

# MANAGING ALASKA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

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## ABSTRACT

The National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office, provides historic preservation technical assistance to National Historic Landmark (NHL) stewards. Preserving Alaska's 49 landmarks offers many challenges as well as opportunities for success through effective working relationships. A closer look at these management challenges and successes are detailed in the NHL case studies of Ladd Field and the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses.

**KEYWORDS:** cultural resources management, historic preservation assistance, federal partnerships

## INTRODUCTION

Alaska's national historic landmarks (NHLs) represent some of America's most significant places. The stories associated with these NHLs include information about ancient hunting camps and villages, Russian exploration and settlements, Alaska Native education and civil rights organizations, fur seal harvesting, mining and fish canning industries, and the World War II Aleutian battlegrounds. The 2005 designation of Amalik Bay Archeological District NHL (Fig. 1) within Katmai National Park and Preserve brings the total number of NHLs in Alaska to 49 (a list of Alaska NHLs is at <http://www.nps.gov/akso/CR/AKRCultural/NHL.htm>).

However, the landmark designation does not ensure preservation of these cultural treasures. Preserving Alaska's NHLs is often a challenging process, and success is largely dependent on responsible stewards and good working relationships.



*Figure 1. View of Amalik Bay Archeological District, Alaska's most recently designated NHL. Photo courtesy of Jeanne Schaaf, Katmai National Park and Preserve.*

## ABOUT OUR LANDMARKS

A national historic landmark is a place considered to have exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating our nation's heritage. The secretary of the interior designates NHLs, which currently number about 2,500 across the United States. NHLs comprise only 3 percent of the properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NHL program at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nhl/>).

Alaska's 15 prehistoric sites and 34 historic landmarks tell the story of roughly 11,000 years of Alaska history. These landmarks span the state from the Kake salmon cannery in southeast Alaska to the prehistoric village of Barrow on the North Slope, and from Fort Egbert in Eagle on the Canadian border to the World War II battleground of Attu at the end of the Aleutian Chain (Fig. 2).

Alaska's NHLs are owned by private individuals, organizations, and Native groups as well as local, state, and federal entities. Five NHLs are managed within the National Park Service (NPS) system: Kennecott Mines in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Fig. 3), Cape Krusenstern Archeological District within the Western Arctic National Parklands, Brooks River Archeological District within Katmai National Park and Preserve, Kijik Archeological District within Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, and the Russian Bishop's House in Sitka National Historical Park. The Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park provides management oversight for two Skagway-based NHLs: the Chilkoot Trail and Dyea and portions of the Skagway Historic District and White Pass.

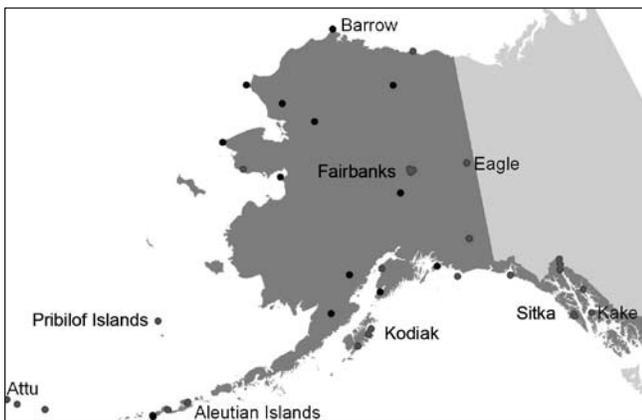


Figure 2. Map showing the geographic dispersal of Alaska's National Historic Landmarks.

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PARTNERSHIP ROLE

The National Park Service administers the National Historic Landmarks Program on behalf of the U.S. secretary of the interior. This authority is found in the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (45 Stat. 666; 16 U.S.C. 461–467), in which Congress determined that “it is a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.”

