



State Historic Preservation Office

South Carolina Department of Archives and History
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Guidance for Assessing Visual and Indirect Effects to Historic Landscapes

Historic Landscapes

Historic landscapes can be found across South Carolina in a variety of forms. Landscapes can be formally designed, like the gardens at Middleton Place or can be vernacular places, such as rural farmsteads. Historic landscapes usually include both natural and cultural features, such as the Georgetown County Rice Culture Historic District which includes rivers and historic rice fields. Landscapes can also be associated with important events, such as battlefields, or with important persons who designed or used the landscape.

Landscapes can be:

- Individually listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Contributing resources to listed or eligible historic districts.
- Contributing resources to individual historic properties such as structures or archaeological sites.

Common characteristics of historic landscapes include:

- Engineering: Applies where the landscape and its uses reflect the practical application of scientific principles to serve human needs, such as transportation usage. Landscapes can also reflect agricultural use or industrial use, such as the phosphate mining industry visible in the landscape along the Ashley River or the rice fields along the rivers in Georgetown County.
- Landscape architecture: Formal gardens, farmyards, parks, cemeteries, orchards, boundaries, walls/fences, scenic byways, etc. that are based on established design principles or conscious designs.
- Cultural heritage: Religious beliefs, social customs, ethnic identities, trades, and skills associated with particular cultural groups. Cultural heritage can also reflect the way cultural groups use the natural features of the landscapes, such as a source for food or for religious beliefs.
- Natural features: Rivers, lakes, trees, mountains, and other natural features can contribute to historic landscapes. Natural features can be used for transportation, in the case of rivers, or can be integral features of a cultural landscape, such as the reason for a settlement or a state park.
- Archaeological: Many landscapes in South Carolina have associated archaeological resources. These resources may reflect prior land uses, or may contribute to the development and character of the historic landscape itself. Archaeological sites may have above-ground components, such as ruins or earthworks, which are considered to be integral parts of the landscape.

The following guidelines are provided by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to answer questions about assessing visual or indirect effects to landscapes and ways to avoid adverse visual or indirect effects to historic landscapes.

Avoiding Adverse Affects

Residential and Commercial Development: All new development within, adjacent to, or across from a historic landscape should incorporate opaque vegetative buffers to maintain the historic character of the surrounding landscape. The SHPO recommends a minimum buffer of at least 50 feet in width. A larger vegetative buffer may be needed to avoid adverse effects based on the development and the significance of the historic landscape.

An opaque vegetative buffer is intended to: avoid diminishing the aesthetic qualities of and scenic views to or from historic sites; minimize adverse visual impacts to historic sites; and preserve the historical or cultural values for which the property is listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Opaque vegetative buffers shall be adequate for this stated purpose and shall totally block the view from the historic property to the new construction. To achieve adequate opaque vegetative buffers, the plantings should be evergreen, with greater density in the lower part of the buffer, and up to 20 feet in height. Selected plantings should be varied, hardy and appropriate to the climate and geographical location. Full growth of the opaque vegetative buffers shall be accomplished within four (4) growing seasons. Existing vegetation growth may be considered an opaque visual buffer when it meets the criteria set forth above; if not, then existing vegetation must be supplemented to achieve the criteria.

The buffer must be indicated on all submitted plats as well as included in deed restrictions or other legal means of ensuring compliance and long-term/ongoing maintenance. Copies of the recorded deed restrictions should be provided to the SHPO. Selective vistas equivalent to one-third of the property width may be cleared in the buffer in consultation with the SHPO.

All new buildings should be lower in height than the existing tree line and should be set back at least 50 feet from the edge of the tree line.

Docks: New docks should be of a low profile, with minimal visual impacts on the landscape, and in keeping with the character of existing structures. Community docks and marinas with large numbers of boat slips and traffic will likely cause an adverse visual effect on the landscape as well as an adverse cumulative effect due to increases in boat traffic and noise in the dock area.

Community docks and marinas should be located in previously developed areas, near bridges, or near non-historic features in a landscape area to lessen adverse effects of the dock or marina on the historic landscape.

To avoid an adverse effect, individual docks should be limited in size, with a pierhead no larger than 100 square feet and with a single floating dock no larger than 128 square feet. Pier height should be as low as permitted by law. No roofs, handrails, or second story decks should be part of the dock's design. Docks should be constructed of wood and should remain unpainted.

If adverse effects to historic landscapes cannot be avoided then additional mitigation measures developed in coordination with our Office are recommended.

Required Documentation

The SHPO needs the following documentation to comment on potential adverse effects to historic landscapes:

- Detailed narrative description of project

- Aerial photographs of project area. Provide two photographs: one at an altitude of 2,500 feet, one at an altitude of 12,500 feet.
- Photographs keyed to a map:
 - Variety of views from historic landscape to project area
 - Variety of views from project area to historic landscape
 - Views from adjacent historic properties to project area
 - Views from project area to adjacent historic properties
 - Views of non-historic features in the viewshed
- Conceptual or final site plan for project
- Elevations, including dimensions, of any proposed docks, piers, or marinas
- Description of vegetative buffers on the project area to protect historic landscape. The SHPO recommends a minimum buffer of at least 50 feet.
- Description and explanation of non-historic features in the viewshed of the project area
- Names and addresses of adjacent owners of properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including owners of historic landscapes

Note: Based on the project, some type of visual simulation may be requested.

Additional Sources

[Special Area Management Plans \(SAMPs\) for Ashley River and Cooper River Corridor - SCDHEC-OCRM](#)

National Park Service:

[Preservation Brief #36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes](#)

[Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes](#)

[Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes](#)

[Guidelines for Identifying, Evaluating, and Registering America's Historic Battlefields](#)

[Guidelines for Identifying, Evaluating, and Registering Historic Mining Properties](#)

[How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes](#)

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