



Planning Guidance for Archaeological Sites

The purpose of this guidance is to encourage planners to incorporate archaeology into county and municipal comprehensive plans. The document also provides basic language that may be incorporated into planning documents and guidance on identifying areas with a high probability of containing archaeological sites.

Archaeological Sites

Humans first arrived in what is now Pennsylvania approximately 16,000 years ago. Europeans began settling in what would become Pennsylvania in the 17th century; by 1682, William Penn had arrived and established the colony of Pennsylvania. During the 1730s, settlers began entering the Ohio River Valley. Over these thousands of years, humans have left a substantial material record of their lives. The study of this material record forms the basis of **archaeology**, the basic unit of which is the **archaeological site**. The number of archaeological sites identified in Pennsylvania's counties and municipalities varies; however, this variation likely reflects a lack of archaeological research, not a lack of sites. Archaeological sites in Pennsylvania include but are not limited to, locations where prehistoric hunters manufactured stone tools, prehistoric encampments, late prehistoric villages, prehistoric burial mounds, historic iron furnaces, historic taverns, historic fortifications and other military sites, and small late nineteenth/early twentieth century farmsteads.

Archaeological sites, like historic buildings, are considered **cultural resources** and, if they meet eligibility requirements set forth in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), they are **historic properties**. Unlike historic buildings, however, archaeological sites are not always evident to the untrained eye. While some archaeological sites have obvious above ground indicators such as earth mounds, or chimney remnants, most consist of **artifacts** (objects made or modified by humans such as stone tools, pottery, bottle glass) and **features** (post holes, trash pits, stone hearths, human burials, etc.) that are **underground**. There are two types of archaeological sites: prehistoric sites and historic period sites. These different types of sites require different techniques for discovery and treatment.

How do you know if an area contains an archaeological site? The only sure way to know is to have a professional archaeologist **survey**, or sample, the area. In many cases, local archaeological societies or amateur/avocational archaeologists may have information, as well. There are some general criteria you can apply to determine the probability if a location may contain an archaeological site(s) and thus, plan accordingly. Prehistoric (Native American) sites are most commonly located near water sources such as streams, springs, or marshes. Historic (European/African-American) sites are commonly located close to old/historic roads and often are associated with above-ground resources. Both prehistoric and historic sites are generally located on level to gently sloping ground and on well-drained soils. Previous disturbance can also affect a location's potential to contain archaeological sites. For example, road/utility rights-of-way have usually been subjected to heavy disturbance and are not likely to contain intact archaeological deposits. Cultivation, however, does not necessarily destroy archaeological sites and does not, by itself, indicate a low potential area. These criteria, along with others, are

often used by archaeologists to create a “predictive model.” A predictive model organizes areas by the probability that they will contain archaeological sites. Hiring a professional archaeologist/consultant is an effective way “to foster conditions under which our modern society and our prehistoric and historic resources can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic,

and other requirements of present and future generations” (NHPA 1966 Section 2(1)). Hiring a professional may also assist in streamlining the compliance process and ensuring that archaeological resources are being treated according to federal and state laws.

Please note that Pennsylvania’s Cultural Resources Geographic Information System (CRGIS) has a planner level access. With this level of access, planners may register for a password that allows them to receive information concerning archaeological sites within specified project areas. This information does not give specific site locations, but informs if there is a previously-recorded site within the project area. Visit <http://crgis.state.pa.us> to learn of the necessary qualifications and to apply for a username and password.

While cultural resources work is often completed in response to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, meaning that there is some federal involvement (i.e., federal funds, permits, etc.), it is important to remember that there are also state laws that may need to be complied with in project planning, such as the [Pennsylvania History Code](#).

Key points to remember when considering archaeology in development projects and to ensure compliance with federal and state laws:

- Humans have been in the area now known as Pennsylvania for at least 16,000 years, so the potential for finding evidence of past human activity (i.e., archaeological sites) is generally high.
- Unlike historic buildings, prehistoric archaeological sites often have no above ground components that would indicate their presence; however, historical archaeological sites are often associated with aboveground resources or ruins.
- While factors such as distance to water and/or old roads, slope, soil drainage, and previous disturbance can help prioritize areas of archaeological concern, the only sure way to know whether an area contains archaeological sites is to conduct an archaeological survey.
- To see if a project area contains previously identified site(s), see Pennsylvania’s Cultural Resources Geographic Information System (CRGIS): (<http://crgis.state.pa.us>). This resource’s Planner Level access gives planners the ability to draw a project area and find out if there is an archaeological site within it; however, the precise locational information is restricted.
- If you know or suspect that there is an archaeological site in a project area, or if there is a high probability for an archaeological site in your project area, the most desirable way to preserve it is to avoid it. Full excavation is a last resort because it results in the destruction of the site.
- The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission restricts access to archaeological site locational information, due to the very real danger of looting, trespassing, and vandalism.
- Most archaeology is done in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic

Preservation Act and regulations implementing that act (36 CFR Part 800). These laws ensure that projects receiving federal funds (CDBG/EIP grants, FDIC loans, etc) or requiring federal permits (e.g., Section 404 of Clean Water Act) take into account effects on archaeological resources.

- In addition to federal laws, there are state laws to consider as well, such as the Pennsylvania History Code.
- If you have any questions please contact the BHP at (717) 787-4363 or (717) 783-8946.