

FAQs about the National Register of Historic Places

If the following questions and answers leave you still wondering, please feel free to call us at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office. We are always glad to talk with you on the phone or in person about the National Register if there is something you'd like clarified. Please write us or give us a call: 1301 E Lockey, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202, (406) 444-7715.

1. What is the National Register of Historic Places?

The National Register is the official list of the Nation's historic buildings and archaeological sites that are considered to be worthy of preservation. The Register was established in 1966 to help property owners, communities and neighborhoods recognize their important historic properties, to offer realistic incentives for preservation, and to insure that Federal actions do not harm these properties without alternatives being considered. The National Register was not designed as a major regulatory program nor as just an honor roll. The Register was intended to be broad rather than exclusive and includes many different kinds of properties important to the Nation, the State, a region or a local community.

2. If I list my home or business in the National Register, what restrictions will be placed on my rights to modify or sell the property?

Listing in the National Register in of itself does not interfere with an owner's right to manage their property as they see fit. You may paint, remodel, administer, sell, or even demolish your property. You may alter your building at any time, unless you use Federal funds or the Federal tax incentives to rehabilitate it, in which case the alterations are reviewed by the agency in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (this is true not only for National Register properties but also for those eligible for listing—see Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act). Placing a property in the Register also does not obligate an owner to make any repairs or improvements. Moreover, the State or Federal government will not attach restrictive covenants to properties or seek to acquire them as a result of National Register-listing. Local governments may adopt, design, or review zoning ordinances affecting properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Please check with your local preservation office or planning office to see if your community has adopted such provisions.

3. Does Register listing mean that my property must be opened to the public on a regular basis?

As the owner of a property listed in the Register, you will not be required to open your house, place of business, or historic site for public visitation. Your private property rights are in no way changed by Register listing, unless, again, you have accepted Federal funds for rehabilitation, in which case the public must be allowed to visit the property for a few days each year.

4. Can I get money to fix up my historic building if it is listed in the Register?

National Register property owners may apply for Federal grants for buildings rehabilitation when Congress appropriates such funds. However, these funds are extremely limited and most property owners will not receive such funding. If you are a Community Cultural Organization, we encourage you to check with the Montana Arts Council (444-6430) to determine whether the project you are considering would qualify for Cultural and Aesthetic Grant monies appropriated biennially by the Montana Legislature.

5. Is there some kind of tax credit I can get if I plan to repair my historic building?

Yes. If a property is listed in the National Register, certain Federal tax provisions may apply. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 allows you to credit 20 per cent of the rehabilitation costs against your federal tax liability for the substantial rehabilitation of income-product properties such as commercial, farm, industrial, and residential rental buildings. Work must meet certain standards and be reviewed and approved by the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. Because tax provisions are complicated, individuals should consult their accountants for assistance in determining the tax consequences of the above provisions.

6. So what are the results of listing my property in the Register? Why should I consider doing so?

Recognition

Most of all, Register listing provided your property **recognition** for its historic value and rewards you for your efforts in preserving it. Listing of a building, site or district also afford it prestige that can enhance its value and raise community awareness and pride. While National Register properties do not have to be preserved, listing does insure that preservation is taken to be an important consideration whenever a building's or site's future is in question

Technical Assistance

Owners of Register properties are also able to seek advice from the Montana Historic Preservation Office on appropriate methods to maintain and rehabilitate older buildings or sites.

Signs

Owners of listed properties may apply for funds to obtain Montana's official National Register interpretive plaque to mount on a stand or hang on an outside wall of their building. The applicant pays only a \$35.00 shipping and handling fee or \$55.00, depending upon the type of sign, the balance coming from the Montana Historical Society.

Government Agency Compliance Review

The National Historic Preservation Act and the Montana State Antiquities Act require federal and state agencies to consider the impacts of all projects occurring on public lands, or with federal funding, that affect historic properties eligible for or listed in the National Register. In addition, the Surface Mining and Control Act of 1977 requires consideration of historic values in the decision to issue surface coal mining permits.

7. How do you decide whether something is significant enough to be listed in the National Register?

The National Register carefully evaluates the quality of significance of each property being considered for listing. To be eligible for the Register designation, a property must meet one of more of the following criteria:

- A. Be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. Be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. Have yielded, or may likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

In addition, properties must possess a high degree of integrity to qualify for listing in the Register – in other words, they must be relatively unchanged in appearance from the historic period.

Generally speaking, a property must be at least 50 years old to be considered for the Register, unless it is of exceptional significance, or if it is an integral part of a historic district. Non-historic properties that are located within the boundaries of historic districts are also listed in the Register as “non-contributing” components of those historic districts.

Who can nominate properties to the Register?

Anyone can prepare a nomination for listing a historic property on the National Register -- from private owners to local historians to public lands manager to historic preservation professionals. Important properties worthy of listing are identified by people across Montana, who frequently are most familiar with their local history and properties deserving recognition. Eligible properties may also be identified by federal and state lands agencies, which must routinely consider historic resources as a part of their permitting and project activities. The owner of a private property must concur in the nomination of a private property to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In the case of multiple owners and historic districts, the majority of private owners must object for an approved property not to be listed.