

Spatial Organization

The Lincoln Memorial is above the banks of the Potomac River in West Potomac Park at the western end of the main east/west axis of the Mall. The line of this axis and the lines of other secondary axes are based on the design developed by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 for the nation's capital and the McMillan Commission's (1901-1902) subsequent adaptation of L'Enfant's concept. A raised terrace elevates the memorial to a point of prominence 14 feet above grade, where views of the Washington Monument and the Capitol and the vista across the Potomac River reinforce the axial relationships.

The linear arrangement is reinforced by the long reflecting pool that captures images of both the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument on the surface of the water. Two avenues of elms, planted on terraced levels in parallel rows, delineate this pool and outline a smaller transverse pool. A formal plaza and a slightly curving set of granite steps, descending to the river, connect the axis with the Potomac vistas. Spatially, the area immediately surrounding the memorial structure had been laid out in a symmetrical and geometric arrangement of drives, walks, and panels of lawn. These forms are enhanced by historic patterns of vegetation, such as the regular planting of American elms found along the roads radiating out from the circular drive.

Most of the spatial qualities of the Lincoln Memorial grounds have been retained, but development on the north and south of the Reflecting Pool



Figure 43 - Reflection of the Lincoln Memorial on the pool, June 1996. LINC 9-24.



Figure 44- Reflection of Washington Monument on the pool, December 5, 1996. LINC 13-23.

have weakened the character of these qualities. Both the construction of temporary government buildings in 1918 and the installation of a flood control levee in 1938 created an undesirable sense of enclosure on the north side. The south side suffered from the same effect when temporary government buildings were built there in 1942. The introduction of these large-scale projects compromised the broad expanse of open space originally designed for both sides of the pools. When the temporary structures were removed in 1964 and 1970, the area south of the pools was left open. On the north, however, the levee remained to limit the views, enclose the avenue of elms, and separate the pool area from the rest of the park. Subsequent memorial projects, developed northeast and southeast of the circular drive, have segmented the area further. Because of their unique designs, the memorials to the veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars have become singular spaces, enclosed by understory trees, with little visual relationship to the historic designed landscape of the Lincoln Memorial.

Component Landscape

Reflecting Pool area

Vegetation

The landscape plan of 1916 for the lagoon, or Reflecting Pool area, called for a two rows of English elms (known then as *Ulmus campestris*) to be planted in parallel lines along the north and south sides. These rows were designed to further define the east/west axis between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. The total space allotted for the pools and the double rows was set at 320 feet, with the width of the pool designed for 160 feet and the allee between the trees for 40 feet. A 15-foot concrete walk delineated the passage through the elms. In each row, individual trees were planted approximately 25 feet on center. The designers sited the rows of elms and a pair of concrete walks on the top of two terraced slopes, which paralleled the pools and rose 4 feet above them. The terraces extended the full length of the axis. At the smaller pool, the trees were placed in curved lines to complement the circular sections of its geometric outline. The four lines of elms ended just before their intersection with 17th Street, as shown on the 1916 Howard plan. At this north/south thoroughfare, an appropriate break in the street trees (*Ulmus americana*) on the west and east side of 17th Street kept the main visual axis between the monuments free of large-scale distractions and served to both emphasize and frame the view.⁸⁴

The planting plan from this 1916 landscape design remains essentially intact. However, a few losses and changes have occurred. Along 17th Street, the northeast line of trees framing the main axis view is no longer standing and have not been replaced. Over the years, the elms originally planted along the Reflecting Pool have died. Unlike 17th Street and the rest of the mall, which are planted with American elms, a different type of elm was selected for the Reflecting Pool area. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. recommended English elms for the double rows of trees along the Reflecting Pool, but documentation suggests that Dutch elm (*Ulmus x hollandica*), may have

been planted originally.⁸⁵ Presently, most of the Reflecting Pool elms are Dutch elms with a few smoothleaf, American, English and Scotch elms (*Ulmus carpinifolia*, *Ulmus americana*, *Ulmus procera*, *Ulmus glabra*) planted in between. Olmsted’s elm selection suggests a conscience decision to define a different tree form for this area. English elms that did not survive have been replaced in the same locations, but with other more sturdy and Dutch elm disease-resistant species. Such replanting has created a corridor of trees of varying heights, crowns and circumferences. The smaller number of mature elms on the south side of the Reflecting Pool may be due to compacted soil in this area. High levels of pedestrian traffic passing between the trees to the adjacent athletic fields, as well as the trees proximity to flood prone areas of the park, may have brought about this condition. On the north side there are more mature elms. These elms are subject to less drainage problems and less compaction from recreational and pedestrian activity. The presence of a flood control berm also discourages walking between the trees to Constitution Gardens. Only a few designated paths cross over the berm, which limits impact to the elms in this area.



