

Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS)

America's Landscape Legacy

During the past 20 years, historic preservation has grown beyond protecting a single structure or district to include historic landscapes that have regional or national significance. The Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) plays an important role in documenting historic, significant and beloved landscapes throughout the country.

Some historic landscapes, including portions of the most significant Revolutionary and Civil War battlefields, New York's Central Park, and the grounds of the United States Capitol, are well known and protected but many others are not. HALS makes certain that a lasting record and images of these significant landscapes in their historic context will endure if the physical character of the region cannot be protected through other means.



COURTESY DAVID LOWE

Sprawl threatens Civil War battlefields, including Cold Harbor in Virginia.

Providing adequate funding for HALS will ensure the program's ability to keep pace with growing threats posed by neglect, sprawl, invasive plants, and other negative impacts. HALS does not limit development, affect property rights, or involve the purchase of land. It simply provides a lasting record of these treasured landscapes for future generations to enjoy. Some of the most threatened landscapes nationwide include:

- **The American Ranch**

The landscape from Texas north to Montana and from the edge of the Great Plains west to the Pacific is dotted with ranches large and small. The experiences of generations are present in the fence lines, the buildings, and the seemingly endless landscape. Yet, the ranch is vanishing under the crush of subdivisions, energy development, and the march of invasive plants.

- **Revolutionary and Civil War Battlefields**

The battles of the American Revolution gave birth to the nation while those of the Civil War cost the lives of more Americans than any other single conflict. Unfortunately, the landscapes on which these crucial events took place are being threatened by highway construction, suburban sprawl, and commercial development.

- **Urban Parks and Plazas**

In cities across the country, parks and plazas provide places to play and relax and serve as open space among a sea of concrete, asphalt, and buildings. These landscapes are threatened today by maintenance backlogs, vandalism, and neglect.



COURTESY ASLA HISTORIC PRESERVATION PPN

Skyline Park in Denver was removed in 2002. Local groups documented the original design through a HALS project.

Recording Our Past, Providing Benefits Today

The Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) was established by the National Park Service in 2000 to document landscapes that serve as tangible evidence of our nation's heritage and development. In general, HALS achieves this purpose through written descriptions, measured drawings, and photographs. HALS is a companion program to the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), which have been administered by the Park Service and funded by Congress over many decades.



In addition to chronicling significant and increasingly at-risk landscapes for future generations, HALS provides a wide range of practical uses today. For example:

- **Battlefield Studies**

Over the past five years, HALS has helped to document the historic significance, location, and size of 243 battlefields from the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. HALS has also recently resurveyed 192 Civil War battlefields that were initially studied in 1991 under the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission. This project updates and assesses the conditions of, and threats to, these battlefields.

- **National Cemetery Inventories**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is following HALS guidelines in documenting the design, layout, and landscape of the oldest of its 124 National Cemeteries, the majority of which date to the Civil War. This information is critical for day-to-day management and long-term stewardship of these hallowed grounds.

- **Hurricane Katrina Response**

Following Hurricane Katrina, past efforts to document historic landscapes and properties in Louisiana and Mississippi proved invaluable. HALS staff provided the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and state and local officials with dozens of detailed digital and printed maps that literally guided bulldozers and other heavy equipment around and through historic districts during the massive cleanup process.



COURTESY SUSAN CROOK, ASLA

Volunteers document a historic landscape in Utah through research, photography, and detailed drawings.

Position of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)

Nationally significant landscapes are disappearing or are being altered at a rate that far exceeds the capabilities of the existing program to respond. Without additional resources, HALS cannot provide technical or financial assistance to local groups, ASLA state chapters, and historical associations interested in developing and completing documentation projects in or near their communities.

Each year, ASLA works with the U.S. Congress to help secure critical funding for the National Park Service (NPS) to administer and manage HALS. If approved, this funding would provide HALS with its first dedicated budget. This appropriation would support core staff, including landscape architects, historians, and geographic information systems (GIS) specialists, as well as allow the program to provide technical assistance and small seed grants to local groups. With this support, citizens nationwide can initiate and complete HALS projects and help document nationally significant landscapes.

ASLA encourages Congress to approve critical funding for HALS, which will ensure that the program can augment efforts to document these important historic landscapes for the enjoyment of Americans today and in the future.



COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The fields of Antietam, the site of the bloodiest single day of the Civil War, have been preserved as a National Battlefield.



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