burial grounds, prioritizing sustainable land use, wildlife connectivity, and wishing to ensure that the land is protected and used in a way that is beneficial to the community and the environment. While each had varying reasons behind the decision, all stated that there was no need for an easement at this time, and as a result, they did not wish to seek certification as a conservation burial ground. One participant is already certified as a natural burial ground through the GBC, the next level of certification for green burial. Their focus is currently on a number of other endeavors taking place on the land, such as community agriculture, social justice, beekeeping, and temporal land art. Additional paperwork and restrictions on activities on the land was not appealing at this time. Another is already owned fee simple by a land conservation organization and was initially created as part of a larger wildlife connectivity and recreational trail network.

They do not see a need for a separate conservation easement at this time but would consider it if the organization saw a need in the future. The third participant is a family owned and operated burial ground that is planning for perpetual stewardship but does not currently see the benefit of certification when compared to the cost. This participant also mentioned that the GBC is a relatively new organization that is still developing their work, and they indicated that they would prefer to wait and see how the organization changed before making a commitment. The fourth burial ground is not only owned fee simple by a religious institution, but also has a conservation easement on it that is held by a local land trust. Although this would likely fulfill all the requirements for certification, the burial ground does not see an immediate need or benefit to certification at this time. To conclude, there are those that do not view the strict certification standards of conservation burial grounds as a benefit, but rather as an added cost, particularly when the participant's actions already reflect the values of conservation burial.

PARTNERSHIPS

The cases in this study provide insight into the varied nature of organizational arrangements in this small, but growing field of conservation burial. Of the 16 participants interviewed, five different partnership structures were identified (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of Partnership Arrangements

Partnership Arrangement	Description	Number of Cases
Two Partners	CBGs partnered with an accredited land trust that formally holds the easement.	Seven
Land Trust Created	Land trusts that have created a CBG to support their operational structure, but as a separate legal entity.	Two

Alternative Partner	CBGs that have a partnership with an entity that is not an accredited land trust. For example, an environmental center or organization.	Three
Multiple Partners	A CBG created by two partners, but more closely linked. The CBG is located on land trust/partner property and a third party is the easement holder.	Two
No Partnership	While the other standards of a conservation burial ground are met by these cases, they do not have a formal partnership with a land trust or environmental organization at this time.	Two

Two Partners

This is a straightforward partnership structure that has been used by a majority of conservation burial grounds. For these cases, a burial ground approached a land trust to conserve the burial ground using a conservation easement. Many of these burial grounds were already operating as conservation burial grounds and sought to ensure the perpetual protection of a conservation easement. As this partnership is a requirement for certification through the Green Burial Council, all seven of these cases also have obtained certification. These cases have a clear division between the conservation burial ground and the land trust. The burial grounds operate as a 501c3 or 501c13 that owns the land the burial ground is located on fee simple. The land trust partner holds the easement but does not own or operate the burial ground. Levels of interaction between the two parties varied amongst cases. Largely, in-person interactions were limited to monitoring visits that occurred annually. In all six cases the operators mentioned feeling that it was important or useful to have a separate entity (the land trust) carry out monitoring to ensure the easement was being followed. They also spoke positively of this experience, with one participant mentioning that monitoring typically happened twice a year, as the two groups enjoyed the chance to interact and walk the property.

Land Trust Created

This structure requires a land trust willing to take on the project of creating the conservation burial ground themselves. Within the past year, two land trusts have developed a conservation burial ground. Both have approached this by creating a separate legal entity to operate the burial ground, but one that operates jointly with the land trust. For example, land trust staff will help operate the burial ground and will be paid for labor by the separate 501c13 burial ground entity. Both land trusts plan mentioned community interest in green burial and the hope that these burial grounds will be self-sufficient and help financially support other conservation projects. Since both these projects are recent, it is yet to be seen how these partnerships will progress. It is notable that until this point, no land trust had undertaken the project of creating a burial ground. There are now two in progress, with more interested and reaching out to the Green Burial Council and Conservation Burial Alliance.

Alternative Partner

The Green Burial Council's standards for certifying a conservation burial ground list include the previously mentioned requirement that they "operate in conjunction with a government agency or a nonprofit conservation organization that has legally binding responsibility for perpetually monitoring and enforcement of the easement." While land trusts may seem like the obvious choice for a 'nonprofit conservation organization' partner, several other types of nonprofit organizations have developed conservation burial grounds as separate 501(c)(13) legal organizations operating with the same staff at the same location. These alternative partners and participants include charitable foundations and environmental education centers. In these cases, these partners already had land owned fee-simple to dedicate to a burial ground, and had a person or persons willing to spearhead the planning for the burial ground. These partnerships stand out as centralized locations where the burial ground is often adjacent to or part of a larger nature preserve, visitor center, or other public space.

Multiple Partners

Two participants stand out as examples of multiple partner cases. The first is a conservation burial ground located on lands owned by a religious institution and conserved by an easement held by a land trust. The proceeds from the burials support the burial ground operation as well as the religious institution. While the staff of the burial ground are not members of the institution, they work closely together and with the advice of the land trust to ensure that the land is managed not only as an active burial ground, but also as a holy space and an active environmental restoration site. This participant stated that these varying uses can sometimes pose a challenge to balance, but also create new approaches to stewardship. For example, one of the initial recommendations for restoration of this particular area was prescribed burning. However, the extensive use of fire in a burial ground was not a practice that the religious institution approved of, and so the three parties worked together to instead develop alternative approaches to forest restoration. As this participant noted, the more parties involved mean that more conversations need to occur during the decision-making process, but also that there may also be more solutions available with more people involved.