At the National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, the NHL/National Register of Historic Places team, which consists of a small group of archaeologists, a historical architect, and historians (the two authors of this



Figure 3. Kennecott Mines NHL within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Management of this NHL is based on the NPS Cultural Resource Management Guidelines (NPS-28), with activities including the preparation of HABS/HAER drawings and preservation planning documents. Photo courtesy of Karen Battle.

article), manages the NHL Program and provides historic preservation technical assistance. The team provides technical guidance, including preservation education, to NHL owners to encourage them to serve as good stewards of the nationally significant properties under their care and ownership. The most effective NHL preservation, however, is achieved when there is a strong interest and dedication by local community members and organizations. As NHL preservation partners, our team assistance includes compliance review and consultations, preservation planning, grant application reviews, architectural design review and condition assessments, and educational projects.

The National Park Service Alaska team also collects NHL condition information to try to keep up with the changes and needs of NHLs. This information from all regions of the U.S. is then compiled and a biannual report is produced as authorized in Section 8 of the amended National Park System General Authorities Act of 1970 (90 Stat. 1940, 16 U.S.C. 1–5), to provide Congress with information that identifies all endangered national historic landmarks.

Developing working relationships with owners and interested parties is often the key to the preservation of a landmark. Working with private owners of the Portland House, built in 1897 and located within the Skagway Historic District and White Pass NHL, NPS has provided a condition assessment and grant documentation with ongoing guidance as the owners rehabilitate their building. Another successful relationship came with the congressionally created Aleutian World War II National Historic Area that brought the Ounalashka Corporation, the landowner, into a partnership with the NPS. The NPS Affiliated Areas Program superintendent provides ongoing technical assistance to this private owner, which helps to preserve part of the Dutch Harbor Naval Operating Base and Fort Mears NHL.

#### **OTHER ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO NHL OWNERS**

Preservation assistance is available to local communities and private owners of NHLs through a variety of grant programs. For instance, the Save America's Treasures program has awarded funds that benefited the Eagle Historic District (Fort Egbert) NHL and more recently provided funds to the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society for the

boat repair facility within the Sitka Naval Operating Base and Coastal Defenses NHL. The Getty Foundation Campus Heritage Grant provided the Sheldon Jackson School NHL in Sitka with a preservation planning grant. Other grant programs that have benefited Alaska NHLs, as well as other historic properties, include the Historic Preservation Fund, administered through the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology (which houses the Alaska State Office of History and Archaeology) and the NPS Historic Preservation Fund grants to Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian organizations. The Organized Village of Kake, for example, was awarded an NPS Historic Preservation Fund grant for emergency repairs to stabilize the pilings and boardwalk at the Kake Cannery NHL. More recently, the team has participated in the cannery reuse planning process to help ensure integrity of the historic district. Some NHL owners have successfully worked with their congressional delegation for line item appropriations or add-ons, as in the cases of the rehabilitation of Holy Assumption Orthodox Church in Kenai and of the Allen Auditorium, part of the Sheldon Jackson School NHL.

Another tool for assisting NHL owners is the Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record programs (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer/>). The preparation of detailed drawings provides the basis from which architects and engineers can rehabilitate buildings and structures. During summer 2004, the team's historical architect oversaw a documentation project as several students from the University of Oregon's School of Architecture recorded six of the Sheldon Jackson School NHL buildings. These drawings will be instrumental in restoring the core 1910 campus buildings.

#### **LANDMARKS UNDER THREAT**

NHLs are under threat from a variety of factors, including natural processes such as erosion or human actions and inactions such as neglect, ignorance, lack of funds, and vandalism. In some cases, the secretary of the interior has removed the NHL designation when integrity has been lost. Two examples of this are the Sourdough Lodge NHL near Gakona, which burned down in 1994, and the archaeological Gambell Sites NHL on St. Lawrence Island, which lost its landmark status because of site vandalism.

