

**Introducing the National Register of Historic Places**  
by **Jason Tippeconnic Fox, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office**

The **National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)** is the official list of the Nation's historic places considered important to our past and worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the NRHP is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

To be formally listed in the NRHP, a property must be significant under standards set forth by the **National Park Service (NPS)**. The program recognizes historic properties: associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; associated with the lives of individuals significant to our past; that embody distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction, or form; or that have yielded, or may likely yield information important to prehistory or history. A property must also possess sufficient integrity to convey its significance. Most simply, a historic site must look largely (though not exactly) as it did during its historic use in order to be listed.

Nationally, more than 1.8 million historic resources are listed in the NRHP on their own or as part of a larger district. Idaho currently has over 7,000 listed resources. These historic resources include buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts, which may be significant to their community, state, or the nation.

**Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs)** are another NRHP property type, added to the program in 1992 to better recognize the diversity of the nation's history and culture. TCPs are properties that are eligible for inclusion in the NRHP because of their association with the cultural practices or beliefs of a living community. They are rooted in the community's history and are important to maintaining its continuing cultural identity.

Many misconceptions exist about what NRHP listing means for historic properties. Foremost, NRHP listing does not guarantee the protection or preservation of historic places. The NRHP identifies and provides *honorific* designation of historic places; it does not restrict the rights of private property owners to change or dispose of their properties in any way – up to and including demolition. NRHP listing also does not require that owners restore or rehabilitate their historic properties.

NRHP listing may increase public awareness and appreciation of historic resources – a perception shift that can tip the scales towards preservation. It also provides opportunities for specific preservation incentives, such as the federal Historic Tax Credit program and certain grants.

The NRHP is also meant to be a federal planning tool. Through the Section 106 process, federal agencies and federally assisted projects must consider the impact of their actions on properties that are either formally listed *or* determined eligible for listing in the NRHP. If a project has the potential to affect a listed or eligible property, the federal agency must consult with the **State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)** and other interested parties in an effort to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate effects to historic properties. It is, however, always up to the federal agency as to how it will proceed, and adverse effects are an allowable outcome as long as there is mitigation to offset those effects.

In recent years, the NRHP has evolved alongside the broader preservation movement. Whereas the program once primarily reflected the contributions of the elite—think the homes of the Founding Fathers and Gilded Age mansions—preservationists today endeavor to make the NRHP more accessible and list historic resources that recognize and reflect the full and rich diversity of the United States.