

# MONTANA'S SHARED HERITAGE

Fourth Biennial Report on the Status, Condition, and Stewardship of Montana's State-owned Heritage Properties

Submitted to the Governor of Montana and the Montana State Legislature  
(Education Interim Committee)

SEPTEMBER 2018

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This fourth biennial report to the Montana State Legislature fulfills the intent of the 2011 revisions to MCA 22-3-422, 22-3-423, and 22-3-424. The report is based upon the information submitted by twelve state agencies that manage heritage properties on state-owned land, and provides insight regarding their administration, interpretation, and operation. In assessing the strategies employed by the agencies, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Montana Historic Preservation Review Board (Board) articulate seven critical findings about the current state of property stewardship and four primary recommendations for continued state improvement.

In this as well as previous reporting cycles, the biennial state agency reports provide a comprehensive and continuing understanding of the state's heritage properties and their management. These reports can be accessed at: <http://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/ReviewComp/StateHeritageProperties>. Analyzing and synthesizing these reports, the SHPO staff and Board have abstracted the most salient findings and best practices and outlined them in this report. Additionally, recommendations are offered to agencies, the Legislature, and the Governor to improve the capability and success of agencies in meeting their heritage properties responsibilities.

## PURPOSE

The 2011 Act by the 62<sup>nd</sup> Montana Legislature that amended the State Antiquities Act and required this reporting explained its overarching purpose as follows:

WHEREAS, hundreds of heritage properties have been entrusted to the state of Montana, the state's agencies are responsible for maintaining those properties on behalf of the state's citizens; and

WHEREAS, these properties are in danger of disappearing or falling into a state of disrepair from which they may never recover; and

WHEREAS, preserving and maintaining heritage properties is important not only for fostering a sense of identity and community, but also for the economic benefits to be realized through reusing buildings, attracting tourism, and revitalizing downtown areas; and

WHEREAS, regular assessment by state agencies on the condition of the heritage properties under the agencies' care will help ensure the state's ongoing stewardship of these valuable resources.

## DO YOU KNOW?

\*A *historic property* is a property that is at least 50 years old. A *heritage property* "means any historic district, site, building, structure, or object located upon or beneath the earth or underwater that is **significant** in American history, architecture, archaeology, or culture" (MCA 22-3-421 (4) and retains its historic integrity.

\*There are approximately 370 recorded state-owned heritage properties in Montana, including seven historic districts comprised of more than 25 contributing buildings each.

\*State-owned heritage properties include, but are not limited to, buildings, roads and bridges, ranches, farms, battlefields, and dams, as well as pre-contact Native archaeological sites and traditional cultural properties.

\*150 state-owned heritage properties are officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places, individually or as part of historic districts.

\*State agencies are aware of between 350 and 500 known but unrecorded and unevaluated historic buildings that may be potential heritage properties.

## FINDINGS

The agency reports yield several patterns of agency practices, as follows:

1. The Board sees improving relationships between agencies and the SHPO, including consultation on projects; however, there is still significant room for more consultation.
2. The Board observes a marked difference in the quality of heritage behavior between those agencies employing or contracting a designated person responsible for historic preservation and agencies that lack such an individual. An internal employee designated with heritage oversight significantly improves agency heritage stewardship.
3. In every case, the quality of state agency heritage stewardship is a function of an agency's perceived mission, funding, and available expertise. Improvement in an agency's heritage stewardship will always be agency specific and reflect agency realities and budgets.
4. Abandoned buildings and unprotected archaeological sites in state agency ownership are experiencing significant and unchecked deterioration and looting.
5. Currently, agencies focus more on already designated heritage properties than on inventory and evaluation of potential heritage properties.
6. With more education, training, funding, and interaction with private and public agencies and organizations, state agencies have the capability to find creative solutions to improve heritage stewardship.
7. Agencies must recognize that heritage preservation is also a part of their legal mission and mandate.

