

# THE NATURAL LANDMARKS PROGRAM



## THE PROGRAM

Publicly owned or privately owned, a Registered Natural Landmark is a select portion of America's land and waters. It is a Mount Katahdin, Maine; a Point Lobos, Calif.; a Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Fla.; a Shishaldin Volcano, Alaska; and a Barringer Meteor Crater, Ariz. It contains geological or ecological values of such distinctive quality as to be of national significance and worthy of designation as a Natural Landmark.

In 1864, the Congress transferred Yosemite Valley to California for preservation as parkland. Thus began a national policy of preserving outstanding examples of the country's natural and historical resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the people. Today, this national policy is implemented by two major programs of the National Park Service: Administration of areas of the National Park System, and identification and registration of National Landmarks to encourage the preservation of nationally significant properties regardless of ownership.

The objectives of the Natural Landmarks Program are (1) to encourage the preservation of sites illustrating the geological and ecological character of the United States, (2) to enhance the educational and scientific value of sites thus preserved, (3) to strengthen cultural appreciation of natural history, and (4) to foster a greater concern in the conservation of the Nation's natural heritage.

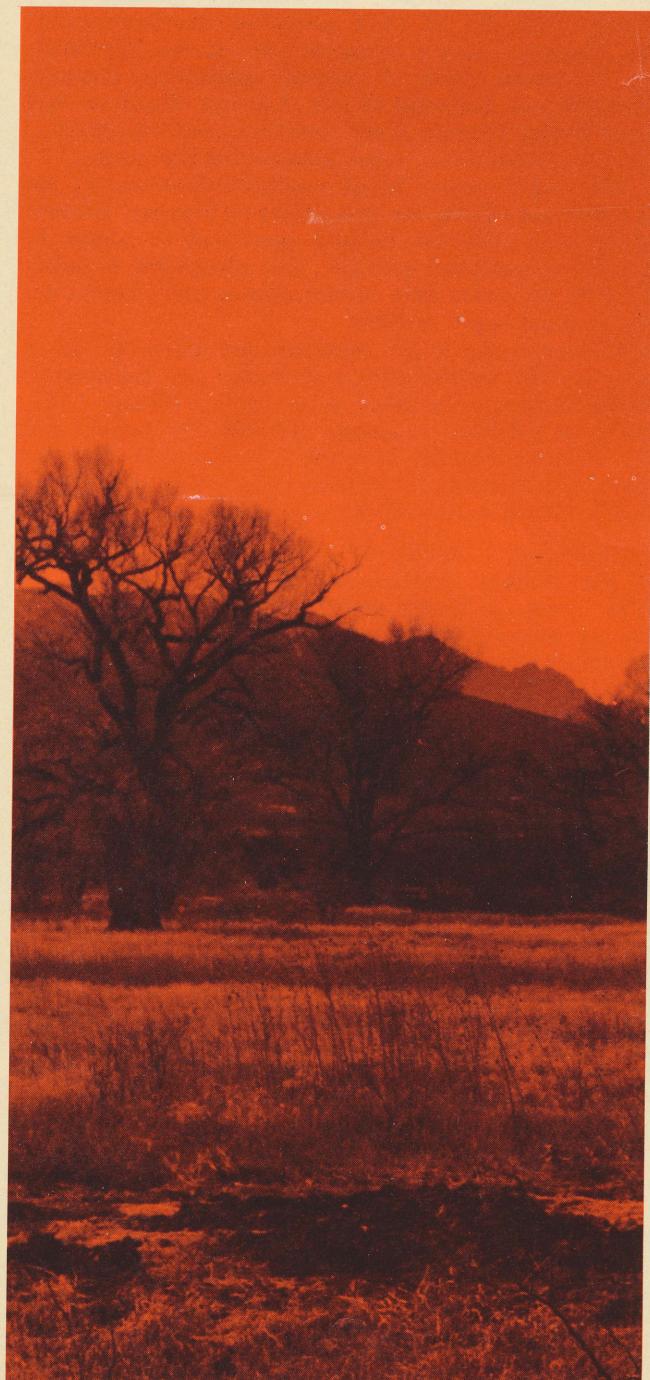
Under this program the National Park Service strives to assure the preservation of such a variety of significant natural areas that, when considered together, they will illustrate the diversity of the country's natural environment.

The Service has compiled a list of themes to provide a logical and scientific basis for the selection of Natural Areas. These themes help in identifying the kinds of areas which adequately represent the natural character of the United States. They are used to characterize the natural areas of the National Park System as well as Natural Landmarks.

Just as nature is a complex overlapping of water, land, air, plants, and animals, so do these themes overlap. A Natural Landmark may represent overwhelmingly a single theme which best characterizes it but it also may represent other themes. The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Florida, for example, represents a land ecosystem, an aquatic ecosystem, and subtropical habitats of land and animals, especially birdlife. It is characterized by a variety of themes.

