

DESCRIPTION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES INVESTIGATIONS

There are multiple levels of investigation to identify and evaluate cultural resources. This brief summary focuses on the kinds of investigations engaged in at the field office level by employees who have completed basic cultural resources training, and by Field Office Cultural Resource Coordinators each of whom has completed additional training. The kind and level of documentation needed for such investigations are also described. More detailed information about the levels and kinds of surveys and documentation can be found in NRCS GM 420, Part 401 and 601, and in the State Historic Preservation Office guidelines ("National Historic Preservation Act Archeological Properties Section 106 Guidelines") published January 11, 2001 by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Cultural Resources Investigation is a general term that includes all types and levels of work to identify and evaluate cultural resources and treat the effects of NRCS actions on them. Field office employees may participate in any cultural resource investigation with appropriate supervision.

Cultural Resources Review is an examination of current information to determine the likelihood that cultural resources are, or may be, present in an assistance area. "Current" means checking the NRHP, asking questions of the landowner/operator about resources they know of or suspect may be present, and checking with other knowledgeable sources and organizations. NRCS personnel who have completed the required cultural resources basic training can complete the review, which varies in complexity depending on the relative amount of ground disturbance anticipated by the assistance, the amount of area involved, and the training of the individual employee. Such reviews conducted by a cultural resources specialist are typically more elaborate (see NRCS GM 420 Part 401). In the field office this review always includes checking the cultural resources map, and asking questions of the landowner/operator. Depending on the nature of the assistance a review may or may not include other actions described. Documentation of the review is notes to the assistance file, the CPA 52 (only a summary of the action), a No Resources Found (NORF) worksheet (see NPPH Supplement), or a formal report (see SHPO guidelines). The amount of area involved is a concern when the review is completed entirely by a non-specialist because of the long-standing belief that the greater the area involved the more likely the presence of cultural resources, particularly archeological sites. Field office employees should be particularly cautious in diverse landscape areas or areas greater than several acres in size. This comports with the basic training, and field office personnel should seek the assistance of the FOCRC and CRS frequently in such situations.

A Field Inspection is an examination of the area that may be impacted by an undertaking and is designed to physically locate and document the presence of cultural resources. This is the most common level of investigation by NRCS field

office personnel. The inspection is conducted by either a cultural resources specialist or NRCS personnel who have completed required basic cultural resources training, or by a FOCRC. The scope of the inspection is generally small and is normally used on farm or ranch fields or conservation treatment areas. FOCRC and CRS complete a NORF worksheet if no resources are found, or a Site Survey Form (see NPPH Supplement for both) if an archeological or historical site is found. If a cultural resource is identified the FOCRC and CRS, but typically the latter, will prepare a formal report following SHPO guidelines.

Cultural resources identified during reviews and inspections are evaluated to establish their significance and thus eligibility for listing in the NRHP. Evaluations always directly involve the cultural resources specialist.

A Cultural Resources Survey is a systematic set of field investigations that may range in scope from: a) a reconnaissance survey that examines all or part of an area in sufficient detail to make generalizations about the types and distributions of cultural resources that may be present; to b) an intensive survey, which is a detailed examination of an area designed to gather information about cultural resources sufficient to evaluate them against predetermined criteria for evaluation of the NRHP. The CRS is directly involved in such surveys and a formal report, following SHPO guidelines is prepared.

The SHPO uses a different classification of reports for which definitions are based on the area involved, whether or not resources are identified, and whether excavation is involved. The styles of report are large, medium and small. Details about the content of these reports can be found in the SHPO guidelines.

The SHPO guidelines, nor the NRCS GM definitions are intended to be mutually exclusive but may be more correctly thought of as somewhat arbitrary segments of a continuum of reporting requirements. Reports should reflect the scope and complexity of the project, investigation efforts, and the resources identified or evaluated.