The second case of multiple partners was first described during the interview as a “win-win-win” situation. In this case, a burial ground partnered very closely with a land trust, and currently has their cemetery located on land owned fee-simple by the land trust.

The two organizations share offices and support each other through financial contributions (from the burial ground) and land management (from the land trust). Both have found that they do not necessarily draw from the same communities, and as a result both have benefited from increased outreach and exposure. The third party involved in this situation is the county government. Because the burial ground wished to become certified with the GBC, it was necessary that a conservation easement be placed on the burial ground. However, a land trust cannot hold the easement on a property that it already owns. At the time, the county government was looking to meet their land conservation goals by purchasing land with conservation values in the area. The three parties met and proposed that instead of buying the land, the county instead purchase the conservation easement from the land trust, thereby saving taxpayer money, solving the issue of holding the easement, and providing the funds to ensure that the easement will be enforced in perpetuity. These two examples of multiple partnerships highlight the complexities of working with several parties, but also show that there may be benefits to a network of invested partners.

No Formal Partnership

Two participants do not have a formal partnership with a land trust, government agency, or other conservation organization with the capability of holding and enforcing and easement as required by the GBC. However, this does not mean that they do not have partners. The first participant named several local conservation groups, with whom they work to protect the larger ecosystem present in their region. This appeared to be the most informal partnership structure I identified, with the primary purpose being information exchange when needed. The second participant is not currently partnered with a conservation organization as defined by the GBC. They are operated and owned by a nonprofit that works to promote sustainability, social justice and peace. This partnership could be better described as the burial ground operation being not only a conservation tool for the nonprofit, but also one that supports them financially and furthers their mission of social justice and peace. While this research focuses on the use of green burial as a tool for conservation, this participant is a key example of the other ways green burial may be used to support other nonprofit missions.

Perception of Partnership Relations

I coded the transcripts of interviews for dynamic language used when discussing positive aspects of their relationship with a land trust. Dynamic language here is defined as emphasizing an action, or active relationship with their partner. Of the fourteen burial ground operators interviewed with a formal partnership of some kind, twelve used dynamic language when describing their partnership. The two burial grounds that are currently owned and operated by a land trust used this type of language less, and more frequently used possessive language when talking about the land trust. This may indicate that while they are working to create the division of roles and labor between the land trust and burial ground, they do not yet view the land trust as a separate partner. For the 12 participants who used dynamic language, the most common terms used when referring to a land trust partner were “support”, “benefit”, and “provide”. The first term was most often used in the context of maintaining the burial ground according to the easement’s standards. Burial ground operators frequently mentioned “support” in reference to the land trust’s ability to provide expertise and knowledge of land management. Examples given included invasive species control, flora and fauna identification, improving forest health, restoration, and seasonal burning. It was also used somewhat less frequently when describing the land trust partner as being particularly supportive during the creation process.

The “benefit” between the two partners was used most frequently in reference to financial support. All burial ground operators referenced either directly supporting a land trust through financial contributions. Of these, five referenced donations (an indirect financial contribution) to the land trusts given by visitors to the burial ground. Four of the participants used positive language to refer to their relationship with their partners as being mutually beneficial in that both partners were connecting visitors with the other. Two of the participants used positive language to refer to a third party that was critical in navigating creating the partnership. In both situations the third party was an acquaintance or friend who was closely familiar with the land trust field.

Of the twelve burial ground operators with a partnership, five participants brought up examples of aspects of their partnership that were not initially fully functional or could be improved. One participant commented that the land trust partner was missing an opportunity to witness and share the powerful connections being built between people attending burials and the land where they were occurring. Very little specific negative terminology or tone was used by any participant when discussing their partner, but the omission of positive statements (such as the ones made by participants who emphasized their positive relationship to their partner) may indicate a more distanced relationship.

OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Day-to-day management of burial grounds has many dimensions. In conservation burial, some sustainable management standards are established by the GBC or are embraced as part of the ethic of conservation burial, while others are dictated by the geography and ecology of the sites. This study did not identify in depth the specific approaches for burial, such as individual rules relating to monuments or what the preferred method of preparing conservation burial plots was. The interview questions used instead aimed to identify the type of business model being used, relevant legal material, trends in management strategies, and economic viability.

Of the participants, fifteen conservation burial grounds were operating as nonprofit entities. Nine of these identified as 501(c)(3) nonprofits, while the remaining six specified that the burial ground itself was operated as a 501(c)(13)s in partnership with a 501(c)(3). 501(c)(13)s are identified by the IRS as nonprofit cemetery corporations, meaning that any net gain by the cemetery must be used for cemetery functions. This designation works in conjunction with 501(c)(3)s such as land trusts because this definition allows the earnings to be used for cemetery conservation purposes, acquisition of additional conserved land for burial, or set aside as a conservation endowment for future stewardship. It is likely that for many participants, the decision to operate as a nonprofit 501c3 or 501c13 was a simple one, as the primary purpose of many of these organizations is conservation or educational, and any proceeds would primarily go to these purposes allowing them to obtain tax exempt status. The one example of a burial ground operating as private company (in this case, a limited liability company, or LLC) is particularly interesting, as I initially anticipated that this would be a common approach to operating a burial ground. In this case, the participant was looking to use conservation burial as a tool to both conserve their land and provide a source of income that fit with sustainable land use. The LLC structure was perceived as being a quicker set-up than a nonprofit organization under a board, and one that allowed for adjustments as this early adopter worked to develop their conservation burial ground.

