NPS's Cultural Resource Inventories: Understanding Resources, Improving Stewardship

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This paper will provide an overview of five cultural resource inventories that are currently on-going within the National Park Service (NPS) and how they are being used to improve preservation and management of diverse cultural resources. They are the Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Archeological Sites Management Information System, Ethnographic Resources Initiative, List of Classified Structures, and Automated National Catalog System. We will examine how each inventory identifies resources and their significance, and how these inventories assist in park stewardship by providing information for master plans, facility development, and natural and cultural resource management and preservation.

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) is a comprehensive inventory of historically significant landscapes within the National Park System. It is an evaluated inventory that provides baseline documentation for cultural landscapes. It includes general descriptive information and looks at the history and physical development of a landscape. Information is gathered from secondary sources and through field surveys of the landscape looking at 13 characteristics: natural systems, spatial organization, land use, cultural traditions, topography, vegetation, circulation, buildings and structures, cluster arrangements, views and vistas, constructed water features, small-scale features, and archeological sites. Each characteristic is described in its historic and current condition, and evaluated for its contribution to the significance of the site. The landscape is also analyzed for integrity, which, along with significance, is weighed to determine eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The CLI also assesses the condition of the landscape, which is important for accountability under GPRA (the Government Performance and Results Act). The database exists only in regional offices and in Washington, and work is underway to move it to the web.

The CLI provides invaluable landscape information that helps parks manage and preserve both cultural and natural resources. It has been used to improve knowledge of landscape resources and inform planning efforts. At the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, a park created as a recreational area, documenting cultural resources such as villages and farms allowed park staff to develop greater understanding of cultural landscape issues.

CLIs inform planning efforts, such as the general management plan at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, and raise questions for further study, such as the role of the African American Civilian Conservation Corps. CLIs also provide base information for other studies, such as the National Register nomination for Roberts Farm in Delaware Water Gap, and the cultural landscape report for Eisenhower National Historic Site.

The CLI is used to inform natural resource and maintenance decisions. At Delaware Water Gap, the CLI raised aware-

ness about the importance of vernacular land-scape features, and the landscape information is now used to set priorities and establish guidelines, including the historic agricultural leasing program. Another way that natural resource and maintenance decisions have been influenced is by linking the CLI database to GIS mapping. By overlaying current and historic aerials at Delaware Water Gap, it has been possible to establish broad patterns in the landscape to assist in stabilization and treatment decisions. CLIs include a section on impacts that affect landscapes and stabiliza-tion measures with cost estimates that can be cited to help justify funding needs. CLI infor-mation assists in completing the compliance for stabilization and treatment projects.

Next we'll look at the Ethnographic Resource Inventory (ERI). An ethnographic resource is a landscape, place, object, or natu-ral resource of cultural significance to people traditionally associated with that resource. NPS does not make the judgment whether that resource is significant, since the signifi-cance is based on the viewpoint of the tradi-tionally associated people. Ethnographic resources are not driven by National Register criteria, although some ethnographic resources may be eligible National Register properties. NPS defines "traditionally associ-ated peoples" differently from other park visi-tors "in that they typically assign significance to … places closely linked with their own sense of purpose" (NPS 2001:57). NPS views people as "traditionally associated" with a park when:

- The entity regards the park's resources as essential to its development and continued identity as a culturally distinct people; and
- The association had endured for at least two generations (40 years); and
- The association began prior to the estab-lishment of the park (NPS 2001:48).

The ERI database helps the park docu-ment these resources, and the value ascribed to them, by utilizing two categories. First, the park resource management documentation includes common name, type of resource (plant, animal, place, or object), location,

NPS-determined condition, relevant treaties and laws, and documentary sources. The database distinguishes these fields from the "group view," which includes vernacular name, sacred and legendary status, and the group's evaluation of condition and preferred treatments. The database also includes fields to document all consultations with the group.

The ERI currently uses Microsoft Access on stand-alone PCs. The regional ethnogra-phers or coordinators train park staff to use the database, and ensure data reliability and validity. In the Pacific Northwest Region, park staff maintains the database, and currently Olympic National Park, San Juan Island National Historical Park, and Fort Vancouver National Historic Site are using the database. This will increase as more parks become aware of the database and staff are trained and assigned to manage its use. The national coor-dinator certifies that data meet the mandatory requirements for GPRA reporting.

The ERI makes information easier to retrieve and can be used to track changing conditions of ethnographic resources. It is also an easy reference for consultation with park affiliated groups, and can produce reports and data sheets for management queries. The ERI creates a way to "come up to speed" quickly and links ethnographic resources to other resource databases.

So how can another database benefit your park? What are the ethnographic resources in your park and who are the associated people? Are the descendants of the homesteaders who once lived in the park traditionally associated people? What about commercial fishermen who have fished there for generations? This information is an important component of park management actions and community heritage preservation. In order to understand the people who have special relationships with the parks, you need to understand what the resources are and how the people value them. This information is available in some cases; it just needs to be accessible. In other instances, ethnographic studies are a neces-sary first step. The ERI is part of the process of documenting this information.

