Key Definitions

Historic Landscapes
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The field of historic landscape preservation has generated a specific vocabulary. Definitions have been published by two National Park Service programs: the National Register History and Education Program and the Heritage Preservation Services Program. The definitions below are either direct quotes from these published glossaries, paraphrases of the published definition, or “hybrids” of definitions.

Publications used to compile this list were:
How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes (1987)—formerly National Register Bulletin 18
Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes (198)—formerly National Register Bulletin 30
Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties (1990)—formerly National Register Bulletin 38

General Terms

Property, as used to describe eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places:

- **District:** a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of site, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development)*
- **Site:** Location of significant event, a prehistoric or historic occupation or activity, or a building or structure, whether standing, ruined, or vanished, where the location itself possesses historic, cultural, or archeological value regardless of the value of any existing structure*
- **Building:** A resource created principally to shelter any form of human activity, such as a house**
- **Structure:** A functional construction made for purposes other than creating shelter, such as a bridge**
- **Object:** Relatively small but important stationary or movable constructions, including markets and monuments, small boats, machinery, and equipment.**

*districts and sites are properties that may be historic landscapes
**buildings, structures, and objects may be components of landscapes gardening or landscape architecture; or a significant relationship to the theory or practice of landscape architecture.

Significance:

The importance for which a property has been evaluated and found to meet the National Register Criteria:

- Criterion A—association with events and activities
- Criterion B—association with important persons
- Criterion C—distinctive physical characteristic of design, construction, or form
- Criterion D—potential to yield important information
**Historic character:**
The physical appearance of a property as it has evolved over time, i.e., the original configuration together with losses and later changes. The qualities of a property conveyed by its material, features, spaces, and finishes are referred to as “character-defining.”

**Historic landscape:**
A geographic area, including both historic and natural features, associated with an event, person, activity, or design style that is significant in American history. Historic landscapes are a subset of the more inclusive term, “cultural landscape.”

**Cultural landscape:**
A geographic area (including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein) associated with a historic event, activity, or person, or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values. There are four general types of cultural landscapes, not mutually exclusive:
- Historic sites
- Historic designated landscapes
- Historic vernacular landscapes
- Ethnographic landscapes

**TYPES OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES**

**Historic site:**
A landscape significant for its association with a historic event, activity, or person. Examples include battlefields and presidential homes and properties.

**Designed historic landscape:**
A landscape that has significance as a design or a work of art; was consciously designed and laid out by a master gardener, landscape architect, architect, or horticulturist to a design principle, or an owner or other amateur using a recognized style or tradition in response or reaction to a recognized style or tradition; has a historical association with a significant person, trend, event, etc., in landscape gardening or landscape architecture; or a significant relationship to the theory or practice of landscape architecture.

Designed historic landscapes usually can be described as one of the following types:
- Small residential grounds
- Estate or plantation grounds (including a farm where the primary significance is as a landscape design and not as historic agriculture)
- Arboreta, botanical and display gardens
- Zoological gardens and parks
- Church yards and cemeteries
- Monuments and memorial grounds
- Plaza/square/green/mall or other public spaces
- Campus and institutional grounds
- City planning or civic design
• Subdivisions and planned communities/resorts
• Commercial and industrial grounds and parks
• Parks (local, state, and national) and camp grounds
• Battlefield parks and other commemorative parks
• Grounds designed or developed for outdoor recreation and/or sports activities such as country clubs, golf courses, tennis courts, bowling greens, bridle trails, stadia, ball parks, and race tracks, that are not part of a unit listed above.
• Fair and exhibition grounds
• Parkways, drives, and trails
• Bodies of water and fountains (considered as an independent component and not as part of a larger design scheme)

**Historic vernacular landscape:**
A landscape that evolved through use by people whose activities or occupancy shaped it. Through social or cultural attitudes or an individual, a family, or a community, the landscape reflects the physical, biological, and cultural character of everyday life. Function plays a significant role in vernacular landscapes, as exemplified in a farm complex or a district of historic farmsteads along a river valley. Examples include rural historic landscapes and agricultural landscapes.

*sometimes considered synonymous with the term, “rural historic landscape”

**Rural historic landscape:**
A geographic area that historically has been used by people, or shaped or modified by human activity, occupancy, or intervention, and that possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of areas of land use, vegetation, buildings and structures, roads and waterways, and natural features.

Rural historic landscapes usually fall within one of the following types, based upon historic occupation or land use:

• Agriculture (including various types of cropping and grazing)
• Industry (including mining, lumbering, fish-culturing, milling)
• Maritime activities (e.g., fishing, shellfishing, shipbuilding)
• Recreation (including hunting or fishing camps)
• Transportation systems
• Migration trails
• Conservation (including natural reserves)
• Sites adapted for ceremonial, religious, or other cultural activities, such as camp meeting grounds

Rural historic landscapes are listed in the National Register as sites or historic districts.

