

Saving a Few, Before Losing Them All A Strategy for Setting Priorities

Disbursed throughout its 70,000 acres, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (NRA) has 464 structures appropriate for human habitation that are in various states of repair and disrepair.

While a sizeable number of buildings have been adapted to new uses, many more remain underutilized or lay vacant. Some of these have been determined to be historically significant, while others await determinations of eligibility. Meanwhile, decaying structures continue to be the victims of vandalism and arson, and even pose safety hazards to visitors. Extremes in the humid river valley climate have accelerated the decline of these structures at a rate that taxes the capabilities of a limited budget and park staff. While stabilization efforts have in many instances managed to stave off “demolition by neglect,” going beyond stabilization has been more difficult. Getting vacant buildings up and running is the real challenge.

Under tremendous public pressure, the park set out to remedy this situation. As a first step, the park elected to pursue cultural resource evaluative studies, treatment plans, and historic leasing options. However, due to staffing and funding

limitations, it became readily apparent that only one to three structures could be evaluated, leased, and/or treated in any one year. Vulnerable structures would have trouble surviving this slow, incremental pace of stewardship. Park management therefore needed to ascertain if the one to three buildings per year receiving attention were, in fact, the *most* significant. To make this selection process democratic and defensible, a methodology for setting priorities from the list of 464 structures would have to be devised. This was accomplished through the development of a Facility Management Report (FMR).

The FMR is a three-part facility management planning process to 1) sort properties and assess needs, 2) geographically organize properties through zoning, and 3) determine achievable facilities management strategies. The FMR was developed by an interdisciplinary team at the park that included a historical architect, an exhibit specialist, an archeologist, the chief of interpretation, a curator, a landscape architect, a historian, a geographic information specialist, and a facility manager. A planner from ICON Architecture in Boston was also consulted, and public input was solicited through a series of public meetings.

The FMR process started by grouping the 464 structures into 154 “properties.” A property was defined as an ensemble of structures that make up a former residence, farmstead, visitor center, village, etc. For example, one property may contain a house, barn, and silo (three structures). Some of these properties are valuable visitor facilities, some are significant historic structures, and some are dilapidated safety hazards.

Of the 154 properties, 78 were over 50 years old, potentially historic, and required a higher priority.

Using the park’s Historic Resource Study, these 78 potentially historic properties were sorted by nine historic contexts including Agriculture, Early European Settlement, Industry, Recreation, and Exemplary Architecture. To

Vacant for years, the eclectic Delaware View House in Flatbrookville, NJ, had fallen into a state of disrepair. This former boarding house is now up and running as a country store under a historic lease. Some 31 “target properties” remain candidates for historic leasing. NPS photo.



establish a defensible and objective methodology for determining what properties were the “best examples” of a particular historic context, we adapted a “preservation priority matrix” developed by Tony Crosby, a historical architect at the Denver Service Center. The matrix allowed the interdisciplinary team of subject matter experts to quantify their institutional knowledge and, albeit at a cursory level, to sort, organize, and better understand which of the properties should be targeted and which could wait for evaluation and treatment.

Of the 78 potentially historic properties on the matrix, 31 were vacant and thus more threatened by vandalism, age, and weather. These were identified as “target properties” and became the primary focus of the assessment.

This exercise ranked the 31 vacant historic properties from highest (Category A) to lowest (Category C) priority

- Category A (11): subtotal scores between 15-18
- Category B (12): subtotal scores between 11-14
- Category C (8): subtotal scores between 7-10

Eleven Category A properties were much easier for the park to deal with than 154 when determining priorities for Cultural Landscape Inventories, Historic Structures Reports, and the Historic Leasing Program!

However, there were still questions as to how to reuse these properties. In addition, park management wanted to understand these historic preservation needs in relation to all other park facility needs. Would the park’s focus on a

(Selected Samples from 154 Property Database Matrix; numerical values range from 1-3; weighted values (wt.) are multiplied by weights shown)

Facility Management Database											
Historic Context	Identification		Cursory Cultural Resource Value				Cursory Baseline Data				
	Property	Current Use	Remaining Character Features		Best Example Rating (Wt.=3)	Subtotal Score	Condition		Interpretive Value	Visitor Access Rating	Operational Value
			Main Bldg. (Wt.=2)	Entire Property (Wt.=1)			Main Bldg.	Entire Property			
Agriculture	Wheat Plains Farm	Hist. lease	3	3	3	18	2	2	3	3	3
	Van. Campen, B.B	vacant	3	3	3	18	2	2	3	3	1
	Bevans Farm	vacant	2	2	1	9	1	1	1	2	1
Early European Settlement	Van Campen, Abraham	lease-back	3	2	3	17	3	2	3	3	3
	Depue House	vacant	2	1	3	14	2	1	3	3	1
	McCarty House	vacant	2	1	2	11	2	1	3	3	3
Industry	Slateford Farm	vacant	3	3	3	18	2	2	3	2	3
	Metz Ice Plant	vacant	3	2	2	14	2	1	3	2	1

Remaining Character Features:

- 3 = good; major character-defining features remaining
- 2 = fair; some character-defining features lost
- 1 = poor; most character-defining features lost

Best Example Rating:

- 3 = best example of historic context
- 2 = medium example of historic context
- 1 = poor example of historic context

Condition

- 4 = very good; routine maintenance needed
- 3 = good; habitable, but needs infrastructure work
- 2 = fair; substantial work needed to make habitable
- 1 = poor; extensive work needed to make habitable

Visitor Access

- 3 = good access from primary road
- 2 = fair access from primary or secondary road
- 1 = poor access from primary, secondary or tertiary road

Category A property supercede a much needed contemporary public beach or restroom facility? The matrix was a first step, but now the properties needed to be placed in the context of the park's management objectives, visitor use patterns, and natural resource values.