The List of Classified Structures (LCS) is

another database currently being used by NPS to manage, document, and track resources. However, LCS is the only cultural resource database with real-time, on-line editing capability.

LCS is officially defined as "an evaluated inventory of all historic and prehistoric structures that have historical, architectural, and/or engineering significance within parks of the National Park System in which the National Park Service has, or plans to acquire, any legally enforceable interest" (NPS 2002:1-1). It is a comprehensive resource management tool that allows park personnel to inventory park historic structures, keep complete and concise records of all historic properties, and manage resources for preservation, management, and stewardship purposes.

The LCS includes properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or determined eligible by the keeper of the National Register and/or the state historic preservation officer. Not all buildings within a park are listed on LCS. It is only for those properties that have been formally determined eligible.

In its current web-based form, data are entered, maintained, and updated by individual parks and/or regional offices. Regional LCS coordinators then verify the entered information and send each record to Washington, D.C., for final approval. This hierarchical review system is designed to provide greater accuracy and consistency.

LCS assists preservation professionals and cultural resource personnel with section 106 compliance document preparation, provides all the necessary National Register data on buildings and structures with a few clicks of a mouse, provides a chronological list of physical events (construction, modification, rehabilitation, etc.), and stores condition assessments so one can track how the building's condition has changed over time.

LCS benefits management by recording important treatment information. These data come directly from general management plans and similar documents, while condition assessments are directly tied to GPRA goals. LCS also contributes to resource management decision-making by cross-referencing other databases, especially the Archeological Site Management Information System (ASMIS) and the Facility Management Software System (FMSS).

The purpose of LCS is to provide a web-accessible, user-friendly system for recording and managing buildings and structures. The database assists resource managers that deal with historic properties, and makes management decision-making, funding requests, and infrastructural planning much easier. It may be used in many ways for important decision-making processes regarding impact, condition, and treatment.

Overall, LCS is a functional, useable system with great benefits for cultural resource personnel. The concise nature of the program provides a quick reference source for all historic buildings under NPS management, thereby allowing resource managers to query and compare the significance, condition, and ultimate treatment of related buildings.

The Automated National Catalog System (ANCS+) is the cataloguing database for the NPS Museum Management Program. Originally based on dBase III, the current database is a Windows-based version of the original ANCS that parks have been using since 1987. ANCS+ is the NPS-customized version of re:Discovery, which uses Microsoft FoxPro as its database engine. Each park is responsible for using ANCS+ to record the required information about its museum and archival collections and for submitting that information annually to the National Catalog.

ANCS+ is a collection of closely related databases that use discipline-specific and park-specific fields for cataloguing. A park can create its own fields, although there are already some 60–70 defined fields for each discipline. Up to 999 digital images may be attached to each record for more complete and accurate descriptions.

Individual objects and lists of related objects can be found using the word search function on any and all fields. This is a powerful word search function, but it requires that you use a consistent terminology. Therefore ANCS+ includes several lexicons, including

The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging.

The collections management module is divided into two sections: cultural resources, which includes history, archeology, ethnology, and archival/manuscript collections; and natural history, which includes biology, geology, and paleontology. In addition, there is a separate archives and manuscript module for detailed archives/manuscript description at the series, sub-series, folder, and item levels.

ANCS+ allows for extensive reporting and associated record-keeping, including: a database for accessions and for associated personnel and institutions; the ability to track loans, exhibits, maintenance, treatments, and deaccessions; and the ability to create location and condition lists, catalogue histories, a finding aid for archives, and housekeeping schedules. It will also print over 40 related NPS forms.

In addition, ANCS+ assists the curator in conducting the annual inventory of museum objects, the collections management report, and the NPS museum checklist for preservation and protection.

The public search mode allows non-museum staff and the public to explore the collections database. To protect sensitive information, the curator controls the fields and records that are available in this read-only mode. For example, provenience information for archeological artifacts is not available to the public.

This same service is being made available to the public on the web (www.museum.nps.org). With its imaging capability, the web catalogue is an opportunity to achieve the NPS mission to provide for the enjoyment of cultural and natural resources in a way that will leave them unimpaired for future generations.

ANCS+ is an essential tool to meet the collection management responsibilities of the museum program. It empowers museum staff to efficiently maintain and preserve collections, and to make those collections more accessible to staff, researchers, and the public.

Conclusion

The inventories and their databases for each of these disciplines are very important for NPS to measure what cultural resources we have, evaluate them for quantity and quality, and track change over time. But for parks, the real importance of our collective information lies in using these systems to make the best possible decisions about the preservation and management of the resources in our care. It is our responsibility to preserve and protect these assets for future generations, and they will decide how well we have done this.

References

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