

# Cultural Resources

## And Your Conservation Plan



### What are cultural resources?

Our North American cultural heritage spans more than 15,000 years. Stories of our past await discovery through careful research. These objects and places that comprise pieces of our past are called cultural resources and they may be found on the surface and in the soils of our farms and cities.

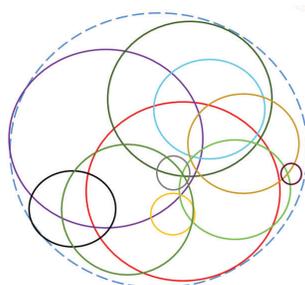
Cultural resources defy simple definition because many different laws define them. They include buildings, objects or artifacts, scenic vistas, sacred places, natural land formations, bodies of water, certain species, statues, memorials, burials, politically-designated landmarks and monuments, and less tangible resources such as dances, stories, beliefs, and holiday traditions. Cultural resources are non-renewable. There is no way to “grow” a new archaeological site, historic house, or a sacred landform after it is destroyed.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) encounters a variety of cultural resources during the conservation planning process. While structures are easy to identify and avoid, NRCS employees commonly encounter non-structural archaeological sites. These often extend below the soil surface and must be protected when conservation activities may disturb the earth at the site.

### Why does NRCS care about cultural resources?

NRCS protects cultural resources for the same reason it protects natural resources—the soil, water, air, plants and animals—on your property. Keeping natural resources in balance helps provide the basis for a healthy and profitable farm environment; protecting and interpreting significant cultural resources provides the basis for understanding our human past.

***NRCS cultural resources policy involves protection and enhancement of cultural resources and historic properties in their original location to the fullest practical extent.***



### It is the law

Recognizing the importance of cultural heritage, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966. The NHPA establishes a policy for protecting important cultural resources (also called historic properties). The NHPA requires Federal agencies to consider cultural resources in their activities, and to determine if significant historic properties will be adversely affected by those activities. NHPA also necessitate consultation between federal agencies and stakeholders such as the State Historic Preservation Office and Native American Tribes. This major law is just one of about 20 Federal laws.

The NRCS has Cultural Resources Specialists (CRS) and Cultural Resources Coordinators (CRC) on staff across the country to help provide additional assistance when cultural resources are encountered.

### What makes a cultural resource important?

One way to be considered a significant historic property, cultural resources must maintain integrity and meet one of the following four criteria of eligibility to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP):

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the major pattern of American history.
- B. Associated with significant people of the American past.
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.
- D. Has yielded or may likely yield information about the history or prehistory of America.

Though sacred places, monuments, and historic landmarks count, too.

### NRCS procedures for cultural resources protection

The NRCS seeks to identify, evaluate, and avoid the destruction of cultural resources. Projects utilizing NRCS funding to implement an activity in a conservation plan must follow these general cultural resources protection procedures.

**Step 1:** Decide if proposed conservation activities are earth-disturbing. Activities that involve heavy equipment and extensive earth disturbance have the potential to impact cultural resources.

**Step 2:** Determine the entire area that will be altered during construction of conservation activities. This can include the area where activities are planned, but it can also include additional areas for such activities as equipment staging and material borrowing.



**Step 3:** Examine available records and conduct field investigations of the area for evidence of cultural resources. This step will be completed by a trained NRCS conservation planner or partner at no cost to the property owner or applicant. If cultural resources are found, NRCS cultural resources personnel may visit the project site to help determine the total extent of the cultural resource.

**Step 4:** Avoid cultural resources that are present. NRCS's preferred alternatives may involve moving the location of conservation activities or selecting a different, non-destructive conservation activity. Most conservation projects with cultural resources present will come to this conclusion.

**Step 5:** If the cultural resource cannot be avoided, a professional archaeologist or historian will evaluate its significance. In most states, this evaluation will be completed by NRCS cultural resources personnel. Under some circumstances, additional research and investigation may be required. The expense for such additional investigations may be the responsibility of the property owner or applicant, and it cannot typically be supported with cost-share funds. In most cases a professional review will also require the applicant to sign a release of information form so NRCS can initiate consultation with the State Historic Preservation office and Native American Tribes.

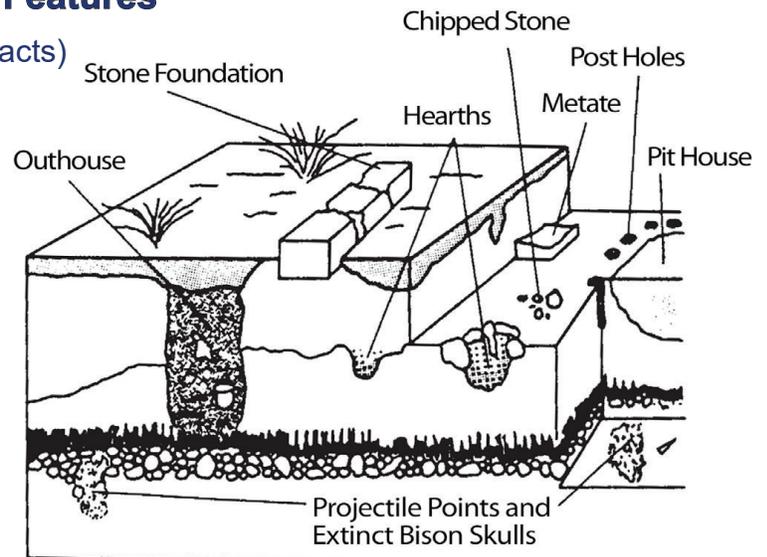
**Step 6:** If the cultural resource is determined to be non-significant, the landowner and NRCS may proceed with the conservation practice. However, if the resource is significant (a historic property), and an alternative practice cannot be agreed upon, the cultural resource must be mitigated.

**Mitigation** is an action that reduces the harmful impact. If a landowner does not want to pay for site evaluation or mitigation and no alternative conservation plan can be implemented, then NRCS will likely withdraw financial assistance on conservation activities at that location. Applicants always have the option to install practices at their own expense.

## Archeological Features

(non-portable artifacts)

CCC-era water control structure



### Procedures for discovery during construction

If unanticipated artifacts, building foundations, or human remains are uncovered during implementation, stop all work in the area and contact the NRCS. The NRCS will work with the property owner or applicant to take steps that protect the cultural resource until its significance is evaluated. Steps 5 and 6 described previously will be conducted.

*If human remains are encountered during construction, stop all work, contact law enforcement and a county coroner's office or medical examiner's immediately, then your state CRS.*



### Private Property Rights and burial protection laws:

Landowners with historic properties on their land have ownership of that historic property with the exception of human remains, grave markers, burial mounds, and artifacts found in association with graves and human remains. Most states, including Iowa, have laws that protect human burials and their associated objects.

Non-grave remains and associated artifacts from archaeological sites and historic buildings are the property of the landowner.

Federal assistance or funding cannot be received if cultural resources are intentionally disturbed or removed to avoid compliance with historic preservation laws and policies.

### Additional information

Contact NRCS are your local USDA Service Center. Use the Farmers.gov Service Center locator to locate your office: [www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator](http://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator).

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