A concept similar to General Management Plan (GMP) "management zones" was applied in part two of the FMR. Five "Facility Management Zones" were established based on visitor use patterns, the inherent nature of properties, the suitability of areas for visitor use or development, and natural features. These zones were intended to geographically organize facilities, to logically "package" properties for future uses and partners and, finally, to provide a framework for the direction of all facilities management.

Facility Management Zones are **Park Gateways.** These are areas where recreation opportunities, National Park Service rules and regulations, and a description of the park can be introduced to the visitor. Gateways are also places where adjacent communities share boundaries, roads, viewsheds, and plans with the park.

Recreation Zones. These are areas where the GMP has called for the development of swim beaches, boat launches, picnic areas, play fields, and a living history village. Surges of day use traffic occur on weekends within these zones. Consequently, road improvements may be required that could potentially affect the character of historic preservation zones (see below). Mapping these zones helps to minimize such future conflicts.

Historic Preservation Zones. Particularly on the New Jersey side of the park, there are zones where a group of several historic properties, collectively, has high integrity as a cultural resource. Some of these have already been designated as "historic districts." However, there are also zones that encompass more than one historic district or are geographic areas that have continuous historic integrity from property to property. These zones are considered "gems" within the park. They require higher standards of preservation treatment.

Scenic Corridors. Roads follow narrow river corridors, with rock-outcropped hills above and the wide river below. Some of these corridors are also important commuter routes. Upland slopes, ponds and streams just above these roads, as well as the open fields down towards

the river, are typically important areas for hikers, fisherman, and hunters.

Upland Camp. There is one zone along the Kittatinny Ridge where the Appalachian Trail crosses the park. Here, Boy Scout camps and other rustic recreation cabins have historically thrived.

Within each of these zones are areas that were defined by the 1987 GMP as natural zones. Within these natural zones are even more sensitive microenvironments where certain plants, animals, and sensitive ecological communities flourish. Each of these "Sensitive Resource Subzones" was also mapped within the Facility Management Zones to minimize conflicts between the preservation of cultural resources, visitor use, and natural resources.

A Geographic Information Systems (GIS) map was created to show the Facility Management Zones and indicate the location of individual properties. A detailed description of each zone was developed that included

- overall character
- GMP goals
- interpretive focus
- facilities character
- road character
- landscape character
- list of all facilities

The final step in the FMR was to develop strategies for facilities management. The principles which guided this process included

