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Geographers have contributed much to the rich literature that defines the natural and human dimensions of the Great Plains. The emphasis that geographers place upon illuminating the spatial components of environmental, societal, economic, and cultural issues has often afforded them a unique perspective on important questions confronting the region. Moreover, geographers have sought to improve our understanding of the complex interrelationships between Great Plains landscapes and their human occupants. These foci of geography have, in recent years, given rise to research on topics such as the drivers and effects of land use and land cover change, rural depopulation and evolving settlement patterns, prospects for economic and social viability of small communities, and the impacts of conflicting landscape ethics on land tenure.

This issue of Great Plains Research features a special section comprised of four papers presented at the 2006 Joint Meeting of the Association of American Geographers’ Great Plains-Rocky Mountain and West Lakes Divisions. In October 2006 more than 225 geographers assembled in Lincoln, Nebraska, to discuss issues related to the theme, Environmental, Social and Economic Transformations of the Prairies and Plains. Important aspects of the diverse subject-matter dealt with at the conference are captured in the papers presented here.

Mark Drummond (U.S. Geological Survey) examines the spatial extent, causes, and implications of changing grassland cover on the western Great Plains from 1973-2000. Gina Thornburg (Kansas State University) explores the impacts of “shop locally” initiatives on small town economies in Kansas. Laura Smith (Macalester College) analyzes the relationships between American Indian and non-Indian peoples as they address native land acquisition in the Minnesota River valley. Roxanne Ornelas (University of Minnesota) discusses connections between sacred landscapes and spiritual beliefs among indigenous peoples, with special focus on the impacts of Garrison Dam in North Dakota.

The examples of research provided in these four papers exemplify the contributions that geographers are making to contemporary research on the Great Plains. For additional information on the conference, including abstracts of all presentations, please visit the web site at http://calmit.unl.edu/aag/

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