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South Dakota environment theme for 2015 State Historical Society conference

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota environment in its many forms will be the focus of this year’s history conference hosted by the South Dakota State Historical Society. The conference is May 29-30 at the Ramkota RiverCentre in Pierre.

The theme of the conference is “Prairie to Pines: People and Their Environment in South Dakota,” examining the way our past interactions with the land have shaped our present.

“This conference will discuss natural resources, people, ideas and movements that have shaped our environment in South Dakota,” said Jay D. Vogt, director of the South Dakota State Historical Society.

The moderator for the conference will be David Wolff, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Black Hills State University. He has taught Black Hills, South Dakota and Western History at the university. His research focuses on natural resources and Black Hills history in general.

Friday’s keynote speaker is David Grettler, professor of history at Northern State University. He is a historian and archaeologist specializing in early American history. His current research focuses on early American environmental history and 19th century American agriculture. Grettler’s presentation is titled, “Man and Nature: An Edible Introduction to Environmental History.”

The rest of Friday’s speakers will discuss such topics as natural resources conservation, the homesteading era, the environmental impact of Black Hills mining, and the history and preservation of Good Earth State Park at Blood Run National Historic Landmark near Sioux Falls.

The winners of this year’s State Historical Society board of trustees election will be announced at Friday’s luncheon. A Friday evening reception will be held for conference attendees at the Cultural Heritage Center.

Saturday’s keynote speaker is David Nesheim, an assistant professor of history at Chadron State College in Nebraska. He specializes in environmental and American Indian history, with a regional focus on the Great Plains and the North American West. Nesheim’s talk is about “The Science of Dispossession: Black Bass, Fireweed, and the Yankton Sioux Reservation.”

Saturday’s other sessions will cover shoreline protection and habitat restoration, land management and cultural resource conservation. Three field sessions to the Buffalo Interpretive Center, Farm Island and the Oahe Dam will conclude the conference.

The Governor’s Awards for History will be announced at a luncheon on Saturday. These awards are presented in recognition of individuals, organizations and teachers who have made outstanding contributions to preserving South Dakota history.

The conference offers teacher continuing education contact hours from the state Department of Education.

For more information, call (605) 773-6000 or visit history.sd.gov and click on the history conference link. The early registration deadline is May 8.

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The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.