The themes represent two major categories of natural phenomena. One is geological, the other, ecological. Even these categories are more interrelated than they are distinct. Rare scenery may be a quality of a Natural Landmark, resulting from unique groupings of both ecology and geological features. But scenery is not an essential factor in classifying Natural Landmarks.

As progress is made in the natural sciences, new themes may be useful. Today, the National Park Service uses the following themes in identifying areas selected as Natural Landmarks:



#### LANDFORMS OF THE PRESENT

Plains, plateaus, mesas  
Cuestas and hogbacks  
Mountain systems  
The works of volcanoes  
Hot water phenomena  
Sculpture of the land  
Eolian landforms (sand dunes)  
River systems and lakes  
The work of glaciers  
Seashores, lakeshores, islands  
Coral islands, reefs, atolls  
Earthquake phenomena  
Caves and springs  
Meteor impact sites

#### GEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE EARTH

The morning of life (3 billion to 600 million years ago)  
Age of primitive invertebrates (600 to 420 million years ago)  
Rise of vertebrates, first forests (420 to 350 million years ago)  
Great development of land life, changes in marine life (350 to 180 million years ago)  
Age of reptiles (270 to 70 million years ago)  
Emerging dominance of mammals (70 to 40 million years ago)  
Golden age of mammals (40 million years ago through the Pleistocene)  
Age of man

#### LAND ECOSYSTEMS

Tundra  
Boreal forest (just south of Arctic tundra)  
Pacific forest  
Dry coniferous forest and woodland  
Eastern deciduous forest  
Grassland (steppe)  
Chaparral  
Deserts  
Tropical region  
Special ecosystems (bogs, balds, lava flows, etc.)  
Special interest species (rare, and relict, i.e., confined habitat, etc.)

#### AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

Marine environments  
Habitats of special interest (bird and mammal colonies)  
Estuaries  
Streams  
Underground waters with distinctive animal life  
Lakes and ponds  
Fresh-water species of special interest (rare, relict species)

As the National Park Service evaluates sites for these characteristics, it is also gradually completing an inventory of the country's natural areas. The study focuses attention on these areas and often stimulates communities to take action in preserving significant areas.

After sites are evaluated by the National Park Service, those which appear to qualify are submitted to the Secretary's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments for its recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior as to eligibility for registration. Upon the Secretary's approval of a site, the owner is invited to apply for a certificate and a bronze plaque designating the site as a Registered Natural Landmark. In requesting registration, owners agree to comply with basic conservation practices relating to management and protection.

The list of properties eligible for Landmark designation is published in a booklet entitled *National Parks and Landmarks*, which is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. (Write to that office for price lists.)

#### CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

National significance is ascribed to areas which possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural heritage of our Nation. Such values may include, but are not limited to:

1. Outstanding geological formations or features significantly illustrating geologic processes.
2. Significant fossil evidence of the development of life on earth.
3. An ecological community significantly illustrating characteristics of a physiographic province or a biome.
4. A biota of relative stability maintaining itself under prevailing natural conditions, such as a climatic climax community.
5. An ecological community significantly illustrating the process of succession and restoration to natural condition following disruptive change.
6. A habitat supporting a vanishing, rare, or restricted species.
7. A relict flora or fauna persisting from an earlier period.
8. A seasonal haven for concentrations of native animals, or a vantage point for observing concentrated populations, such as a constricted migration route.
9. A site containing significant evidence illustrating important scientific discoveries.
10. Examples of the scenic grandeur of our natural heritage.

To possess national significance, the area must reflect integrity. Thus, it must be a true, accurate, essentially unspoiled example of nature.

## STANDARDS FOR CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE

**INTEGRITY OF RESOURCE.** Continuing integrity is an essential element in maintenance of the quality of national significance. The test is: does the area still possess intact the resource or resources for which it received recognition as being of national significance? A bird rookery may be abandoned, or a virgin forest may be destroyed by a hurricane or cut for lumber. Loss of integrity may range from such obvious examples of resource destruction or depletion to more subtle ones in which an ecological successional stage lost through natural change, inattention, or mismanagement.

Moreover, a Landmark may lose integrity if, even through no fault of the Landmark owner or administrator, circumstances and events on the lands adjacent to the Landmark result in the serious impairment, diminishment, or destruction of Landmark resources, character, and significance. Thus a highway project or drainage around a swamp could destroy its ecology. Intense and uncontrolled development adjacent to a Landmark significant for its wildlife may drive away or significantly diminish the numbers of wildlife.

Reference to the original Landmark application and description is essential to evaluate continuing integrity.

**ACCEPTABILITY OF USE.** Many Landmarks are in private ownership. Indeed, a primary purpose of the Landmarks program is to encourage and assist private individuals and organizations in protecting and preserving important elements of the Nation's cultural and natural heritage.