## PROTECTION OF LANDMARKS BY FEDERAL LAWS

Federal laws provide a degree of protection for our landmarks. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), as amended, provides a review process for federally funded or licensed projects that requires consideration of the effect of the undertaking on historic properties. This process includes seeking comment from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation under Section 110(f) of the NHPA (<http://www.achp.gov/nhpa.html>).

Federal agencies that own NHLs are mandated under Section 110 of the NHPA to provide responsible stewardship. This responsibility was reiterated with the 2003 Presidential Executive Order 13287, titled the Preserve America policy statement, which says:

It is the policy of the Federal Government to provide leadership in preserving America's heritage by actively advancing the protection, enhancement, and contemporary use of the historic properties owned by the Federal Government, and by promoting intergovernmental cooperation and partnerships for the preservation and use of historic properties. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030304-9.html>)

In the case of NPS-owned historic properties, park superintendents are guided by Director's Order #28, "Cultural Resources Management," which sets forth the procedures for carrying out NPS' responsibilities with regards to NHLs under the NHPA and its implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800.10).

Some federal agencies have done well in their NHL stewardship efforts. Stewardship efforts are most effective when the agency hires professional cultural resource specialists or historic preservation professionals who understand and know how to implement the federal agency's Section 106 and 110 responsibilities. In several cases, having professionals in key positions has created positive working relationships between the agency and the Alaska state historic preservation officer as well as the NPS. Examples of these agencies include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (for the Indian Health Service), U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Army Garrison Alaska.

Another federal law that can offer a measure of NHL protection is the Federal Highway Administration Act.

When the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (AKDOT) undertook its environmental assessment/environmental impact statement process for the proposed Juneau-to-Skagway road, the team provided information about the Skagway Historic District and White Pass NHL. Our role was to confirm for AKDOT that a highway crossing the NHL would adversely impact significant features of the NHL. AKDOT was responsible for implementing the Federal Highway Administration regulations, the 4(f) provision, allowing road construction within NHLs, parks, and other significant conservation areas only if there are no prudent and feasible alternatives to using that land. Since AKDOT had alternatives that avoided the NHL, it chose one of them as its preferred alternative.

## NHL PRESERVATION CHALLENGES

While certain federal laws are in place that encourage preservation of NHLs, the reality of managing some NHLs can be difficult. This is especially true for several of the World War II NHLs in the Aleutian Islands. These NHLs are large landscape districts located on mostly remote and isolated islands, including the Attu Battlefield and Bases NHL on Attu Island and the Japanese Occupation Site NHL on Kiska Island. Management of these sites is hampered by lack of staff and by site vandalism.

U.S. military ownership offers inconsistent NHL management. In the case of the Adak Army and Naval Operating Base NHL, the U.S. Navy gave little consideration for trying to avoid potential adverse impacts to historic properties when it undertook environmental restoration activities as it transferred the former "Navy town" to private ownership.

Ladd Field NHL, another military-managed property, is part of Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks. While the U.S. Army has made great strides in establishing and implementing a cultural resources management program for the base, it also has shown an inconsistent understanding and implementation of the Section 106 consultation process for some undertakings within the landmark. This has placed the NPS in a vigilant role, in concert with the state historic preservation officer, to provide close oversight of the Section 106 process for this NHL, in concert with the state historic preservation officer.

Other preservation challenges include the accumulation of changes to NHLs over time that cause landmarks to lose their integrity. This takes place when historic fabric

is replaced with unsympathetic modern materials. While these materials can be less expensive and easier to maintain, there are often better alternatives that are in keeping with historic appearance. Other factors that contribute to loss of integrity for NHLs include construction of modern buildings that are not compatible with surrounding NHL properties and additions to NHL properties that are unsympathetic with the building's historic design. The latter is a growing issue at the Seal Islands Historic District in the Pribilof Islands, the Fort William H. Seward NHL in Haines, and Ladd Field NHL in Fairbanks.