When discussing the creation of their conservation burial grounds, four participants noted that one of the biggest challenges was identifying relevant state legislation pertinent to green burial. At this time, many states do not have specific language identifying green burial standards, or the language that exists precludes certain green burial requirements. As mentioned earlier, Vermont is an example of a state that prior to 2015 had no green burial legislation, and until 2017 had language that prevented burial at an appropriate depth for decomposition. Two participants noted that having state legislation determine burial regulations makes for a “patchwork quilt” of rules to identify. While this primarily arises when there is need to transport a deceased individual across state lines, it also makes developing a unified movement for conservation burial difficult. As one participant pointed out, each first conservation burial ground in a state must lay the groundwork for future ones, thus repeating the process of revising local and state legislature over and over. In speaking to some of the participants who are members of the Conservation Burial Alliance, they mentioned that they see this as part of the CBA’s mission to facilitate strategies and programs that increase accessibility to conservation burial. To address this, a participant commented that the CBA is researching and has discussed the possibility for developing language that could easily be adopted at the state or federal level to streamline this process for future conservation burial grounds.

While all participants spoke to conserving the land they were located on, the management strategies varied. Participants fell on a scale ranging from a high level of land management to a low level of land management. The majority of participants can be characterized as intensive managers, due to their work on projects ranging from invasive species management, to restoring wetlands, to annual prescribed burning and large-scale connectivity planning. Many of the participants that fall towards the middle range of management are working on active strategies but have not yet begun them, or are in the early stages of identifying projects. The level of infrastructure also determined where participants fell on this scale. Some noted detailed landscape design plans, ADA compliant pathways, interpretive signage, and facilities such as parking and restrooms, while others trended towards fewer pathways, minimal signage, and no facilities other than a parking area. The decision between the two seemed to be made based on interpretations of local consumer needs and determined by the availability of resources following any restoration or conservation work. One participant spoke to their decision to take a comparatively very hands-off approach to management, choosing to only mow paths and maintain a small amount of signage. This approach worked well at this location, as the site did not immediately require restoration or have a significant invasive species presence and was originally chosen for its location connecting two other larger conserved parcels.

Monument use and requirements varied. Many burial grounds do not require a marker but offer the option of using a small flat marker flush with the ground. Some locations ask that the marker be made from local stone as well to ensure that the marker fits with the surrounding landscape. Memorial plantings are allowed less frequently.

Some locations allow approved native plantings for wildflowers or trees, while others prohibit plantings out of concerns for invasive species or pests, high planting mortality rates, or a need to actively manage the landscape (for example, in an area with prescribed burning). All locations utilize some form of mapping gravesites using GIS, detectable metal tags, or some other system to keep track of marked and unmarked graves.

Of the conservation burial ground operators interviewed, I categorized four as actively expanding, eight as stable and four as static. Of the four actively expanding, one has plans for multiple future sites, while the other three are considering adjacent or nearby properties to expand to. Three are expansions of opportunity, while one is considering an expansion out of necessity due to small acreage size of the original burial site and the density constraints of conservation burial. The GBC requires that conservation burial density does not exceed 300 burials/acre, or 400 burials/acre if sensitive areas on the property are being excluded. For some smaller conservation burial grounds, this poses a challenge to meet certification standards and burial demand. Of the eight "stable" conservation burial grounds, these participants were characterized as not immediately looking to expand their operations, but actively growing in sales and outreach at varying rates. Two participants noted that this type of growth only occurred after a 2-4 year period of establishing their burial ground and creating connections with surrounding communities. Finally, the group categorized as static, or not currently growing includes two new (opening within the year) burial grounds that have not yet established a baseline for burials, and two established burial grounds that are not currently seeing an increase in green burials at their operation.

Nearly all participants noted an increase in inquiries and sales during the Covid-19 pandemic. While some of these may be the result of deaths from Covid-19, several participants commented that pre-sales in particular were up, likely due to consumers thinking more about mortality and after-death planning during the pandemic.

Participants' rate of burials ranged from one to two a year to several a week. This wide range of consumer interest can likely be attributed to the outreach and age of the burial ground and geographic location. Several participants noted the importance of having relations with local funeral homes, death doulas, religious organizations, and community groups that could help spread the word and provide opportunities for educational events.

Many participants stressed the importance of having a solid business plan and an endowment fund for the management of the property. They commented on the loss of historic cemeteries that have been abandoned, and the responsibility that conservation burial ground owners have to ensure that the property is cared for in perpetuity, whether there is an easement on the property or not. The GBC does require for all certified green burial locations that 10% of burial plot proceeds be set aside for long-term maintenance endowment fund. Some states also have legislation requiring similar investments. When asked if this conflicts with the effort to also provide affordable burial for all, one participant commented that sliding scales are used in some cases, but "those that can afford it should (pay)… we need to be fiscally responsible and manage the property so that you have a dignified resting place forever." This emphasis on financial stability was emphasized by both nonprofit and the privately owned operations.

LAND TRUST PERSPECTIVES

The three land trust interviews were intended to provide insight into the views of conservation organizations with respect to developing partnerships or otherwise engaging with the green burial movement. Of the three land trust participants interviewed, all had heard of the green burial movement and conservation burial grounds through other lands trusts, their own research, or the Land Trust Alliance Rally conference, where a session on conservation burial was offered.

Of the three groups interviewed, the participant from the local land trust was most interested in conservation burial as a project they would be possibly or definitely interested in considering for the future, depending on resources available. Their organization consisted of approximately seven full and part-time staff members. From their perspective, this was a fundraising opportunity that aligned with their mission to protect and connect the landscape with the local community. They have an active volunteer base and board to support them and are looking for ways to offer opportunities such as recreation and education to their community. Their largest concerns were site selection, start-up costs, and division of responsibilities (ex: what aspects would be provided by funeral homes and what tasks would be their responsibility). While mission creep was mentioned, it was brought up in the context of ensuring that the division of these responsibilities was clear and their primary goal would continue to be conservation, not providing death care services.