Some of the Landmarks are operated as commercial enterprises. Income from admission and sale of goods and services may support a business, and the profit motive may be an essential consideration in the management and preservation of the property. Commercial operation *per se* does not disqualify a site for continued landmark status. It is recognized, however, that the enterprise itself, by location, impact, excessive use, or management philosophy, may so dilute the quality of the Landmark that it no longer meets the test of integrity. Therefore, the following guidelines will be used in evaluating acceptability of use of Landmarks.

### 1. Commercial Visitor Use

- a. The commercial services and developments, if any, are located so as to avoid imposition upon or dilution of the integrity of the resources for which the area is recognized as a Landmark.
- b. The tone and atmosphere of the commercial activity, if any, is in good taste and compatible with the natural values of the Landmark.
- c. Advertising and promotional activities are factually correct, in good taste, and reflect the concept that it is the feature, not the commercial activity, that has been awarded Landmark status.
- d. Interpretation, if any, of the Landmark is accurate.
- e. Use of the site is so planned and disciplined as to avoid damage or destruction of the resources for which the area was designated as a Landmark.

### 2. Consumptive Uses

Certain consumptive uses of renewable resources, such as grazing on a durable geological feature, may be compatible with maintenance of resource integrity and significance. Some may be part of the historic pattern of use. Such uses are appropriate to the extent they do not impair the integrity of the Landmark.

## RELATED PROGRAMS

**THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES.** The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 directs the Secretary of the Interior to expand the National Register, authorized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, to include places of State, regional, and local significance as well as those nationally significant places qualified for designation as National Historic Landmarks.

This act provides certain safeguards against damage by Federal undertakings for all properties included in the National Register and a grant-in-aid program to assist in their preservation. It also authorizes the establishment of an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation composed of Federal department heads, the Chairman of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and citizens appointed by the President.

While the National Register includes places of national, State, regional, and local significance, Landmark designation is the unique status accorded limited numbers of properties meeting the stringent criteria of national significance. All properties eligible for National Historic Landmark status, whether the owner applies for the formal designation or not, are entered in the National Register as soon as the Secretary of the Interior finds them of national significance.

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY.** This program for recording important examples of American architecture is conducted in cooperation with the American Institute of Architects and the Library of Congress. The records—photographs, measured drawings, written data—are deposited in the Library of Congress, where they are available for inspection and study.

Recording by HABS is evidence that a building is worthy of preservation. Most recorded buildings will be entered in the National Register either as National Historic Landmarks or by nomination of the States.

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ARCHEOLOGICAL PROGRAM.** Archeological research and protection are other major responsibilities of the National Park Service. Prehistoric ruins were among the earliest areas set aside for Department of the Interior protection. The Antiquities Act of 1906 provided the Department with initial protective and research powers in respect to archeological resources. The Act of 1916 creating the National Park Service charged that agency with protection of historic resources in the National Park System. The Historic Sites Act of 1935, the

Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960, and the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 greatly broadened these responsibilities.

The Service now conducts a program of salvage archeology where highway construction, dams, pipelines, and other projects threaten sites rich in prehistoric or historic data. A large proportion of the archeological fieldwork in this country is conducted under the Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program, sponsored by the Service.

**THE NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM.** The Historic Sites Act of 1935 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to make a survey of historic sites and buildings to identify those of national significance. Potential landmarks are evaluated by the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments, and are recommended to the Secretary of the Interior.

Sites and structures found nationally significant by the Secretary are eligible for designation as National Historic Landmarks. Upon the owner's agreement to adhere to accepted preservation precepts, this designation is recognized by the award of a bronze plaque and a certificate. The program began in 1960.

Properties eligible for landmark designation are listed in a booklet entitled *National Parks and Landmarks*. Studies leading to the selection of National Historic Landmarks are published in a series of books. The booklet and the books are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. (Write to that office for pricelists.)

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LANDMARKS.** The third part of the National Landmarks Program was started in 1968. These Landmarks are designated for use of schools and the general public for teaching the principles of environmental awareness.

**OTHER PROGRAMS.** Among the newer programs of the National Park Service is a plan to identify and record significant engineering landmarks. The Service works closely with the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Library of Congress in establishing a graphic, documentary record of the Nation's distinctive engineering accomplishments.

#### **RELATED PRESERVATION FOLDERS**

The National Park Service publishes the following information folders similar to this one on its preservation programs: *National Park Service Archeological Program*, *The National Register of Historic Places*, *The Historic American Buildings Survey*, and *The National Historic Landmarks Program*. These publications, along with this folder, are available in packet form (*National Park Service Preservation Programs*, 50 cents) from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

For further information about any of the programs mentioned in this folder, write to the Director, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**