Since the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 process only provides for a review and consideration of potential impacts to historic properties, NHLs are sometimes adversely altered or demolished despite efforts to prevent such actions. Sometimes a private property owner decides to make changes to an NHL property. If federal funds are not being used, the Section 106 review process does not apply and the NPS may not even know about the action until after the fact. One of the best ways to avoid this and encourage positive outcomes for Section 106 consultation is to actively maintain good working relationships with NHL property owners, based on mutual and regular communication.

To better illustrate some of these NHL preservation challenges and successes, what follows is a closer look at two landmarks: Ladd Field NHL and Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL.

### **A PRESERVATION CHALLENGE: LADD FIELD NHL**

The Ladd Field NHL is an integral part of Fort Wainwright, an active army post in Fairbanks. The secretary of the interior designated Ladd Field as a landmark in 1984 for its role in the World War II Lend-Lease program. From 1942 to 1945, Ladd Field was the site where the U.S. transferred 9,000 aircraft to Russian pilots to assist in fighting Germany on the eastern battle front. Today, management of the NHL frequently comes under pressure from the demands of various missions of the U.S. Army. These pressures come from many directions. Some are the result of army-wide realignments and changing views of the Army's overall mission in Alaska. Other pressures are more local. Generally, actions coming from outside Alaska are more likely to have a greater impact on the NHL than those initiated by the U.S. Army Garrison Alaska.

Frequent changes in command and differing views of historic preservation at various levels of the command cause an uncertain management environment for cultural resources. On average the command changes every 18 to 24 months. The disposition of commanders towards historic properties and historic preservation ranges from hostile to indifferent to favorable. Each of these elements is present at various levels of the command structure. Views of the commander can determine who gets heard and what kind of working relationship there will be between the Army and the NPS regarding the landmark.

Since 2000, U.S. Army Garrison Alaska has been working hard to develop a cultural resources management program by hiring qualified personnel, implementing an Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan, and developing alternate procedures for the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 compliance. Since that time U.S. Army Garrison Alaska has also developed an interpretive program for the NHL that includes interpretive signs and pamphlets and has published several histories of the post, ranging from early homesteads to the early Cold War period.

In a 2005 meeting, U.S. Army environmental personnel observed that being stationed in Alaska was once viewed by many in the Army as a recreational assignment. Alaska meant hunting, fishing, skiing, and other outdoor activities. Today this is not the case. As during the Cold War, Alaska is once again considered a front-line assignment. Troops train for deployment anywhere in the world on a moment's notice.

Construction associated with this new army mission in Alaska has the potential to severely impact the Ladd Field NHL. The transformation of the 172<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade at Fort Wainwright into a Stryker Brigade has resulted in the construction of a number of new buildings inside and adjacent to the landmark boundaries. During the planning of these new buildings, U.S. Army cultural resources staff worked with planners to ensure that the buildings were placed away from major landmark properties, such as the Birchwood Hangars, and this reduced the impact to the landmark.

The Army's newest plans for Fort Wainwright call for stationing an Aviation Combat Brigade there. The massive scale and location of the major construction inside the southwest corner of the landmark boundary and adjacent to two World War II Birchwood hangars will severely impact the landmark (Fig. 4). Whether the



*Figure 4. Pictured are Hangars 2 and 3, the two remaining Birchwood Hangars in the Ladd Field NHL. It is hoped that these massive wooden hangars, built during World War II, will be integrated into future plans for Fort Wainwright. Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Garrison-Alaska.*

Army will accept recommendations to rehabilitate the Birchwood Hangars and integrate them into their plans for the Aviation Combat Brigade remains an unanswered question. Demolition is a possibility, and the viability of Ladd Field as a landmark will be questioned. The loss of its NHL status is a possibility. Prescoping meetings with U.S. Army environmental and cultural resources staff have ruled out relocation of the construction. It is hoped that CRM staff at the U.S. Army Environmental Center in Maryland, acting on the recommendations and concerns from CRM staff at U.S. Army Garrison Alaska commissioned a condition assessment and rehabilitation plan for the hangars. The Army will adopt the plan for the hangars, which could be completed at considerable savings.