The participant from the regional land trust had already received interest from landowners who were looking to start their own natural burial grounds on land protected through conservation easements. As a result, their primary focus was better understanding green burial and what being a partner to a separate green burial operation would consist of. Due to their existing commitments and ongoing projects, creating a conservation burial ground was not something that the regional land trust was interested in pursuing at this time. Mission creep was largely not a concern, as their role as partners would allow them to primarily focus on conservation aspects of the burial ground. The regional land trust participant also felt that creating this partnership with a group they were already familiar with (a landowner or municipality) would be a definite possibility. The participant from the national land trust group interviewed had a similar stance[2], stating that while creating a conservation burial ground did not necessarily align with their typical operations and conservation goals, partnering with existing conservation burial grounds was something they were interested in at a more regional or local level of their organization to avoid mission creep. This organization has the potential to reach a national audience, but at this point does not view conservation burial as a priority for their organization.

All three land trust participants expressed excitement and interest in finding a new way to connect people with the land they cared about. Two mentioned reaching out to existing town cemeteries or town forest lands to explore the potential for sustainable multi-use approaches that might include green burial. All felt green burial was a growing field and expected to hear more about conservation burial as a tool at future land trust conferences. However, all three also identified the challenge of working in the non-profit sector and finding the time, people, and resources to begin a project of this scale and bring it to completion. The local land trust participant in particular spoke of needing more

[2] It should be noted that this organization has a national presence but frequently works at regional levels. As such, the interviewee was speaking from a perspective of doing regional conservation work guided by a national organization.

successful examples of land trusts that have taken on this work to better understand what the process looks like and if it is a viable source for fundraising.

THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION BURIAL

All participants agreed that conservation burial is a growing field, as can be illustrated by the two additions identified during this study, and another identified after the data gathering phase was complete. When burial ground operators were asked where they saw conservation burial in ten years, the majority expressed a view that it would grow, particularly as word spread and more CBGs were established in different parts of the country. Four participants noted that the green burial movement has a lot of "momentum", due to social media interest in alternative burial options and a strong environmental movement in many parts of the country. Another commented that with the increasing popularity of cremation, more funeral homes may seek to offer green burial as an option that generally provides more revenue than cremation, but that is still economically viable for those looking for an affordable option.

One participant noted that the structure of a 501(c)(3) partnered with a land trust was likely to remain the most common operating structure. Their reasoning was that the mechanics of learning to manage land in a sustainable way and ensure conservation are fairly easy to learn with the right resources, while coming from a land management background and learning the funeral industry may be more of a challenge for organizations like land trusts. Another participant echoed this sentiment, adding that it's an ambitious project for land trusts to take on unless they have the staff, land, and resources to do it. With the recent addition of land trusts developing conservation burial grounds on their own in the past two years, these will be interesting case studies to follow and learn from. Another participant stated that the role land trusts will play in the next ten years will shape conservation burial as a widespread tool for conservation, or as a comparatively small but significant part of the green burial movement. Participants emphasized that while it will be good to see the conservation burial movement expand, it is key that future operators take the responsibility of being both a steward of the land and of the deceased very seriously, and not view this a light undertaking, or easy business model.

My own observation is that many of these conservation burial grounds have relied on each other for information pertaining to management plans, business plans, and general advice. This can be attributed to the wealth of knowledge that these individuals and organizations have, and to the lack of formal studies and data available at this time.

The growth of the green burial movement is developing standards and following structural patterns associated with social movement theory. However, it does not follow spatial patterns of growth. The local and national levels of green burial activism are established but there is not a regional presence. This is particularly noticeable by comparing conservation burial to the environmental movement. The land conservation movement has networks at local, regional, and national spatial scales (as seen by the three examples of land trusts interviewed). However, the conservation burial movement currently only has local networks and one national network, the GBC. Regional expansion of conservation burial grounds has not yet been attempted, though one participant mentioned the possibility of expanding to additional locations in the region. Existing regional networks of land trusts could help enable conservation burial grounds to expand beyond one location, as land trusts typically have regional scale conservation initiatives. There are also existing cemetery and funeral home associations that operate at the regional scale. However, the localized networks that conservation burial grounds currently work with emphasizes their place-based connection to land and communities. These place-based strengths may keep conservation burial grounds as a local phenomena, rather than encouraging expansion. With the growing interest in conservation burial, a focus on developing and strengthening the conservation burial movement both at the local and regional level will help reach a larger geographic distribution.

With respect to future demographics of green burial, of those that offered demographic information, two participants spoke to a wish to connect with unrepresented or minority communities in their area. Two participants spoke to positive experiences that people had at their burial ground that then led to further participation from those communities, but none spoke of a specific plan or course of action to do so. While I do not believe that this was an intentional omission, the absence speaks to the relatively selective community outreach that conservation burial grounds may have, or the clustering of conservation burial grounds in communities that are predominantly white and middle class. One notable participant shared that their process for choosing a burial ground involved conversations with indigenous stakeholders. After choosing a site, this group reached out to local tribal representatives to ask if the proposed site would be an appropriate one for conservation burial. The tribe turned down this site and instead proposed an alternative property that would be better suited to burial. Had that conversation not happened, the current location would not have been used and an important voice in the conversation would have been lost. If the conservation burial movement is one that aims to not only be an environmental one, but also one of environmental justice, indigenous and minority voices need to be included in the conversation, particularly when it is one so entwined with cultural and religious values, remembrance and loss, and land ownership.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research aimed to meet four main objectives and in doing so, gain insight into different approaches and motivations for involvement in the green burial movement and a better understanding of partnerships with land trusts. The four main objectives were as follows:

- What motivations and perceptions do the CBGs have of the GBC's certification process?
- What forms do these partnerships between burial grounds and land trusts take?
- What are the views of land trust organizations on developing partnerships or otherwise engaging with the green burial movement?
- What is the role of conservation burial in the green burial movement?

