



**MA Department of Conservation and Recreation
Office of Cultural Resources
Best Management Practices**

Historic Landscapes – Built Features

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Goal: Preserve significant historic landscapes through maintenance; keep DCR's historic park and building settings intact for interpretation and public enjoyment.

Guidelines

General

- Historic landscapes in DCR facilities can include the grounds around historic buildings, designed gardens, cemeteries, historic agricultural landscapes, and landscapes associated with the recreational development of the DCR parks system (parkways, CCC camp complexes, beaches).
- Landscapes are more than plants. A historic landscape should be viewed as a combination of the plantings and vegetation along with the “hardscape” including rock formations, walls, roads and paths, structures and objects (e.g. bird baths, fountains, pergolas).
- Maintenance of turf, topography and drainage features is essential to preventing erosion and ensuring proper stormwater control.
- Related BMPs: *Stone Walls, Wells, Archaeological Features*



Structures – walls, fences, gates, benches, sheds, buildings

- Do not relocate historic structures.
- Do not paint structures that were historically unpainted.
- Maintain painted surfaces on fences, benches and other wooden structures, repaint every 5-7 years or as needed to protect wood.
- Iron fencing (painted) – maintain painted finish; if rust appears, scrape and sand down to clean/stable material, prime and paint.
- Manage vegetation on fences, walls and other structures to avoid damage from moisture retention, roots and suckers, and possible structural overload (100 year old vines are heavy!).
- Cut plants close to the surface, do not pull roots on or near built features.
- When maintaining pergolas and trellises that include climbing plants, carefully pull vegetation off of the structure, place on the ground and protect during work, then retrain to the structure after maintenance is done.

Objects – headstones, sculptures, sundials, fountains, birdbaths and markers (various materials)

- Cleaning should be limited. If cleaning is needed (to remove biological growth, for example) use only plastic or natural bristle brushes, water and **no soap**.
- Removal of graffiti and more extensive cleaning and repair should be undertaken under the direction of a conservator (consult with OCR).
- For metal plaques and objects, check fasteners to ensure secure connections. If loose, tighten or replace fasteners, or consult with OCR for options for epoxy sealants. (Note: epoxy may not be appropriate for all conditions.)
- Do not move objects from their original setting; consult with OCR if moving objects is necessary for their preservation (for example, if materials could be stolen, collapse or otherwise be lost without intervention).
- Report damage or theft of objects to OCR.

Circulation

- DCR facilities may contain designed carriage roads, footpaths and recreational trails associated with former estate use, the CCC, or even Native American or Colonial era transportation networks.
- Retain paths and trails in their original layout, alignment, materials and construction.
- Maintain grading of swales and crowns to ensure proper drainage.
- Preserve and repair, in kind, path and trail surfaces, unless alterations are part of an overall plan for an adaptive reuse of the landscape. For example, converting a historic woodland trail into a paved, accessible interpretive route.
- Do not alter curbing, drainage features and stairs without further analysis.
- Trails which have “ancient” associations but no surviving visible historic features should be treated as archaeological sites (see Archaeological Features).

Topography

- The lay of the land, including hills, valleys, streams and ponds are integral to the historic landscape and may be related to important viewsheds or historic land use.
- Avoid topographical changes. For example, exposed ledge should not be removed in historic quarries or overlooks.

Views and Vistas

- Views from roads into gardens, framed views between buildings, or wide vistas at the terminus of a main drive heighten the experience of the landscape and should be clearly shown on plans.
- Maintain vegetation regularly to keep views and vistas clear.
- Include vista maintenance as part of any construction or other maintenance on associated built features such as towers, overlooks, bridges or roads.