Consultation, which was once inconsistent and contentious, is now ongoing and friendly. Regular, informal consultation has been a part of the working relationship between U.S. Army Garrison Alaska and NPS since 2003. Disagreement about where the NEPA process ends and Section 106 consultation begins has been resolved. Timing was the primary issue: under Section 106 an undertaking begins with the expenditure of federal funds, which includes planning. Under the National Environmental Policy Act, however, the undertaking did not begin until after the Army had gone through the process of defining alternatives and selected a preferred alternative. As a result, the alternatives did not always consider historic properties. Thus, the preferred alternative was not necessarily the best

alternative for the NHL, which required additional work to mitigate the effects of the undertaking.

The solution to these problems was to initiate Section 106 consultation earlier, involving the NPS and other interested parties in defining alternatives. The Army's response has been to develop alternative procedures that essentially integrate the Section 106 process into the National Environmental Policy Act process. The process of developing the alternative procedures began in 2003 and involved the NPS, the SHPO, Bureau of Land Management and various Alaska Native groups and interested parties. While the Army Alternate Procedures have yet to be finalized, U.S. Army Garrison Alaska has begun using them as guidance for consultation until they are instituted. For NPS and others, the benefit is involvement in an undertaking from its earliest stages. For USAGAK it is ensuring that the landmark is taken into consideration throughout the planning process instead of near the end.

Today USAGAK has one of the best CRM programs in Alaska. CRM staff respond quickly and openly to NPS inquiries and requests. Inviting NPS to participate in prescoping development of environmental assessments when the project or action has potential to impact the landmark has removed many potential conflicts between NHPA and NEPA and made the review process more efficient. Since USAGAK implemented a professional CRM program, almost all undertakings resulting in an adverse effect to the landmark have occurred as a result of decisions made outside Alaska, beyond the control of the USAGAK commander and CRM staff.



*Figure 5. The Sitka Naval Operating Base boathouse gets a new coat of paint, summer 2005. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Poulson, Sitka Maritime Heritage Society.*

### **AN NHL PRESERVATION SUCCESS: SITKA NAVAL OPERATING BASE AND U.S. ARMY COASTAL DEFENSES**

A real preservation success story is happening at the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL. During the first months of World War II, this base was one of the few installations prepared to protect the North Pacific against enemy incursion. Today this NHL on Japonski Island in Sitka includes a multitude of owners and interested parties, making it one of our more complex landmarks. The NHL consists of over 60 contributing buildings and structures with multiple owners and local interest groups. These stakeholders include the Alaska Department of Education, the Alaska Department of Transportation, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the University of Alaska, the Public Health Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, the City of Sitka, the Alaska

Native Tribal Health Consortium, Sitka Trail Works, and the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society. Cooperation and partnership among these entities and the NPS has resulted in a phenomenal turnaround for a landmark that some in Alaska's preservation community once viewed as ripe for losing its NHL status.

In early 2001, the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society contacted the NPS to request assistance in rehabilitating the boathouse for use as an interpretive center and working boathouse. The boathouse was constructed as part of Sitka Naval Operating Base in 1941. The structure was used to maintain and repair various wooden naval vessels, including those used to transport people between Japonski Island and Sitka before construction of the O'Connell Bridge connecting the two in 1972. The boathouse is a contributing property of the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL. Since 2001, the society has applied for and received several grants, including

a 2005 Save America's Treasures grant in the amount of \$325,000. The grants have been used for site planning, condition assessments, cleanup, and stabilization (Fig. 5). The Save America's Treasures grant will be used to address structural problems in the boathouse.