The participants in this project sought to provide a natural, environmentally sustainable option for after-death care. By partnering with a land trust, a burial ground has access to expertise and knowledge that otherwise may not be available, or only provided at a cost through consulting. Certification is one way to ensure that conservation standards are met while offering additional benefits. Some of the closer partnerships that were described to me not only included exchanging knowledge, but also providing financial resources, time, volunteers, and outreach to the partner organizations. While other forms of green burial are considered environmentally sensitive due to avoided costs (such as preventing the use of nonbiodegradable materials), conservation burial goes an extra step and takes on additional responsibilities of actively caring for the surrounding environment. As one participant noted, the involvement of a land trust not only offers knowledge and legal protection as holders of the conservation easement; it also adds legitimacy to an ambitious, novel conservation project. As evidenced by the varied types of partnerships used by both certified and uncertified burial grounds, these benefits are not unique to certified burial grounds. Burial ground operators described perceived benefits of remaining uncertified; none described perceived benefits of abstaining from a partnership with another organization. Partnership therefore may not be viewed by many as a reason to seek certification since these relationships can be built outside the certification structure. Reasons to certify trended towards having established standards and practices to follow, as well as participating in a larger movement. Reasons to remain uncertified trended towards avoided costs of certification and increased freedom to pursue other land use options or management.

While I have categorized participants based on partnership types, certification status, and operating structures, each location is unique. Approaches to management ranged from intensive to a hand-off approach and partnerships varied, including land trusts, religious and educational institutions, and government entities. The most frequently identified dimensions across approaches were a passion for land and the environment, and a willingness to reach out and develop connections to the funeral industry, environmental groups, and other relevant parties. These themes of stewardship and community are some that are shared by many in the land conservation world. Land trusts are interested in novel conservation tools, particularly those that are financially self-sustaining or beneficial such as green burial. Although conservation burial poses a unique set of challenges beyond normal land trust responsibilities, the participants from land trusts viewed it as an opportunity to connect with people and be at the forefront of an increasingly popular consumer choice for after death care. Land trusts can establish casual relationships, formal partnerships, or even create their own conservation burial grounds. When provided with these options, land trusts may be more likely to pursue green burial as a potential option for their organization than if they believe it is an “all-in” or “all-out” scenario.

These are still the early days for conservation burial in the US, but all participants agreed that the next ten years would see increased growth and change to this field. This is evidenced by the two land trusts who took on the creation of their own conservation burial grounds, a development that occurred in the past year. As this movement grows, it will be beneficial for the Green Burial Council to survey the perceived benefits of certification and create their own relationships with land trusts and other environmental organizations that may use green burial as a conservation tool. Since there is no national scale on-the ground monitoring by the GBC at this time, partner land trusts or other organizations can also provide third party monitoring for GBC standards as well as the conservation burial grounds own environmental goals.

During this project, I provided the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) with an information session on the background and function of conservation burial, as well as initial findings on different levels of partnership participation with conservation burial grounds. No conservation burial grounds exist in Vermont currently, and only two exist in the northeastern United States. While there is an opportunity for VLT to create a conservation burial ground, members of the organization identified challenges of time and resource limitations. For that reason, the preferred path would be a conservation burial ground created by a separate group that the VLT could then partner with as the holder of the conservation easement. This type of partnership has the flexibility of letting partners set the level of participation for the land trust, while still ensuring that a sustainable land management baseline is met.

Whether in Vermont or elsewhere, conservation groups are taking on novel partnerships and entirely new roles as stewards of conserved burial grounds. One line of research is to investigate how conservation burial, which sets the highest standards for green burial, may shape the green burial movement as it grows. Similarly, there is much to be learned from the recent creation of land trust-owned burial grounds. As these are established and increase in number, it will be valuable to consider what factors contribute to their success, how long-term restoration projects with land trusts are managed in active cemeteries, and what (if any) differences arise between land trust created burial grounds and others.

Beyond the dynamics of how conservation groups may figure in the green burial movement going forward, comments made by some burial ground operators point to the value of investigating what characteristics consumers are interested in vis a vis green burial; additional research focused on public and potential consumer views of conservation burial grounds would contribute meaningful insights into the small body of existing literature. Related to this, while ecosystem services was not a term frequently used by participants, it would be interesting to explore the potential for contributing payments for ecosystem services to the estates of those who choose green burial, or, conversely, creating a revised pricing system for traditional burial that includes the cost of the environmental impact it creates. In this context, one might consider whether and how such approaches might affect individual choices related to death care, how they might work in practice, and whether and where they might be politically viable.

Finally, while this study asked a general question about the demographics of those choosing green burial, a deeper study and consideration of factors in this arena of the burial industry that repeat patterns of discrimination, disenfranchisement, and social inequities is warranted. The example described by one operator about reaching out to an indigenous tribe about the acceptability of a site for a conservation burial ground illustrates both the potential for repeating patterns of appropriation that are a part of the history of the United States and the potential to avoid repeating these patterns. This has implications for both research and practice. That is, researchers will do well to investigate how patterns of inequity are repeated in the green burial movement and how this can be changed, while practitioners can take actions to acknowledge and dismantle these patterns.

