



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

## Stone Walls

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**Goal:** Avoid damaging resource; monitor for vandalism and illegal activity

### Guidelines:

Stone walls crisscross the New England landscape, demarcating former animal pens, farm fields, cemeteries, roads, and causeways. In DCR's parks and forests stone walls have been preserved as part of the historic record and integrated into the recreational landscape. Stone walls still provide points of reference for visitors and park managers, they can mark boundaries between state and private land, and they reflect the past land uses of our parks.



Additional information can be found in DCR's *Terra Firma #5 - Stones that Speak: Forgotten Features of the Landscape* available at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/publications.htm> or upon request to the Office of Cultural Resources. *Exploring Stone Walls* by Robert Thorson is a good introduction to these resources as well.

### General:

- Use of metal detectors is never allowed.
- Digging on state property is illegal.
- Inspect feature periodically to make sure it is not a threat to your/public safety and has not been subject to vandalism. Document any damage to the site. Report to the DCR Archaeologist.
- Prohibit any activities that disturb the integrity of historical sites and features.
- Stone walls should remain in place.

## **Vegetation Management**

- Stone walls in wooded settings can survive in harmony with naturally occurring vegetation, with little damage, or only isolated areas of damage, over long periods of time.
- More highly designed stone walls that surround historic buildings, cemeteries, or flank historic parkways should be cleared of vegetation to prevent damage to the stonework.
- If trees have fallen onto a stone wall they should be removed and stones reset.
- Invasive species control using herbicides may be required along stone walls and should be carried out by properly licensed personnel under DCR protocols. Herbicides should be applied carefully to the plants only, avoiding overspray onto stones and distinctive lichen or other natural patina. If small plants must be pulled from walls, any damage should be repaired (stones reset, etc.).
- Sap or berry producing trees and shrubs should be kept away from stonework through regular pruning. If the plantings are not part of a historic landscape, they should be replaced with another species that cannot drip sap and fruit onto the walls.
- If vegetation management or tree removals occur near stonewalls, activities should be located a safe distance from the walls, and trees should not be felled toward walls.
- For larger trees near stone walls, cut stumps to grade and promote natural decay; do not pull or stump grind.

## **Repair and Rehabilitation**

- Reset fallen stones placing weathered or lichen-covered surfaces facing outward.
- If breaks are created for operational access or DCR programs, restore stones to their original placement, reset all stones.
- Do not use mortar on drylaid stone walls; if repairing mortared stonework a qualified mason should be engaged to match mortar (color, strength, texture, etc.) and tooling of historic joints.
- Do not install capstones where none existed originally.

## **Monitoring:**

- Monitor for illegal harvest of stones and dismantling of stone walls, which are often collected from state lands for private use.
- Identify, record areas of collapse and report to the DCR Archaeologist.
- Identify, record and report areas of digging or vandalism to the DCR Archaeologist.