What are archaeological sites?
Archaeological sites are any physical evidence of past human activities, by law, greater than 50 years of age. Archaeological sites can include structures such as barns, houses, factories and prehistoric sites, as well as sites that are of traditional significance to groups of people. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 provides protection of archaeological sites that have been determined to be of significant value.

What are historic properties & cultural resources?
Historic properties are archaeological sites that have been determined to be of significant value. Only individuals who meet the Secretary of Interior Qualifications can make determinations as whether an identified archaeological site meets these historic property significance qualifications, as detailed in the National Historic Preservation Act. The NRCS uses the term Cultural Resources interchangeably to refer to any historic, aesthetic and cultural aspects of the human environment.

Why & when must a cultural resource survey be completed?
Cultural Resource Specialists or Area Office Cultural Resource Specialists, complete cultural resource surveys for proposed NRCS projects that have the potential to affect cultural resources. Potential to affect historic properties is generally identified as potential ground disturbance, but may include indirect project effects such as visual or cumulative effects. The NRCS field office personnel are trained to complete cultural resource surveys and identify archaeological sites in the field. A cultural resource survey consists of walking completely over the ground surface of proposed project areas of potential impact and identifying any archaeological sites that may be impacted. If archaeological sites are found during the survey, then a NRCS Cultural Resource Specialist will record the archaeological site on a Nevada State Historic Preservation Office Archaeological Inventory form and submit the form to the State Historic Preservation Office, along with a determination of whether the identified site is eligible or not eligible for National Register inclusion. The NRCS will, in consultation with the land owner (producer) and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), or Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), determine appropriate mitigation alternatives to avoid impacts to the identified archaeological site.

Who must the NRCS consult with on their projects?
Under the National Historic Preservation Act, the SHPO and American Indian Tribes are mandatory concerned parties with whom NRCS must consult. By law, the SHPO has 30 days to review projects and provide recommendations and project concurrence. Consultation with American Indian Tribes may take a little longer. NRCS may also identify other concerned parties with whom they can consult with on a project-by-project basis.

When can a project begin?
No project may begin until all NRCS required environmental compliance, including cultural resource surveys, has been completed and all NRCS consultation has been completed.
What is the proper mitigation alternative to use when archaeological sites are identified?

When archaeological sites are found within a project area of potential effect, an NRCS Cultural Resource Specialist will recommend a mitigation alternative to the producer. There are three alternatives:

1. Avoid impacts to the archaeological sites by modifying the project design.
2. Test the archaeological site to determine whether the site is an historic property.
3. Withdraw Federal support for the project.

Alternative one is the preferred alternative as the NRCS, in consultation with the SHPO or THPO, can determine that the archaeological site identified is administratively eligible for National Register inclusion and all eligibility determinations can be avoided since the project has been modified. In this case, the archaeological site identified is considered eligible for National Register inclusion until an eligibility determination is made. If the producer decides that the project cannot be modified, then alternative two or three would be the best alternative. If an archaeological site has been determined to be not eligible for National Register inclusion, then the site is not an historic property.

What happens to archaeological site forms when they are submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office?

When the NRCS submits an archaeological form or report on a project to the SHPO, a record of the report and site form is kept at the State Historic Preservation Office. Archaeological site information is entered into a Nevada State Historic Preservation Office Database. Access to this database information is secure and limited to qualified archaeologists on a project-by-project basis.

Why are historic properties important?

Historic properties represent our cultural heritage and are being destroyed rapidly. Many of them hold important scientific value. We need to protect historic properties for their cultural and historical value.

What are some common Nevada NRCS practices that require archaeological surveys?

Nevada NRCS, in consultation with the Nevada SHPO, has identified a list of practices that require cultural resource surveys if the project is on private land. For a complete list of practices that need cultural resource surveys, contact a Nevada NRCS field office. Some of these practices are:

1. Buried pipelines and watering facilities
2. Water control structures
3. Land leveling
4. Concrete ditch lining
5. Brush management using mechanical equipment
6. Pinyon pine/Juniper cutting (mechanical equipment)