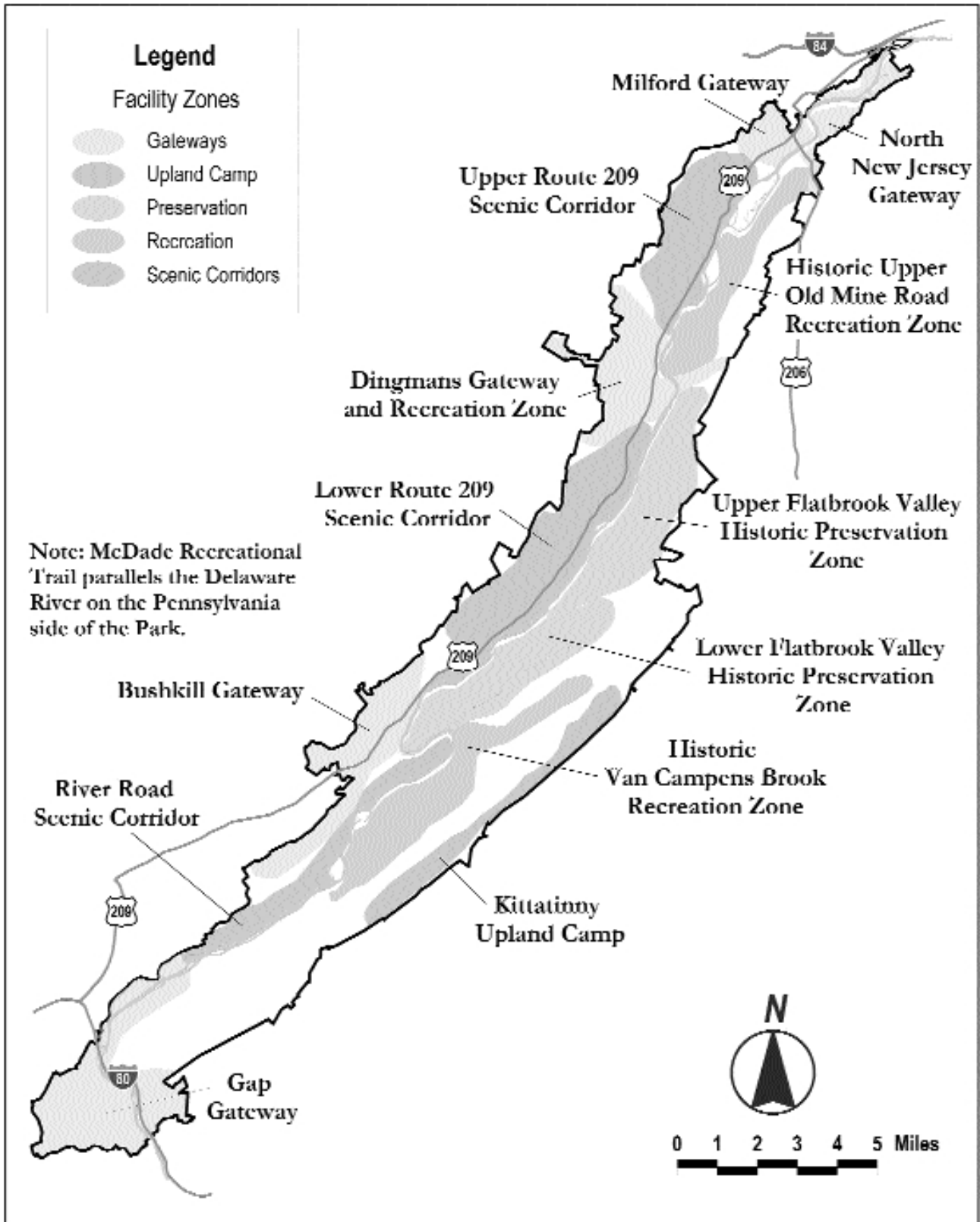
- employ vacant Category A and B properties first and foremost;
- preserve the inherent character of each Facility Management Zone;
- preserve and interpret or else demolish vacant historic properties according to the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Properties 1992";
- maximize partnerships; and,
- accomplish goals sequentially and with focus.

Using these principles, the park outlined five alternatives, each of which could be implemented sequentially over 5-10 year periods. Each addressed historic preservation and contemporary facility requirements for a specific geographic area or under the umbrella of a funded project. The five alternatives were

- Alternative 1: McDade Recreational Trail

Facilities Management Zones

Delaware Water Gap
National Recreation Area



Herons Nest, built c. 1830 was converted to a summer retreat in the 1930's. Forest succession is strangling the building today. One of 31 vacant "target properties", it ranked in the lowest priority (Category C). NPS photo.

- Alternative 2: Historic Van Campens Brook Recreation Zone
- Alternative 3: Upper Flatbrook Valley Historic Preservation Zone
- Alternative 4: Park Gateways
- Alternative 5: Address most threatened target properties

For example, before the FMR was completed, Congress appropriated funds for the McDade Trail (Alternative 1), which is now under construction. Under this scenario, this 22-mile recreational trail corridor would, through the expenditure of funds and staff time, become the focus for all divisions. Under this alternative, the following items would receive priority consideration for funding requests, staff allocation, program development, and implementation:

- evaluating the three vacant target properties within the trail corridor
- focusing partnership search efforts on the three vacant target properties along this corridor by investigating opportunities for concessions and partnerships that support the trail user, including bike rentals, ski rentals, food concessions, "hut-to-hut" hiker lodging, eco-tourism ventures like birding, environmental education centers, maintenance sheds, restrooms, and trail shelters
- removing hazardous structures along the trail corridor
- upgrading existing trail facilities, including picnic areas, kiosks, benches, and restrooms
- developing trailheads
- developing trail sign system, interpretive exhibits, brochures, and ranger-lead tours related to the trail
- selectively clearing vegetation to enhance views and vistas along the trail
- maintaining managed open space preservation along trail corridor

This three-part facility management planning process 1) sorted properties and assessed priorities, 2) geographically organized properties and suggested their management through zoning, and 3) developed alternative facility management strategies. It helped the park take a list of 154



historic properties and narrow it down, as the example demonstrates, to three vacant ones that should be addressed within the next 5 years. Given the geographic context and selected implementation strategy, it is now easier to visualize appropriate uses for these three properties that will meet many park management objectives. This process is meant to be dynamic. The database matrices as well as the GIS maps are to be periodically updated. Currently, the alternative strategies have been updated and used in combination.

Although the ranking of resources is not (theoretically) a desirable management practice, the Facility Management Report provided a strategy for setting priorities and a plan for implementation. The proposed methodology offered a defensible and achievable means for determining which of the 154 properties should first receive evaluations, treatments, and historic leases. The entire park staff can now sing with one voice when requesting funding or designating staff time. This planning process allowed the staff to come to consensus on what the park's "best examples" are and how they could be best managed in their current context. In setting priorities there will, of course, be concomitant deferred maintenance and calculable losses along the way. But what is the alternative? When funds and staff are lacking, wouldn't we be better off saving a few, before losing them all?

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Map on p. 12 by GIS Lab, Delaware Water Gap NRA.