**Ethnographic landscape:**
A landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. Examples include contemporary settlements, sacred religious sites, and massive geological features. Small plant communities, animals, subsistence and ceremonial grounds are often components.

*The term “ethnographic landscape” is not commonly used in the National Register program.
Traditional cultural property:
In the National Register programs, the term “culture” is understood to mean the traditions, beliefs, practices, lifeways, arts, crafts, and social institutions of any community, be it an Indian tribe, a local ethnic group, or the people of the nation as a whole.

One kind of cultural significance that a property may possess, and that may make it eligible for inclusion in the Register, is traditional cultural significance. “Traditional” in this context refers to those beliefs, customs, and practices of a living community of people that have been passed down through the generations, usually orally or through practice. The traditional cultural significance of a historic property, then, is significance derived from the role that property plays in a community’s historically rooted beliefs, customs, and practices. Examples of properties possessing such significance 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;
- An urban neighborhood that is the traditional home of a particular cultural group, and that reflects its beliefs and practices;
- A location where Native American religious practitioners have historically gone, and are known or thought to go today, to perform ceremonial activities in accordance with traditional cultural rules of practice; and
- A location where a community has traditionally carried out economic, artistic, or other cultural practices important in maintaining its historical identity.

COMPONENTS OF THE LANDSCAPE

Spatial relationships:
The three-dimensional organization and pattern of spaces in a landscape. They may have evolved for visual or functional purposes and include views within the landscape itself. Spatial organization is created by a variety of elements, some of which intentionally form visual links of barriers, such as fences and hedgerows. Other elements less intentionally create spaces and visual connections in the landscape, such as topography and open water.

Setting and environment:
The context in which a historic landscape occurs, whether urban or rural, that contributes to its historic character. Elements may include adjacent lands, views, watersheds, transportation or circulation corridors, land use patterns, streetscapes, and natural systems.

Vegetation:
Includes crops, trees, or shrubs planted for agricultural and ornamental purposes, but also trees that have grown up incidentally along fence lines, beside roads, or in abandoned fields. Vegetation may include indigenous, naturalized and introduced species.
Topography:
The shape of the ground. Topography occurs naturally and may be shaped through human activity. Landforms may contribute to the creation of outdoor spaces, may serve a functional purpose, or provide visual interest.

Natural systems:
Include geology, hydrology, plant an animal habitats, and climate. Many historic landscapes derive their character from a human response to natural systems.

Water features:
May be aesthetic and functional components of the landscape. Their associated water supply, drainage, and mechanical systems are important components of water features. Some attributes of water features are shape (form), sound, edge, and bottom condition/material, water level or depth, movement or flow, reflective qualities, and associated plant or animal life.

Circulation:
Systems for transporting people, goods, and raw materials from one point to another. Circulation systems may be roads, parkways, drives, trails, walks, paths, parking areas, and canals. They may occur individually or be linked to form networks or systems. The character of circulation features is defined by attributes such as alignment, surface treatment, width, edge, grade, and infrastructure.

Boundary demarcations:
Delineate areas of ownership and land use. Typically, such features as fences, walls, tree lines, hedgerows, drainage or irrigation ditches, roadways, creeks, and rivers represent historic boundary lines. Such demarcations sometimes are referred to as “landscape edges”.

Buildings, structures, objects:
Various types of buildings, structures, and objects serve human needs related to the occupation and use of the land (see “General Terms/Property” above)

Clusters:
Groupings of buildings, fences, and other features, as seen in a farmstead, ranch, or mining complex. The repetition of similar clusters throughout a landscape may indicate vernacular patterns of sitting, spatial organization, and land use. Also, the location of clusters, such as the market towns that emerged at the crossroads of early highways, may reflect broad patterns of a region’s cultural geography.

Archeological sites:
Archeological sites may be the location of prehistoric or historic activity or occupation, may be marked by foundations, ruins, changes in vegetation, and surface remains. The spatial distribution of features, surface disturbances, subsurface remains, patterns of soil erosion and deposition, and soil composition may also yield information about the evolution and past uses of the land.
Site furnishings and objects:
Small-scale elements that may be functional, decorative, or both. They may be movable, seasonal, or permanently installed. They may be created as vernacular pieces associated with a particular region or cultural group, available through a catalog, or significant in their own right as works of art or as the work of a master.

TREATMENT
To subject a property to an action, process or change. The National Park Service has identified four treatment options:

Preservation:
The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features, rather than extensive replacement and new construction. New exterior additions are not within the scope of preservation; however, the limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a preservation project.

Rehabilitation:
The act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions, while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

Restoration:
The act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period. The limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a restoration project.

Reconstruction:
The act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.