**Environmental Stewardship of the McMurdo Dry Valleys**

The continent of Antarctica has been formally set aside for scientific research, and the nations that have signed the Antarctic Treaty ([official link](http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm) , [Wikipedia link](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antarctic_Treaty_System)) have agreed to defer territorial claims, plans for permanent settlement, and resource development.  Antarctica is managed by many nations through the Antarctic Treaty System, not a single nation or agency.

The McMurdo Dry Valleys represent the largest ice-free portion of Antarctica. The valleys are composed of glaciers, lakes, streams, and sandy-gravelly soils. Closer inspection reveals a microbially-dominated desert ecosystem composed of novel assemblages of primarily microscopic organisms. Because of the uniqueness of this landscape and fragile nature of the ecosystem, human presence and activities in the McMurdo Dry Valleys are regulated by the Antarctic Treaty System, and the entire landscape is a designated Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA).

In the 1990s, 3 Environmental Workshops) initiated by LTER scientists in collaboration with NSF and international partners were held to develop protocols for working in the Dry Valleys, the last of which was held in 1998. Formal reports were generated and published after each workshop (links below). These products have been used to develop management guidelines for the Dry Valleys.

McMurdo LTER scientists have been integral to the cooperative effort to responsibly conduct scientific field research in the Dry Valleys for over two decades and we continue to work with international collaborators, NSF, and other interested parties to reduce current and potential impact on this landscape.

Past Environmental Workshop Reports (with links as applicable):

Wharton, R.A. (ed.) McMurdo Dry Valleys: A cold Desert Ecosystem. Report of a NSF

workshop held at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies, The New York Botanical Garden, Millbrook, New York, 5-7 October 1991.

Vincent, W.F. (ed.) Environmental Management of a Cold Desert Ecosystem: The

McMurdo Dry Valleys. Report of a NSF Workshop held at Santa Fe, New Mexico, 14-17 March 1995.

Wharton, R.A. and P. T. Doran (eds.) McMurdo Dry Valley Lakes: Impacts of Research Activities. Report of a NSF held at the University of Illinois at Chicago, 15-17 July 1998.