



Oblique aerial, ca. 1968-70

**Name of Property:** Painted Desert Community Complex

**City, State:** Petrified Forest National Park, Apache County, Arizona

**Period of Significance:** 1961-1965

**NHL Criteria:** 1, 4

**NHL Theme:** III. Expressing Cultural Values

5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

**Previous Recognition:** NRHP, National Level of Significance (2006); National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Treasure (2014)

**National Historic Context:** (PL 101-628, Section 1209, NHL Bulletin, pp. 15-20)

“National Park Service Mission 66 Era Resources” Multiple Property Documentation Form (2014)

**NHL Significance:**

- Criterion 1: America’s decade-long Mission 66 program addressed postwar park needs for up-to-date facilities and improved visitor experiences, while limiting impacts to natural resources. As part of the Mission 66 Program the \$1.9 million complex comprised an oasis in the desert as a new park headquarters for Petrified Forest National Park. The Painted Desert Community Complex is the largest and the most fully articulated expression of Mission 66 values given the variety of functions housed in its concentrated footprint, including park administration and maintenance, staff housing, education, recreation, and a new property type—the visitor center—conveniently located adjacent to a major highway, Interstate 40.
- Criterion 4: The complex constitutes an International Style park headquarters designed by renowned architects Richard J. Neutra and Robert E. Alexander. The plan masterfully contains the many park headquarter functions within a consolidated, environmentally sensitive footprint that shelters its users from the windswept desert. Architectural elements utilized by Neutra in earlier residential and institutional designs are



incorporated in the buildings, including horizontality, flat and widely cantilevered roofs, spider leg roof structures, bands of windows, minimal ornamentation, limited incorporation of walls or panels of natural stone, use of aluminum and primary paint colors for accents, and a central plaza, a covered, connecting walkway, and courtyards became integral landscape features continuing the stylistic idiom.

**Integrity:**

- Painted Desert Community Complex maintains a high degree of historic physical integrity. The original plan of Neutra and Alexander is readily apparent. Many ca. 1980s alterations made for energy efficiency or to gain additional space have been reversed in recent years, bolstering the complex's integrity.

**Owner of Property:** United States Government, National Park Service

**Acreage of Property:** 20.3 acres

**Origins of Nomination:** In May 2013, Petrified Forest National Park Superintendent, Brad Traver, requested the Painted Desert Community Complex be designated a National Historic Landmark for its association with Mission 66 and Neutra and Alexander. This request followed on the heels of the March 2013 demolition of Neutra and Alexander's only other Mission 66 project, the Visitor Center and Cyclorama Building at Gettysburg National Military Park.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** Recognition will further the recognition of the Mission 66 Program and the role of Modern architecture in the national parks. It will also raise awareness for preservation of the complex, complementing efforts by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which listed the complex as a National Treasure in 2014.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

None known.

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:** Designation. Dr. Mills moved, Dr. Chen seconded; unanimous approval.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 10/13/16):**

William S. Collins, PhD, State Historic Preservation Office, Arizona State Parks  
Jeanne Swarthout, PhD, President, Northland Pioneer College; Board Chair, Friends of the Petrified Forest, Holbrook, Arizona

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**