



# Cultural Resources and Climate Change

## Background

Cultural resources, which include archeological sites, cultural landscapes, ethnographic resources, historic and prehistoric buildings and structures, and museum collections, have distinct considerations with respect to climate change. Most are fixed in place or derive much of their significance from the place within which they were created. Many are non-living, and all are unique. As a result, the capacity of cultural resources to adapt to changing environments is limited.

Impacts to cultural resources from climate change range from coastal erosion and storm damage to effects of wildfires, floods, melting permafrost, and deterioration due to changing rain and temperature patterns. Observed and projected climate change trends are a great concern as these forces accelerate, intensify, and combine in new ways that are increasing the rate of loss of cultural resources. With so many cultural resources entrusted in our care, the National Park Service (NPS) provides leadership nationwide for their preservation and management in regards to climate change.

## Approach

Cultural resources are irreplaceable indicators of the wide array of lifeways, ideas, beliefs, practices, and experiences that, over time, have led to the world we live in today. As stated in the *Director's Policy Memorandum 14-02*, "NPS cultural resource management must keep in mind that (1) cultural resources are primary sources of data regarding human interactions with climate change; and (2) changing climates affect the preservation and maintenance of cultural resources."

## Program Updates

### Policy and Program Development

- The *Directors' Policy Memorandum 14-02 Climate Change and Stewardship of Cultural Resources* sets out major directions for adaptation, decision making, and communication for cultural resources.
- NPS *Cultural Resources Climate Change Strategy* (in prep) is a companion document to the *NPS Climate Change Response Strategy* that expands upon the roles of cultural resources in climate change science, adaptation, mitigation, and communication.

### Communication

- *Every Place has a Climate Story Initiative* connects cultural resources and climate change in park-specific stories of experiencing climate change, learning from the past, and understanding how the present came to be.
- The NPS *Climate and Culture Community of Practice* is a forum for park, regional, and program staff and partners to share current projects and issues.
- Cultural resources were part of the NPS leadership role for climate change at the 2014 World Parks Congress.



Archeological survey of an eroding shoreline in Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

### Science

- NPS *Cultural Resources Climate Change Impact Table* details impacts from climate change to all categories of cultural resources.
- *Ice Patch Archeology* links researchers and Native Americans in inventory and research of artifacts exposed by melting high mountain ice patches in multiple mountain parks.
- Vulnerability assessments are linking climate projections to effects on cultural resources.

### Adaptation

- Cultural resources are incorporated into scenario planning and climate change planning frameworks.
- Adaptation options and decision-making frameworks for vulnerable cultural resources are part of the *Preserving Coastal Heritage Workshop Report* and the *Coastal Adaptations Strategies Handbook*.
- Collaboration and guidance on cultural resources management at landscape and multi-agency scales is ongoing with federal, state, tribal, and other partners.

### Mitigation

- New guidance for climate change and disaster resilience for the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* will join the *Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*.

## More Information

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