



## Number of Historic Places

This EnviroAtlas national map portrays the total number of historic places within each 12-digit hydrologic unit (HUC). The data were compiled from the National Register of Historic Places that provides the official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture.

### Why is the number of historic places important?

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) became law in 1966 based on the premise that “the historical and cultural foundations of the nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life.” A limited number of historical sites had been created since the 19<sup>th</sup> century for patriotic and educational reasons, to honor famous people, and to recognize great architecture.<sup>1</sup> Since the passage of the act, the number of candidate sites has expanded to include over 80,000 properties. More recently, historic district status has been used as a tool for urban revitalization and tourism.<sup>1</sup>

To be considered for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, a property must be nominated with justifications submitted to a federal, state, or tribal preservation office. To qualify, a building site must have its original construction and integrity of location, design, and materials. It must offer educational value and be associated with a historical period or event, lives of significant people, a building style, or artistic period. Intangible values may also be important in historic designation. Natural areas may be designated if they are sacred to Native American groups, or rural historic landscapes may be selected to highlight landscape characteristics that have resulted from continued human use.<sup>2</sup>

The designation of historic districts has become an important method for revitalizing urban neighborhoods. Most research into historic preservation vs. new development has shown that it is efficient and profitable to preserve historical buildings. A study of nine cities in Texas found that historic district designation increased property values in seven of the cities by 5–20%.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in the U.S., expenditures from renovation have been repaid in the form of new jobs and revenue from museums, convention business, and tourism.<sup>4</sup>



Photo: C and O Canal, National Park Service photo

Heritage tourism is a fast-growing segment of the tourism industry. The Travel Industry Association of America found that about 81% of U.S. adults who traveled over 50 miles away from home in 2003 were cultural and heritage tourists.<sup>5</sup> According to their results, heritage tourists spent more money and stayed longer than other types of travelers. A challenge for planners is to integrate tourism into the fabric of the community without allowing it to radically change local identity. For example, historic preservation may result in the commercialization and gentrification of historic districts. Over time, corporate development of entertainment, shopping, and lodging facilities may change the integrity and character of the historic district. In addition, increasing property values may reduce diversity in the district, making it unaffordable for low- and middle-income residents to remain there.<sup>1,3</sup>

The more intangible benefits of historic preservation include a sense of place, a feeling of historical connectivity with previous generations, civic pride, and neighborhood cohesion. Some of the benefits of residence in or accessibility to historic districts, such as positive health effects, reduction in stress, and a general sense of well-being, are similar to those provided to residents by urban trees and green space. Urban green space and historical space both give one a sense of identity through continued association with a particular place and continuity with the past, and they provide opportunities for social interaction, education, thinking, and reflection.<sup>6</sup>

## How can I use this information?

This map allows users to evaluate the number of historic places in each 12-digit HUC across the U.S. The map may be compared with other national EnviroAtlas maps to evaluate accessibility to historic sites. Users may overlay number of historic sites with other built-environment metrics found in the interactive map table of contents under People and Built Spaces to highlight areas possibly needing improved accessibility. Historic places within HUCs may be compared with other national recreational map layers. Users can identify hydrologic units with few or no historic places that may benefit from a search for significant historic or cultural sites. HUCs containing historic sites may also be overlaid with data on environmental effects, such as air and water pollution to examine possible threats to historic sites.

## How were the data for this map created?

The data for this map were compiled from the [National Register of Historic Places](#) maintained by the National Park Service. Each type of historical site (historical districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects) completely within the census block group was counted using Spatial Join in ArcGIS to create a total count of all historical places. The data layer was also compiled for the entire U.S. and summarized by 12-digit hydrologic unit ([HUC](#)).

## What are the limitations of these data?

Summarizing and estimating various metrics across HUCs may create misleading results. This indicator is most useful for drawing attention to regional patterns of historical sites

within HUCs that might benefit from further study. Historic sites may be concentrated within urban areas or scattered across a broad rural area in the HUC; the locations of specific historic sites are not identified within individual HUCs. Increasing the transparency and examining the aerial-image base map gives an indication of the proportions of developed and undeveloped land in each hydrologic unit.

## How can I access these data?

EnviroAtlas data can be viewed in the interactive map, accessed through web services, or downloaded. [National Register of Historic Places](#) data and detailed information about how the historic places are defined may be obtained at the [National Park Service National Register](#) website.

## Where can I get more information?

A selection of resources on the relationships among historic sites, planning, and environmental quality is listed below. For additional information on data creation, access the metadata for the data layer from the drop down menu on the interactive map table of contents and click again on metadata at the bottom of the metadata summary page for more details. To ask specific questions about this data layer, please contact the [EnviroAtlas Team](#).

## Acknowledgments

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## Selected Publications

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  3. Leichenko, R.M., N.E. Coulson, and D. Listokin. 2001. [Historic preservation and residential property values: An analysis of Texas cities](#). *Urban Studies* 38(11): 1973–1987.
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  5. U.S. Department of Commerce. 2005. [A position paper on cultural and heritage tourism in the United States](#). Developed by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. Accessed August 2015.
  6. Fuller, R.A., K.N. Irvine, P. Devine-Wright, P.H. Warren, and K.J. Gaston. 2007. [Psychological benefits of green space increase with biodiversity](#). *Biology Letters* 3(4):390–394.
- Barthel, D.L. 1996. [Historic preservation: Collective memory and historical identity](#). Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey. 182 p.