

## SECTION II - C

### CULTURAL RESOURCES INFORMATION

#### What Are Cultural Resources?

**Cultural resources** are all the past activities and accomplishments of people. They include buildings, objects, locations, and structures that have scientific, historic, and cultural value. They also include folk ways, dance forms, and other less tangible resources.

NRCS deals most often with prehistoric or historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, features, or objects. NRCS field personnel are most likely to encounter archeological sites that are characterized by artifacts scattered on and below the soil surface.

#### Why Are Cultural Resources Important?

Cultural resources are part of the overall resource base. The information recovered from studying cultural resources may contribute to solving some of today's problems. Prehistoric archeological sites are important because they are the only way we can learn about people who kept no written records. Information from historic archeological sites can be used to confirm or correct the written records left by more recent inhabitants.

Cultural resources are **non-renewable resources**. Once destroyed, they cannot be replaced. Because of the unique value of cultural resources, Congress has passed many laws protecting them. The most recent and comprehensive law to protect cultural resources is the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This law established national policy that requires all federal agencies to consider cultural resources when conducting their programs, and to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects on significant resources.

The State of Maryland has a similar law to protect cultural resources at the state level. The Maryland Historical Trust is the state agency that assists other agencies and the public with protection of cultural resources.

It should be noted that as long as there is no federal or state technical assistance, financial assistance, permits, or local ordinances involved, a landowner is not legally obligated to protect the cultural resources on his/her property. Federal and state historic preservation requirements apply only to the actions of federal and state agencies, respectively.

#### What Makes A Cultural Resource Eligible For The National Register?

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources determined worthy of preservation. Resources such as historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture are included on the list. The National Register is not a complete list, however, because many cultural resources have not yet been identified, and their significance is unknown. Known sites that have been determined significant are listed by county on the National Register.

There is a Maryland Register of Historic Properties that is a listing of all resources on the National Register that are located in Maryland. The Maryland Historical Trust maintains this list as well as an inventory of all districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of known or potential value in the state.

To be eligible for the National Register, a cultural resource must have **integrity of location, design, materials, or association**.

Integrity, or historic authenticity of a resource, is defined by the presence of original building materials.

For example, a house or bridge should look essentially the same as it did when it was first built. An archeological site should be relatively intact with little disturbance from erosion, plowing, or

construction. Usually, cultural resources without such integrity are not eligible for the National Register and, therefore, are not significant.

In addition, to be eligible for the National Register, a cultural resource must be:

1. Associated with events contributing in important ways to broad patterns of our history, such as the development of Indian civilization or the westward expansion of America; or,
2. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or,
3. Distinctively characteristic of a type, period, or method of construction, such as a Victorian house or a Pueblo Indian kiva; or,
4. Likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. For example, an archeological site could provide information on the origins of agriculture among prehistoric Indian groups in a region.

The information that can be gained from the excavation of a site is particularly significant if:

- a. The site is well preserved;
- b. It is of a time period that is underrepresented in a particular area or about which little is known;
- c. There is an extensive array of artifacts from the site;
- d. It can yield important environmental information, such as soil formation data; or,
- e. It can provide an opportunity for public education.

Significance may be considered at the local, state, or national level for listing of a cultural resource on the National Register. In other words, a house doesn't have to be the home of George Washington to be eligible for the National Register. The home of an important local figure is also eligible if it meets the integrity requirement. Significant local and state level resources make up the bulk of the National Register listings.

Generally, properties that are less than 50 years old are not considered eligible for the National Register unless they are of exceptional importance.

### **What is NRCS Policy Concerning Cultural Resources?**

NRCS recognizes that cultural resources are an important part of our national and local heritage. It is NRCS policy to protect and consider cultural resources in all of its conservation programs. The protection and consideration of cultural resources is to be accomplished by:

1. Identifying resources early in the planning stages of all assistance activities;
2. Protecting resources in their original location to the fullest extent possible, and developing feasible alternatives to reduce unavoidable impacts that may be harmful;
3. Informing land owners/users about the importance of cultural resources;
4. Working with state and local agencies, other federal agencies, and the public to ensure conservation of cultural resources.

### **References**

Cultural resources information can be found in a variety of references. The most important reference for NRCS policy is the **General Manual 420, Part 401**. The General Manual contains a summary of federal historic preservation laws, plus detailed information concerning NRCS policy for protection of cultural resources.

The Cultural Resources Coordinator, located in the Maryland NRCS State Office, may be contacted if assistance or additional information is needed.