

## Facts for Feds:

*a briefing service of the  
Federal Preservation Institute  
National Park Service  
February 2007*

### **FEDERAL STEWARDSHIP OF NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS** *One-Third of Federal Landmarks were Documented More Than Forty Years Ago*

#### **What are National Historic Landmarks?**

National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. Since 1960 fewer than 2,500 historic places have been granted this national distinction. Excluding the 74 properties managed by the National Park Service, other federal agencies are stewards to 204 designated Landmarks. While the Department of Defense protects nearly 80 Landmarks, most Departments control fewer than five nationally significant properties.

#### **What is the standard for federal stewardship at National Historic Landmarks?**

The National Historic Preservation Act requires, in Section 110, that Federal Preservation Officers exercise a “higher standard” of care when considering undertakings that may directly and adversely affect National Historic Landmarks. This means that Federal Preservation Officers must ensure that agency planning activities “consider all prudent and feasible alternatives” to actions that will damage National Historic Landmarks. In addition, agencies must, “to the maximum extent possible,” plan to “minimize harm” to designated Landmarks.

#### **How can Federal Preservation Officers protect designated Landmarks from agency impacts?**

Federal actions that have the potential to adversely effect National Historic Landmarks are assigned additional historic preservation review to ensure that these nationally significant places are given due consideration. The Federal Preservation Officer must ensure that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Secretary of the Interior are provided opportunities to consult on the proposed adverse undertaking. The Advisory Council maintains comprehensive records regarding consultation on federal agency adverse effects on National Historic Landmarks. Since 1960 the Secretary of the Interior has withdrawn the designation of 27 National Historic Landmarks—of which only four appear to have resulted from federal undertakings. Developing a federal project that impacts a National Historic Landmark to the extent that compromises its physical integrity is contrary to the intent of the National Historic Preservation Act and should be avoided. Establishing and monitoring the implementation of higher standards for considering impact of federal undertakings on National Historic Landmarks is one hallmark of an effective federal historic preservation program.

#### **What is the physical condition of federally-owned National Historic Landmarks?**

Every two years the National Park Service surveys the condition of National Historic Landmarks and reports on their condition. Federal Preservation Officers should work with the National Park Service to ensure that information maintained on the National Historic Landmarks web site ([www.cr.nps.gov/nhl](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nhl))

accurately depicts the condition of Landmarks under their stewardship. The National Park Service characterized the condition of Landmarks as being either:

- **Lost:** The Landmark has lost its integrity. Designation should be withdrawn.
- **Emergency:** The Landmark has suffered recent catastrophic damage that requires immediate intervention to preserve the resource and prevent withdrawal of designation.
- **Threatened:** The Landmark has suffered or is in imminent danger of suffering a severe loss of integrity.
- **Watch:** The Landmark faces impending actions or circumstances that likely will cause a loss of integrity.
- **Satisfactory:** The Landmark faces no known threats.

### **How good is the quality of information regarding National Historic Landmarks?**

Documentation of the significance and physical description of each National Historic Landmark can be found in the original nomination form. This form is often the primary document used by federal agencies in making historic preservation decisions about Landmarks. It is also the official baseline for evaluating changes to the integrity of a Landmark since its designation. Although many additional studies may have been completed on individual Landmarks as part of ongoing management activities, this information has generally not been comprehensively incorporated into the property's designation documents.

More than one-third of the National Historic Landmarks under federal stewardships were designated prior to the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966! In addition, eighty percent of federal Landmarks were designated more than 20 years ago, and thus, the quality and accuracy of the descriptive information contained on these nominations is dated. Moreover, the documentation of these nationally significant places can reflect out-of-date trends and perspectives of historical interpretation.

### **National Historic Landmark Designations**

<b>1960-1966</b>	<b>1967-1976</b>	<b>1977-1986</b>	<b>1987-1996</b>	<b>1997-2006</b>
73	39	51	32	9
36%	19%	25%	16%	4%

Given their legal mandate to provide a higher standard of care for National Historic Landmarks, Federal Preservation Officers should consider updating older National Historic Landmark nominations as a high priority for their historic preservation programs. Only with comprehensive and accurate information, can federal stewards meet their responsibilities to ensure the appropriate treatment of these nationally significant historic properties.

*For more information, send an email to [NPS\\_fpi@nps.gov](mailto:NPS_fpi@nps.gov) or call 202-354-6999.  
Federal Preservation Institute, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW (2254), Washington, D.C. 20240*

