

106 SUCCESS STORY

Forest Service Approach to Preservation Yields Results, Public Benefit

Montana and Idaho

“This Programmatic Agreement is an outstanding example of the Region’s commitment to preserving its historic properties while also providing significant cost-saving efficiencies.”

—DAVE SCHMID
Deputy Regional Forester, U.S. Forest Service, Northern Region



THE STORY

The U.S. Forest Service’s (USFS) Region I comprises national forests and grasslands in northeastern Washington, northern Idaho, Montana, and western North and South Dakota. These areas contain more than 4,500 administrative structures and buildings, about one-quarter of which are more than 50 years old and require evaluation of their eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. They include ranger stations, guard stations, work centers, and fire lookouts. In addition to this historic infrastructure, there are thousands of other historic and archaeological properties, which are often located in remote backcountry settings.

THE PROJECT

To address its preservation responsibilities, USFS undertook a region-wide inventory of historic administrative structures in 1990, resulting in a holistic understanding of the number, types, range, and preservation value of these properties. The USFS was confronted with a formidable challenge in the rich and diverse collection of cultural resources scattered across national forests and grasslands, including a myriad of historic buildings and ruins. Considerations on how to best maintain and use these properties for agency and public benefit led the USFS to develop a program focused on active and expedited protection, stewardship, and continued or adaptive use.

THE 106 PROCESS

The USFS, the federal agency managing these properties, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects on those properties of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic properties when adverse effects may occur.

To more efficiently manage such a large number of geographically dispersed properties,

Photos: Above, Boulder Lookout, Bitterroot National Forest, MT; Right, before and after Jesse Elliot Ranger Station, Custer National Forest, SD (photos courtesy USFS)

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Photos: Left to right: Big Hole Peak Lookout, Lolo National Forest, MT; Northern Region Historic Preservation Team Work Shop, Missoula, MT; Pack string support, Big Hole Peak Lookout (photos courtesy USFS)

the USFS arrived at a “homegrown” solution for Region I. In 1992, it created a Historic Preservation Team (HPT) to provide systematic, readily available, cost-efficient, and sustained preservation work on its historic properties. The team’s charter was to direct historic building preservation projects throughout the region; conduct training in preservation techniques and skills (including the use of traditional tools); and complete historic building assessments and plans for upcoming preservation projects.



In 1992, the USFS, in consultation with the Idaho and Montana State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, developed a Programmatic Agreement (PA) to provide a comprehensive Section 106 review framework for the preservation work being conducted by the HPT. PAs are tools available through the Section 106 process that can guide the implementation of an entire program or the resolution of adverse effects from multiple undertakings. The Region I PA gave the USFS the ability to perform certain maintenance and rehabilitation work that complied with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties without first consulting SHPOs. This provided an expedited path for approval of preservation projects. The agreement was revised and renewed in 2015 to better reflect current conditions, including a certification program for USFS employees.

Consulting Parties:
 U.S. Forest Service – Region I
 ACHP
 Montana State Historic
 Preservation Officer
 Idaho State Historic Preservation
 Officer

THE SUCCESS

Under the purview of the PA, the HPT has completed preservation work on more than 300 historic buildings and structures since 1992. Historic buildings that might have otherwise fallen into disrepair or neglect have been maintained for interpretation and public use. Additionally, a wide variety of properties have been rehabilitated for agency operations and use. The HPT has also assisted other federal and state agencies in similar building preservation work across Region I.

The PA has resulted in a substantial cost savings by reducing the need for outside contractors, detailed project specifications and contracts, and contract management. The HPT has also contributed to public outreach through USFS’ “Passport in Time” program, which offers opportunities for the public to learn hands-on preservation skills and provides volunteer labor on maintenance and rehabilitation projects. Volunteers have logged more than 10,000 hours on these projects since the early 1990s. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the Region I program has been the direct and enthusiastic engagement of the American public, who ultimately are the beneficiaries and advocates for historic preservation on the nation’s public lands.

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

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