



National Register of Historic Places - Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) A Quick Guide for Preserving Native American Cultural Resources

What is a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP)?

A Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) is a property that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) based on its associations with the cultural practices, traditions, beliefs, lifeways, arts, crafts, or social institutions of a living community. TCPs are rooted in a traditional community's history and are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.

The cultural practices or beliefs that give a TCP its significance are, in many cases, still observed at the time a TCP is considered for inclusion in the NRHP. Because of this, it is sometimes perceived that the practices or beliefs themselves, not the property, make up the TCP. While the beliefs or practices associated with a TCP are of central importance, the NRHP does not include intangible resources. The TCP must be a physical property or place--that is, a district, site, building, structure, or object.

What constitutes a "traditional" community?

A "traditional" community is a one that has beliefs, customs, and practices that have continued over time, been passed down through the generations, are shared, and help to define the traditions of the community.

Are TCPs eligible for the NRHP under a special criteria?

There are no special criteria for TCPs. In order to be eligible for listing in the NRHP a TCP must still meet one of the four basic Criteria for Evaluation, as outlined in *36 CFR Part 60.4 (a, b, c, d)* and must retain integrity (*see National Register Bulletin 15, Chapter VIII*). A TCP is simply a different way of grouping or looking at historic resources, emphasizing a place's value and significance to a living community.

How are TCPs identified?

TCPs are best identified by consulting directly with members of a traditional community. Members often have a special perspective on properties that play important roles in their historically rooted beliefs, customs, and practices. While certain properties may be documented in the historic literature or through previous ethnographic or archeological studies, information on other properties may have only been passed down through generations by oral history or practice.

For Indian tribes and Native Hawaiians, knowledge of TCP locations may reside with tribal elders or traditional practitioners who may retain specific confidential information regarding the location of properties and the special qualities associated with them. Sensitivity to these issues may be necessary during any identification and documentation process.

What types of properties might be eligible for listing as TCPs?

Examples of TCPs might include:

- a location associated with the traditional beliefs of a Native American group about its origins, its cultural history, or the nature of the world;
- a rural community whose organization, buildings and structures, or patterns of land use reflect the cultural traditions valued by its long-term residents;
- a location where Native American religious practitioners have historically gone, and are known to go today, to perform ceremonial activities in accordance with traditional cultural rules of practice;



- an urban neighborhood that is the traditional home of a particular cultural group, and that reflects its continuing beliefs and practices;
- a location where a community has traditionally carried out economic, artistic, or other cultural practices important in maintaining its historic identity.

What are some TCPs that are listed in the NRHP for their association with Native Americans?

Bassett Grove Ceremonial Grounds, Oklahoma. The Grounds have been the site of specific ceremonies conducted by the Seneca and Cayuga Indians since 1832 and illustrate an intimate association between valued traditional practices and a singular location.

Kuchamaa (Tecate Peak), California. A sacred mountain associated with the Kumeyaay Indians. The mountain peak marks a significant location for the acquisition of knowledge and power by shamans and remains a site of important rituals and rites.

Nantucket Sound, Massachusetts. The Sound is an essential component of a larger traditional cultural landscape important to the ongoing practices, beliefs, and traditions of the Wampanoag tribes of Cape Cod. Features include landscape forms central to events associated with the Wampanoag stories, as well as archeological and historic sites associated with the ongoing practices and traditions of the local tribes.

What should be considered before nominating a TCP to the NRHP?

The decision to pursue the public identification and documentation of a TCP is one that should be made after careful consideration. Helping people to better understand those types of places of greatest value to traditional communities is a worthy goal, but each decision has to be weighed with the understanding that the identification and evaluation processes may have additional ramifications, including the potential release of sensitive information and greater public access to often isolated properties.

What are the benefits of listing a TCP in the National Register of Historic Places?

The identification of TCPs can help preserve those physical properties associated with often-intangible aspects of a local community's cultural history. Listing in the NRHP provides traditional communities with a way to document and protect those places associated with their cultural practices, traditions, beliefs, lifeways, arts, crafts, or social institutions. In addition, listing a TCP in the NRHP mandates a review process for any Federal, federally licensed, or federally assisted projects that might affect the property as well as requiring consultation with the affected traditional community (see *Quick Guide – Section 106*).

For more information

For more information about the NRHP nomination process, visit the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places Program website at: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/>

For more information regarding TCP identification, evaluation of eligibility, and documentation, refer to National Register Bulletin 38, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties, revised 1998* at: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb38/>