In fall 2001, NPS and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium joined forces to conduct a survey of buildings and structures associated with the Sitka Naval Operating Base portion of the NHL. Because the 1984 NHL nomination was completed without building descriptions, this survey added much to our knowledge of the NHL. During the course of this survey, the Alaska Department of Education (ADOE) contacted the NPS about a large collection of blueprints of buildings in the World War II landmark that it had in storage. The blueprints, numbering over 500 and dating from the 1910s through the 1950s, were in a deteriorated state caused by water and high humidity and were in danger of being discarded. With assistance from the NPS, the ADOE donated the blueprints to the National Archives Pacific Alaska Region in Anchorage.

In January 2004, the ADOE again contacted NPS, this time regarding the rehabilitation of two barracks, the mess hall, and a warehouse in the landmark. Since the ADOE was using state funds for this project, the consultation and its outcome were not the result of a Section 106 undertaking but rather a voluntary initiative. The buildings, as part of the Mount Edgecumbe campus, are used for dorms, a cafeteria, and for storage.

The ADOE needed to upgrade the energy efficiency of the buildings by adding more insulation and by replac-

ing doors, windows, and siding. The ADOE also planned to remodel the interior of one of the buildings to make more space for dorm rooms. As a result of ADOE and NPS consultation, rehabilitation was accomplished without adversely impacting the NHL and significantly increased the useful life of the buildings. The ADOE's desire to minimize impact to the NHL and the positive working relationship that developed with NPS during the 2001 survey have gone far in helping to maintain the historic appearance of this WWII landmark.

Construction within a landmark's boundaries has the potential to be very harmful if done without concern for the historic integrity of the landmark. The NPS was initially apprehensive following contact by the U.S. Coast Guard in January 2004 about the planned construction of a cutter support team building adjacent to the boathouse. The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society had worked hard since 2001 to secure funding, devise plans, clean up, and stabilize the boathouse. Introduction of a modern building with an unsympathetic design in the area would have adversely affected the boathouse and the landmark.

To the relief of the NPS and the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society, the U.S. Coast Guard was quite open to recommended design changes to make the support team building compatible with adjacent buildings and the landmark. The NPS recommended that the building mimic the World War II building (i.e., to be similar in design and setting, but not replicate the historic building) that once stood on the planned construction site, in keeping with the secretary of the interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (<http://www.cr.nps>.



Figure 6. Artist's rendering of the new U.S. Coast Guard building design that is sympathetic to the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL on Japonski Island, Sitka.

gov/hps/tps/standards\_guidelines.htm). After discussions with U.S. Coast Guard personnel in Juneau and Alameda, California, throughout the spring of 2004, the parties agreed upon a design. Design changes included a gable roof instead of a shed roof, the addition of horizontal siding that resembles the wood siding on the boathouse and the building that once stood on the site, an estate-type fence instead of a chain-link fence, and muntin windows. The completed building will look remarkably like the World War II building that once stood on the site (Fig. 6).

Until 2004, the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses portion of the landmark had been neglected for years. This area of the NHL consists of a series of small islands connected by a causeway and a series of bunkers and gun emplacements separated from the rest of the landmark by the airport, which made it inaccessible to the public from land. In fall 2004, Sitka Trail Works received a federal grant to develop a hiking trail along the causeway and thereby made the area accessible by boat from Sitka Harbor. The project is in its infancy, but Sitka Trail Works continues to work toward this goal. The group recently requested that the state designate the area as a state park, which would improve the management status of this area.

In four short years the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL has undergone a remarkable turnaround—one achieved despite the diverse views of a variety of owners and interest groups. For this and other preservation activities the City of Sitka, with eight NHLs, was named a Preserve America Community in 2005.

## CONCLUSION

Good stewardship is critical to the preservation of Alaska's NHLs. While threats to NHLs remain constant, preservation successes can be built on the momentum of a concerned community or organizational member and helped along with technical support and other assistance from the NPS. These successes serve as encouragement for all of us involved in this challenging profession.

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