Conservation burial's modern take on a traditional practice is still developing, and there are many opportunities for future research. Even with the rigorous standards set by the GBC, variety exists within the existing conservation burial grounds with respect to design, partnerships, management, community, and personalities. These differences allow burial grounds to adapt to each location – a necessity in conservation work. Conservation organizations face numerous challenges in their efforts to reduce the impacts of human development on land and ecological processes and they have pursued a range of approaches to meet these challenges. Conservation burial offers a relatively new tool to conserve land, continue sustainable use, and reduce the environmental impact of our burial customs. And because burial is practiced in every community, this novel tool is not limited to groups or places. Cemeteries are spaces to use, whether it’s to say goodbye, say hello, birdwatch, hike, picnic, or just spend time. It is important that we care for these spaces in sustainable ways for current and future generations. Conversations and partnerships between burial ground operators and environmental groups such as land trusts can be an effective path to advance this goal.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Background/History: can you help me understand the background and history of your organization?
    a. Additional prompts: How was this conservation burial ground created? What was the timeline? Who were the driving forces?
    b. What was the largest challenge to creating a conservation burial ground? (ex: zoning, public perception, creating a management plan)

   c. What motivates you to continue this line of work? What opportunities have you encountered?
   d. What are the demographics of your organization? Are you seeing changes to demographics within the green burial movement?
2. Management: What are the major elements/is the primary goal of your management plan?
3. Operations: What is your operating structure? How have you approached the economic hurdles within the death care industry?

<u>Certified:</u>

4. Certification
   a. Why did you decide to pursue certification?
   b. What changes (if any) were needed to achieve certification?
   c. What benefits do you see from having certification?
   d. Without certification, what would your partnership with (land trust partner) look like?

<u>Uncertified:</u>

5. Uninterested in Certification
   a. Is there a particular reason why certification doesn't appeal to you?
   b. Would a partnership with a land trust benefit your organization, or theirs?

6. Interested in Certification
   a. What challenges have you faced during the certification process?
   b. What has the process of developing a partnership with X looked like?

<u>All:</u>

7. Could you reflect on the changes that have happened in the past/future in the field of conservation burial or at your burial ground?
   a. Where do you see the green burial movement in the past? How has it changed in the past 10 years?
   b. Do you see this as something that more land trusts should look into? Why?
   c. What trends in demand have you seen? How are you responding to these trends?

Interview Questions for Land Trusts:

8. In what ways is the Green burial movement relevant to your mission?
   a. Specific green burial place partnership
   b. Ecosystem services
9. Within the land trust world, have you seen an increase in conservation burial interest? What motivated this interest/at what scale?

10. What level of involvement with the green burial movement would best fit your organization? (Holding an easement, assisting with land purchases, owning a property)
11. What concerns or challenges do you see with conservation burial ground partnerships?
12. What opportunities do you see with conservation burial ground partnerships?

APPENDIX B

AN OVERVIEW OF CONSERVATION BURIAL FOR LAND TRUSTS

Recommendations for Partners and Participants

March, 2021

This document provides recommendations for land trusts interested in conservation burial. Recommendations are based on a master's project conducting exploratory research into the field of conservation burial and the types of existing partnerships between land trusts and conservation burial grounds.

What is a conservation burial ground?

A conservation burial ground (CBG) is a nature preserve that also functions as a space for green burial[3]. Green burial forgoes the practice of embalming and the use of nonrenewable casket materials and vaults to allow the body to decompose at a natural rate and return nutrients to the earth. To facilitate this, bodies are buried at a depth of 3.5' feet as opposed to the typical depth of 4' to 6' deep. This depth is deep enough to prevent any animal disturbances. Here, aerobic bacteria break down the body at a much faster rate than if the body was experiencing anaerobic decomposition contained in a vault and casket. The soil acts as decomposition and filtration system, converting organic matter into available nutrients for microorganisms in the soil. Cemetery zoning standards such as distancing grave sites from water bodies still apply to prevent any hydrologic contamination. The only exceptions to green burial are cases that involve highly infectious diseases that can survive in the body after death (such as Ebola[4]).

The green burial movement seeks first and foremost to provide an alternative to the environmentally detrimental practices of standard burial and cremation, but also seeks to connect both the living and the dead to nature. Conservation Burial is a subset of green burial that prioritizes conservation and preservation as well as providing green burial. In the US, the standards for conservation burial were first devised by Billy Campbell as he developed the burial ground Ramsey Creek Preserve in South Carolina. These standards were later modified and adopted by the Green Burial Council (GBC), the leading US nonprofit educational group and

[3] Clayden, A., Green, T., Hockey, J., & Powell, M. (2014). *Natural burial: Landscape, practice and experience*. Routledge. Harris, M. (2008). *Grave matters: A journey through the modern funeral industry to a natural way of burial*. Simon and Schuster. Kelly, S. (2015). *Greening death: reclaiming burial practices and restoring our tie to the earth*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

[4] Morgan, O. (2004). Infectious disease risks from dead bodies following natural disasters. *Revista panamericana de salud pública*, *15*, 307-312.

certifying organization for green burial[5]. Today, approximately 20 conservation burial grounds are operating in the US, 8 of which have obtained certification by the GBC. The GBC requirements for conservation burial are their most stringent standards. In addition to requiring that nonbiodegradable materials be prohibited and an ecological impact assessment be performed (as well as a number of other operating standards), the GBC also requires that burial density be restricted, strategies for preservation or restoration are implemented, a government agency or nonprofit conservation organization is partnered with, and the burial ground is preserved in perpetuity by deed restriction or conservation easement.

While there are several CBGs that have not sought certification from the GBC at this time, and as a result may not have a formalized partnership, there is a shared intent of creating a burial ground that is a natural space and is protected for perpetuity. In researching these certified and uncertified conservation burial grounds, I identified two primarily approaches that land trusts have used to participate in conservation burial. It should be noted that this is a novel conservation tool, and there are likely more approaches to combining the fields of green burial and conservation that have not yet been researched or attempted.

