



Landscape surveys in Massachusetts can trace their roots back to 1929, when Charles W. Eliot II working with the Governor’s Committee on Needs and Uses of Open Space, identified key areas for open space acquisition throughout the state. Only two types of landscapes were identified – those areas that were proposed open spaces and areas within which state forests should be acquired. This identification helped guide the Commonwealth and municipalities with some initial land acquisition guidance.

Comprehensive efforts to identify significant landscapes in Massachusetts began in earnest in 1933, when The Trustees of Reservations, then known as the Trustees of Public Reservations, joined the American Society of Landscape Architects in sponsoring a statewide landscape survey. For the purposes of this survey, a set of categorical landscape types were chosen as “kinds of Massachusetts scenery that are believed to have special character of outstanding value...”. Acting on the identifications and recommendations made through the 1933 Massachusetts Landscape Survey, The Trustees, DCR (then known as the Department of Conservation) and other entities subsequently acquired many of these places for their protection and public enjoyment.

In 1980, the challenge of again unifying the direction with which different interest groups should be approaching land conservation was raised, and this time DCR (then the Department of Environmental Management) took up the gauntlet, undertaking a statewide inventory of scenic landscapes. Adapting assessments utilized by the U.S. Forest Service and the Countryside Commission of Scotland, the consulting team created a methodology that relied on three classifications of scenic quality: “distinctive”, “noteworthy”, and “common”. The assessment resulted in a 1982 report. This effort set DCR on a path of landscape preservation efforts that has continued for over 25 years.

Two thematically-based statewide cultural landscape survey efforts were also undertaken. A 1982 survey of public landscapes designed by the Olmsted firm, was sponsored by the Massachusetts Association for Olmsted Parks and the Massachusetts Historical Commission. This inventory effort was followed by the Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program in 1983. But by the mid 1990s, the concept of cultural landscapes had evolved, and a wider range of landscape types were recognized as having historic and cultural value. It also became clear that in order to be able to protect community character and promote an integrated planning approach, further identification of the overall cultural landscape of Massachusetts needed to be undertaken. As a result, the following efforts were initiated by DCR: a 1999 survey and publication of Civilian Conservation Corps resources, the Historic Landscape Grant Program (from 1998 to 2002), the Historic Cemetery Preservation Initiative in 1999, and the Town Common Initiative in 2005.

Further, based upon a proposal prepared in 1997 by The Trustees of Reservations and Preservation Massachusetts (then known as Historic Massachusetts, Inc.), DCR was able to secure funding through the legislature to develop and launch a pilot project in 2001 - the Heritage Landscape Inventory, the strategy of which is currently being implemented in state parks as the Park Historic Landscape Inventory.

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