## BEST PRACTICES

While historic preservation efforts vary among state agencies, examples of successful preservation efforts continue to emerge and can serve as guidance for all agencies. The agency reports revealed the following best practices:

1. *Reporting*—Montana State University has updated their inventories and provides a comprehensive chart of their data in accompaniment with a well-written narrative of their stewardship efforts.
2. *Expertise*—In addition to SHPO, Montana State Parks and the Montana Heritage Commission retain expertise in heritage property interpretation and stewardship that may benefit other agency planning efforts.
3. *Re-Use*—Giving priority to the potential for heritage property rehabilitation and re-use before funding new construction can be economically advantageous while simultaneously preserving heritage properties. The Law Enforcement Academy (Justice) demonstrates the wisdom of such consideration in its ongoing use of the historic Mountain View School for Girls in Helena.
4. *Consultation*—The Department of Transportation and the Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation consistently and actively consult with the SHPO to consider impacts and proactively plan for preservation management.
5. *Funding*—Successfully completing heritage property projects often requires cultivating creative funding and collaborative sources. The MHS-Moss Mansion in Billings, the Old State Territorial Prison in Deer Lodge, and the University-FWP joint archaeological projects exemplify such creative and collaborative efforts.

## AGENCY VOICES

**“We strive to achieve the delicate balance of respectful resource stewardship with public access and enjoyment and economic self-sufficiency”**  
*Montana Heritage Commission 2018:4)*

**“This report documents efforts to preserve the places that matter—and to publicize these efforts.”** *Montana State University 2018:1*

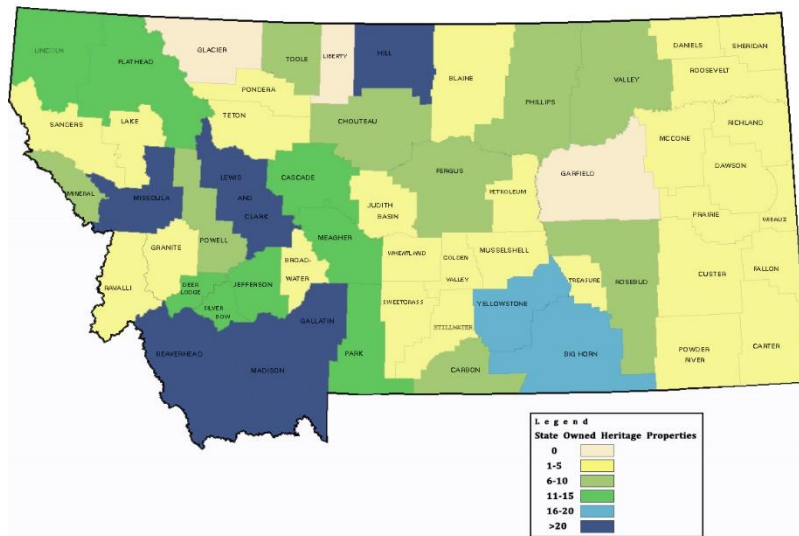
**“The documentation and preservation of buildings...has brought to life the history of the area and offered visitors and those who work and train at Fort Harrison a deeper appreciation for the history of the state’s Guard and elements that make up the historic district.”** *Department of Military Affairs 2018:7*

**“The ability to effect change on how resources of national significance are managed is a tremendous opportunity.”**  
*Fish, Wildlife, and Parks: Montana State Parks 2018:24*

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Through the four reporting cycles of this biennial report, the SHPO and the Board have seen many improvements in the reporting process and in agency stewardship efforts. To continue developing these efforts, we offer the following recommendations generated from the information and patterns noted in the agencies’ 2012-2018 reports:

1. Agencies who lack a cultural resource specialist should work with the SHPO to develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to guide their compliance with the Montana Antiquities Act and consultation protocols.
2. Agencies need to implement their Heritage Strategies and Strategic Plans.
3. The last comprehensive inventory of state-owned heritage properties occurred in 1980. The Legislature and Governor’s Office should allocate funding for an updated comprehensive survey of unrecorded and unevaluated state-owned historic properties (> 50 yrs old). Such an inventory would greatly benefit state agencies in meeting their Antiquities Act requirements and assist them in assessing their deferred maintenance and infrastructure needs.
4. The State of Montana needs to recognize that archaeological resources can often be heritage properties. With only 6% of state trust lands surveyed, great potential exists to expand our knowledge of this resource type, monitor the known sites, and evaluate their eligibility as heritage properties.



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