1. Partnership with an established CBG

Historically, landowners or green burial groups have created CBGs by developing the burial ground themselves (typically as 501(c)(13)s) and choosing a partner conservation organization to work with. Due to the GBC's requirements for conservation burial certification, all currently certified CBGs are partnered with a land trust. These partnerships each take a unique form, ranging from minimal interactions such as annual monitoring and some additional consulting on conservation projects, to daily interactions and shared site management, volunteers, and events. Many conservation burial grounds use a structure that contributes a percentage of the burial fee towards the land trust partner (sometimes dependent on referrals or membership with the land trust).

2. Development of a CBG through a Land Trust

Recently, several new CBGs are being planned by land trust organizations themselves. These land trusts see conservation burial as an opportunity for sustainable land use on conserved land, a means to connect people and land, and as a potential revenue source. The created CBGs are also 501(c)(13)s, and while the CBGs and land trusts are separate financial institutions, they ideally are created to share resources and support each other.

Recommendations

These two approaches require substantially different commitments, but some aspects of being involved with a conservation burial ground remain the same. Taken from a series of case-study interviews conducted with existing CGBS, these are the most common recommendations for land trusts interested in any sort of involvement with conservation burial.

- A respect for the dead. Burial of our loved ones is a deeply personal and emotional act. Care should be taken to provide a humane approach to a very regulated operation (e.g.: not requiring the removal of synthetic body parts or potentially allowing a loved one to be buried with a nonbiodegradable item of importance to them). Care for the dead may come in many different forms, but respect must be present in each. For any CBG,

[5] Green Burial Council. (2020). *Conservation Burial*. https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/our_standards.html

partnering with local funeral homes, directors, or death doulas can provide the expertise and guidance to care for the dead, address the needs of the living, file the paperwork, and offer the most options for consumers. For land trusts looking to create their own CBG, these partnerships can also help prevent mission drift into the funeral industry.

- Each location is unique. What worked in one location may not be replicable in another and may present novel opportunities or challenges based on the existing local or regional land use laws, consumer interest, or geography. There is no one right way to create or partner with a conservation burial ground.
- Partnerships should be defined and dynamic. Those with close, positive relationships to land trusts emphasized communication and a mutual enthusiasm for and support of the other's mission. The creation of a CBG is not a quick process (typically over 3 years in the planning) and so revisiting the responsibilities of each party allows for adjustment and adoption.
- Education and outreach. Consumers are increasingly expressing interest in green burial as the movement grows[6]. Providing education to community groups, addressing myths (such as animal disturbance or human body toxicity), and building neighbor and stakeholder relationships is key. This is particularly true for providing equitable access to green burial for all and identifying existing cultural or religious connections to the site.
- Conservation burial will (mostly likely) not make you rich. While some CBGs have had growing popularity or ambitious business plans, many CBGs talked about the difficulties of getting started and the slow growth of an industry where those interested are not likely to become customers until many years later. They also stressed the seriousness of the responsibility to perpetually care for land and the dead, an undertaking that requires many resources upfront and set aside for the future.

Resources

CBGs can be immensely rewarding, but they are not for everyone. Different levels of participation should be evaluated by land trusts to see what best fits their mission and resources. The following are organizations and online resources to assist land trusts with this decision-making process.

The Green Burial Council
The Green Burial Council Cemetery Conservation Standards
The Conservation Burial Alliance
The Conservation Burial Alliance – Building Conservation Relationships
Land Matters
Green Burial Massachusetts – Partnering with Land Trusts

[6] NFDA. (2018) 2018 NFDA Cremation and Burial Report: Research, Statistics and Projections. National Funeral Directors Association.
NFDA. (2019) 2019 NFDA Cremation and Burial Report: Research, Statistics and Projections. National Funeral Directors Association.

APPENDIX C

ANALYSIS AND CODING

Structural Codes

- Origins
- Challenges
- Driving forces
    - People
    - Motivations
- Management
- Operating structure
- Demographics
- Partnerships
    - Partnership as a necessity/origin
    - Partnership as an option
    - Partnership as a benefit

Concept Codes

- Future of Conservation burial
- Land trust engagement and interest
- GBC influence

REFERENCES

Achawangkul, Y., Maruyama, N., Hirota, M., Chaichana, C., Sedpho, S., & Sutabutr, T. (2016). Evaluation on environmental impact from the utilization of fossil fuel, electricity and biomass producer gas in the double-chambered crematories. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *134*, 463–468. doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.09.030

Barrett, C. (2019). Cremated Remains: Options for Green Burial & Scattering. Retrieved from https://carolinamemorialsanctuary.org/cremated-remains-options-green-burial-scattering/.

Barrett, G. W., & Barrett, T. L. (2001). Cemeteries as repositories of natural and cultural diversity. Conservation Biology, 15(6), 1820-1824.

Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2017). Comparative case studies: An innovative approach. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE)*, *1*(1).

Brough, A. R., Wilkie, J. E. B., Ma, J., Isaac, M. S., & Gal, D. (2016). Is eco-friendly unmanly? The green-feminine stereotype and its effect on sustainable consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *43*(4), 567–582. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw044.Return to ref 2016 in article

Bushnell, D. I. (1920). *Native cemeteries and forms of burial east of the Mississippi* (No. 71). US Government Printing Office.

Caprariello, P. A., & Reis, H. T. (2013). To do, to have, or to share? Valuing experiences over material possessions depends on the involvement of others. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *104*(2), 199.