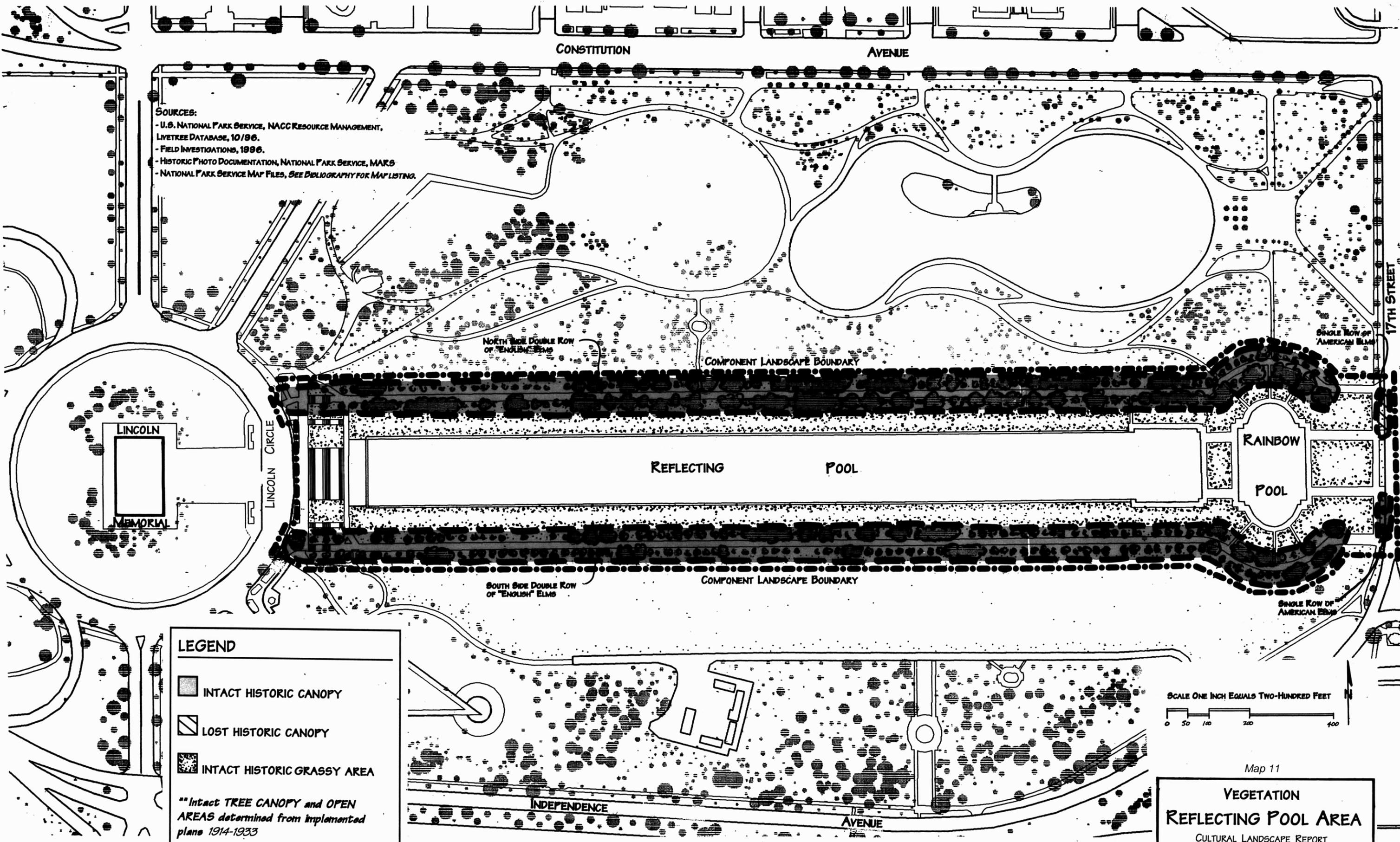
The Reflecting Pool area is divided into three vegetation zones. These zones define the spatial composition of the tree canopy of the north and south paths, 17th Street corridor, and the lawn area. By breaking the vegetation into smaller areas, there is a better sense of the integrity from the original plans. See Map 11 *Reflecting Pool area - Vegetation* map for graphic representation.

Figure 45 – Elm walk on south side of Reflecting Pool, November 10, 1996. LINC 11-35.

Contributing Features	Noncontributing Features
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Double row of “English” elms trees along Reflecting Pool main walks 2. Remnant row of American elms along 17th Street 3. Open grassy areas around Reflecting Pool and Rainbow Pool 	

SOURCES:

- U.S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, NACC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, LIVETREE DATABASE, 10/96.
- FIELD INVESTIGATIONS, 1996.
- HISTORIC PHOTO DOCUMENTATION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, MAR3
- NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MAP FILES, SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR MAP LISTING.



LEGEND

- INTACT HISTORIC CANOPY
- LOST HISTORIC CANOPY
- INTACT HISTORIC GRASSY AREA

**Intact TREE CANOPY and OPEN AREAS determined from implemented plans 1914-1933

SCALE ONE INCH EQUALS TWO-HUNDRED FEET
 0 50 100 200 400

Map 11
VEGETATION
REFLECTING POOL AREA
 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT
 LINCOLN MEMORIAL GROUNDS
 PREPARED BY: M. JOSEPH DATE: OCTOBER 1996

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