

NATIONAL REGISTER BULLETIN

Technical information on the the National Register of Historic Places:
survey, evaluation, registration, and preservation of cultural resources



U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Cultural Resources
National Register, History and Education

Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes



SYNOPSIS

A rural historic landscape is:

a geographic area that historically has been used by people, or shaped or modified by human activity, occupancy, or intervention, and that possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of areas of land use, vegetation, buildings and structures, roads and waterways, and natural features.

The evidence of human use or activity is examined through eleven landscape characteristics:

- land uses and activities
- patterns of spatial organization
- response to the natural environment
- cultural traditions
- circulation networks
- boundary demarcations
- vegetation related to land use
- buildings, structures, and objects
- clusters
- archeological sites
- small-scale elements.

Rural historic landscapes are listed in the National Register as:

- sites or
- historic districts

following:

- identification of historic landscape characteristics,
- evaluation according to the National Register criteria, and
- documentation on a registration form.

To **identify** a rural historic landscape:

- develop historic context,
- conduct historic research, and
- survey the landscape.

To **evaluate** National Register eligibility:

- define significance,
- assess historic integrity, and
- select boundaries.

To **register** a rural historic landscape:

- complete the National Register Registration Form (NPS 10-900), and
- follow the procedures in 36 CFR Part 60.

TYPES OF RURAL HISTORIC LANDSCAPES

Rural historic landscapes usually fall within one of the following types based upon historic occupation or land use:

- agriculture (including various types of cropping and grazing)
- industry (including mining, lumbering, fish-culturing, and milling)
- maritime activities such as fishing, shellfishing, and shipbuilding
- recreation (including hunting or fishing camps)
- transportation systems
- migration trails
- conservation (including natural reserves)
- sites adapted for ceremonial, religious, or other cultural activities, such as camp meeting grounds.

Although diverse, these types all contain substantial areas of vegetation, open space, or natural features that embody, through past use or physical character, significant historical values. Buildings, industrial structures, objects, designed landscapes, and archeological sites may also be present. Many will be integrally related to historic activities and contribute to the significance of a large historic district. Some may also qualify individually for listing in the National Register.

Rural historic landscapes, especially those composed of a variety of land uses, may incorporate more than one of the types listed above. While this bulletin introduces a methodology that can be used for evaluating all of the above types, it focuses primarily on agricultural properties.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

A classification system of eleven characteristics has been developed for **reading** a rural landscape and for **understanding** the natural and cultural forces that have shaped it. **Landscape characteristics are the tangible evidence of the activities and habits of the people who occupied, developed, used, and shaped the land to serve human needs; they may reflect the beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and values of these people.**

The first four characteristics are **processes** that have been instrumental in shaping the land, such as the response of farmers to fertile soils. The remaining seven are **physical components** that are evident on the land, such as barns



Drainage ditches and canals divide the agricultural fields and flat plains of Lake Landing in Hyde County, North Carolina. Implemented in the 19th century, this system made possible water transportation and the farming of swampy lowlands. Coastal plain cottages represent the common housing stock of the region. (J. Timothy Keller)

DOCUMENTATION OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

Landscape characteristics are the tangible evidence of the activities and habits of the people who occupied, developed, used, and shaped the landscape to serve human needs; they may reflect the beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and values of these people.

This chart summarizes the kinds of data, gathered through field survey and historic research, to be described on National Register forms. Certain landscape characteristics require location, dating, and detailed description, while others may be described collectively as they contribute to the general character and setting of the landscape. Generally those meeting the definitions used in the National Register for *buildings, structures, objects, and sites*, require the most detail. An asterisk * identifies those characteristics that should be located on sketch maps accompanying National Register forms. Preservation planning and management may call for additional documentation, for example, a detailed site plan of types of vegetation.

The features within a landscape are the physical evidence of past uses, events, and associations. They may reflect a variety of activities occurring at one time, or evolving functions in different periods of time, for example, orchards planted sequentially as a farm's productivity increased. They may or may not be historic, or contributing to the significance for which the landscape meets the National Register criteria. Although the larger and most prominent characteristics require the greatest documentation, those, less prominent, help define the landscape's setting and character, and should not be overlooked. The characteristics of a landscape interrelate and may, in some cases, overlap, for example, cultural traditions may be evident in structures and buildings, spatial organization, vegetation, and clusters.

Characteristics	Features	Documentation
<p>Land Uses and Activities</p>	<p>Fields, pastures, orchards, open range, terraces, commons, cemeteries, playing fields, parks, mining areas, quarries, and logging areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe principal and significant land uses. • Identify the tangible features related to land uses by type, general location, dates of use, condition, and related vegetation. • Describe historic processes related to land use, such as mining, irrigation, lumbering, contour farming, or quarrying. • Point out obsolete historic operations, ongoing traditional practices, or modern adaptations related to significance. • Identify threats to integrity, and indicate their location, extent, and impact on historic integrity. * Identify areas having major importance or predominance, by location and type, and classify as historic or nonhistoric.

Characteristics	Features	Documentation
Patterns of Spatial Organization	Overall pattern of the circulation networks, areas of land use, natural features, clusters of structures, and division of property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe any patterns characterizing the landscape as a whole. • Relate patterns to land uses and activities, responses to nature, and cultural traditions. • Relate spatial organization to components, including vegetation, boundary demarcations, and circulation networks. • Describe and locate any areas where historic spatial organization is particularly visible or substantially lost.
Response to the Natural Environment	Adaptations to climate and natural features seen in land use, orientation of clusters, construction materials, design of buildings, and methods of transportation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the physical environment and ecological systems of the region. • Describe the kinds of the features that have resulted from cultural adaptations or responses to the natural environment. * Identify natural features that have major importance or predominance, by name, type, and location.
Cultural Traditions	Land use practices, buildings and structures, ethnic or religious institutions, community organization, construction methods, technology, trades and skills, use of plants, craftsmanship, methods of transportation, and patterns of land division.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe land use practices, patterns of land division, institutions, building forms, workmanship, stylistic preferences, vernacular characteristics, use of materials, and methods of construction that have been influenced by cultural tradition. • Identify the sources of cultural influences, and name specific individuals, such as artisans, builders, community leaders, or farmers, responsible for perpetuating or establishing such traditions. • Describe the kinds of features resulting from or exhibiting cultural traditions, and name, date, and locate the primary features reflecting such traditions.
Circulation Networks	Paths, roads, streams, or canals, highways, railways, and waterways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the principal forms of transportation and circulation routes that facilitate travel within the landscape and connect the landscape with its larger region. • Name, date, and describe principal or significant examples. * Identify principal roadways and other transportation routes, by name, type, and location, and classify as contributing or noncontributing.

Characteristics	Features	Documentation
Boundary Demarcations	Divisions marked by fences, walls, land use, vegetation, roadways, bodies of water, and irrigation or drainage ditches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the ways in which land ownership and activities are physically divided within the landscape, and discuss the differences between historic and current practices. • Relate boundary demarcations to overall spatial organization and regional patterns of land division. • Identify the predominant features that mark divisions within the landscape and locate important historic ones.
Vegetation Related to Land Use	Functional and ornamental trees and shrubs, fields for cropping, treelines along walls and roads, native vegetation, orchards, groves, woodlots, pastures, gardens, allées, shelter belts, forests, and grasslands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe principal, predominant, and significant vegetation, by type, condition, age, use, and general or specific location. • Discuss changes that have occurred in vegetation since the period of significance. • Relate the function, massing, and details of vegetation to land uses and activities, cultural traditions, and response to the natural environment. • For rotated crops, identify the general types of crops that might be grown over a period of several years.
Buildings, Structures, and Objects	<p>Buildings: residences, schools, churches, outbuildings, barns, stores, community halls, and train depots.</p> <p>Structures: dams, canals, tunnels, mining shafts, grain elevators, silos, bridges, earthworks, and highways.</p> <p>Objects: monuments, threshers, and cider mills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the kinds of buildings, structures, and major objects present. • Relate the function, form, materials, and construction of buildings, structures, and objects to land uses and activities, cultural adaptations, and response to the natural environment. • Identify patterns and distinctive examples of workmanship, methods of construction, materials, stylistic influences, and vernacular forms. • Describe the condition of historic buildings and structures, and nature of additions and alterations. • Describe the principal and most important buildings, structures, and objects, by name, type, location, date, function, condition, methods of construction, materials, stylistic influence, and, if known, builder. • Discuss the impact of nonhistoric construction and alterations on historic integrity. * Identify all buildings and structures and principal objects, by location, name or number, and type, and classify as contributing or noncontributing.

Characteristics	Features	Documentation
Clusters	Village centers, farmsteads, cross-roads, harbors, and ranching or mining complexes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the clusters, historic and nonhistoric, found in the landscape, by general location, function, scale, spatial arrangement, density, condition, and composition. • Discuss any patterns visible in the arrangement, location, or presence of clusters, and relate these to spatial organization, cultural traditions, response to the natural environment, and land uses and activities. • Identify principal, representative, or important examples, by name, type, function, and location. • Discuss the impact of nonhistoric development on historic integrity. * Identify all buildings, structures, and principal objects comprising clusters, by type and location, and classify as contributing or noncontributing.
Archeological Sites	Road traces, reforested fields, and ruins of farmsteads, mills, mines, irrigation systems, piers and wharves, and quarries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the types of archeological sites, their cultural affiliations, and the period of history or prehistory represented. • Indicate the extent of archeological sites within the landscape, their distribution, environmental setting, and general location. • Identify principal sites, by number or name and location, and describe surface and subsurface features, condition, disturbances, and any excavation or testing. * Identify all archeological sites, by site number or name, location, surface and subsurface characteristics, and condition.
Small-scale Elements	Foot bridges, cow paths, road markers, gravestones, isolated vegetation, fence posts, curbstones, trail ruts, culverts, foundations, and minor ruins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the kinds of elements that collectively add to the landscape's setting, by type, function, general location, and approximate date. • Relate these elements to historic patterns of land use, spatial organization, cultural traditions, boundary demarcations, circulation networks, or vegetation. • Discuss the extent to which the loss of these has cumulatively affected historic integrity.