CDC. (2008) Public Health Statement for Formaldehyde. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Chiappelli, J., & Chiappelli, T. (2008). Drinking grandma: the problem of embalming. *Journal of Environmental Health*, *71*(5), 24-29.

Christiansen, J. (2009). Four stages of social movements. *EBSCO Research Starters*, *1248*.

Clayden, A., Green, T., Hockey, J., & Powell, M. (2015). *Natural burial: Landscape, practice and experience*. Routledge.

Clayden, A., Green, T., Hockey, J., & Powell, M. (2018). Cutting the lawn− Natural burial and its contribution to the delivery of ecosystem services in urban cemeteries. Urban forestry & urban greening, 33, 99-106.

Conservation Burial. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.theeddy.org/conservation-burial.html.

Cremation Growth Trends: Speed and Velocity. (2018). https://www.cremationassociation.org/page/IndustryStatistics.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry*, *12*(2), 219-245.

Funeral Pricing (2019). *Funeral Pricing* [Brochure]. Guare & Sons, Montpelier, VT.

Gaffney, A. (2020). The fight to save America's historic black cemeteries. Retrieved January, 2021, from https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/historic-black-cemeteries-at-risk-can-they-be-preserved

Green Burial Council. (2020). *Conservation Burial*. https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/our_standards.html

Harris, M. (2008). *Grave matters: A journey through the modern funeral industry to a natural way of burial*. Simon and Schuster.

Keijzer, E. (2016). The environmental impact of activities after life: life cycle assessment of funerals. *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, *22*(5), 715–730. doi: 10.1007/s11367-016-1183-9

Kelly, S. (2015). *Greening death: reclaiming burial practices and restoring our tie to the earth*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

LeCompte, M. D. (2000). Analyzing qualitative data. *Theory into practice*, *39*(3), 146-154.

List of Natural Burial Grounds. (2021). Natural Death Centre. Retrieved from http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/index.php?page=find-a-natural-burial-site

Louise, S. S. M., & Rebay-Salisbury, K. (2013). *Embodied knowledge perspectives on belief and technology*. Oxford: Oxbow.

Micale, B (2016). Researcher explores history and complexity of African-American funeral home business. Retrieved from https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2016/01/012216-ncr-lyonsafricanamericanfuneralhomes.html.

Millenium Ecosystem Assessment. (2005). Ecosystems and Human Well-being. Island Press. Washington, DC.

Mitford, J. (1998). *The American way of death Revisited*. New York City. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. (Original work published 1963).

Moody, J. (2011) Balance: An Overview of Abenaki and Indigenous Peoples, Burial Site Protection, Repatriation, and Customs of Respect, Looting, and Site Destruction in the Abenaki Homeland, and Relations between Archeology, Ethnohistory, and Traditional Knowledge. *The Journal of Vermont Archaeology, Volume 12.*

Morgan, O. (2004). Infectious disease risks from dead bodies following natural disasters. *Revista panamericana de salud pública*, *15*, 307-312.

Morticians, undertakers, & funeral directors. (2019). Retrieved from https://datausa.io/profile/soc/morticians-undertakers-funeral-directors.

NFDA. (2018) 2018 NFDA Cremation and Burial Report: Research, Statistics and Projections. National Funeral Directors Association.

NFDA. (2019) 2019 NFDA Cremation and Burial Report: Research, Statistics and Projections. National Funeral Directors Association.

Nebhut, A. (2016). "Culture and Carbon and Cremation, Oh My!" Undergraduate Student Research Awards. V29. http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/infolit_usra/29

Oliveira, B., Quinteiro, P., Caetano, C., Nadais, H., Arroja, L., Ferreira da Silva, E., & Senos Matias, M. (2013). Burial grounds' impact on groundwater and public health: an overview. *Water and Environment Journal*, *27*(1), 99-106.

Owley, J. (2011). Changing property in a changing world: a call for the end of perpetual conservation easements. *Stan. Envtl. LJ*, *30*, 121.

Order of the Good Death (2021) *Death Positive*. Retrieved 2021, from http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/death-positive

Orum, A. M., Feagin, J. R., & Sjoberg, G. (1991). Introduction: The nature of the case study. *A case for the case study*, 1-26.

Quinton, J. M., & Duinker, P. N. (2019). Beyond burial: researching and managing cemeteries as urban green spaces, with examples from Canada. *Environmental Reviews*, *27*(2), 252-262.

Rosen, J. (2020). How Covid-19 Has Forced Us to Look at the Unthinkable. The New York Times Magazine. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/29/magazine/covid-hart-island.html

Schröter, M., Van der Zanden, E. H., van Oudenhoven, A. P., Remme, R. P., Serna-Chavez, H. M., De Groot, R. S., & Opdam, P. (2014). Ecosystem services as a contested concept: a synthesis of critique and counter-arguments. *Conservation Letters*, *7*(6), 514-523.

Sloane, D. C. (2018). Is the cemetery dead? Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Stanley, T. (2016). The Disappearance of a Distinctively Black Way to Mourn. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/01/black-funeral-homes-mourning/426807/

Stowe, J. P., Schmidt, E. V., & Green, D. (2001). Toxic burials: The final insult. *Conservation Biology*, *15*(6), 1817-1819.

Tindall, D. B., Davis, S., Mauboulès, C. (2003) Activism and Conservation Behavior in an Environmental Movement: The Contradictory Effects of Gender, Society & Natural Resources, 16:10, 909-932, DOI: 10.1080/716100620

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. John Wiley & Sons.

Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, 90th U.S. Congress. (1968)(enacted).

Van Allemann, S. T. (2017). *A laboratory simulation of the potential groundwater contamination associated with burial materials* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria).