Heritage in the Landscape
Meshing Conservation and Preservation Goals with the National Register

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The watershed-wide initiative for the Squam Lakes provides a ground-breaking preservation road map for an approximately 40,000-acre region of central New Hampshire that encompasses five towns, three counties, and three bodies of water just south of the White Mountains. Project leaders’ close alliance with conservation interests and robust public outreach were key to raising local interest and support for a multiyear effort—2010 to 2018—to create a National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form that has led to both many short-term preservation successes and promising ongoing efforts. The project yielded the largest geographic and first watershed-wide National Register for Historic Places listing in New England.

The project design and National Register process identified and documented Squam’s historical resources, raised awareness of the interconnectivity between the built and natural landscapes, and continues to encourage their preservation. The initiative’s innovative strategies were successful in preserving a cherished place and way of life and offer practical ideas for large- and small-scale projects with similar goals.

This watershed-wide initiative provides a unique preservation “road map” for a region that encompasses five towns and approximately 40,000 acres in central New Hampshire south of the White Mountains. The boundary relies primarily on natural features, but employs town lines and lot lines when appropriate.

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HISTORIC SQUAM LAKES
Since the late 19th century, people have gathered in the Squam Lakes area in the warmer months to enjoy the beauty, serenity, and recreational opportunities afforded by the lakes and surrounding mountains. This highly distinctive cultural landscape is defined by rustic camps; summer cottages, both modest and architect designed; farmsteads surrounded by fields, pastures, and woodlots; village centers; former hotels and inns; children’s summer camps; stone walls; burial grounds; and cellar holes. Squam is the site of Camp Chocorua, the first organized children’s summer camp in the United States. Founded in 1881, it established a template for those that followed throughout the Northeast. After the camp closed in 1889, the same site evolved into the open-air Chocorua Island Chapel. Most of the resources are clustered around Squam Lake and its more than 60 miles of shoreline, but the smaller Little Squam Lake and White Oak Pond are also integral to the watershed’s history and natural context.

In a May 2013 article, architectural historians James Garvin and Nancy Dutton described the private camps and cottages as “deliberately rustic and evocative of the era before electrification, automobile travel and powerful motor boats.” They noted, “Their camps and cottages and the summertime activities they sheltered were often a complete antithesis to the home life of their builders, among whom were some of the most successful entrepreneurs and most distinguished teachers, clergy, writers and scientists in the Northeast.”

Despite more than 200 years of active habitation, the landscape remains remarkably unspoiled—thanks to a strong conservation ethic among the residents and an unspoken adherence to low-impact development, which have kept the shoreline essentially free of the mid- and late-20th-century commercial and multi-unit residential development that typifies lake communities throughout much of the country. Betsy Whitmore, chair of the committee that spearheaded the Squam Lakes initiative, marvels at the lake’s seemingly pristine shoreline: “When gazing down at the lake from a surrounding ridgeline, the shoreline appears undeveloped, even though there are numerous small cottages tucked in among the trees here and there.”
POINEERING THE CAMPSTEAD EASEMENT

Working with other conservation partners, the 100-year-old Squam Lakes Association and the somewhat younger local land trust—the Squam Lakes Conservation Society—have long led efforts to protect 30 percent of the watershed through the acquisition of conservation easements and land in fee. However, little had been done to identify and preserve the historic built environment.

Meanwhile, the area’s desirability and high property values had made Squam’s older camps, cottages, and farmsteads vulnerable. Soaring property taxes forced some families to sell, and high sales prices increased the pressure to remove and replace the rustic camps with larger, year-round dwellings.

To meet these challenges, the Conservation Society worked with the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance to create an innovative tool: a campstead easement. Its legal framework is that of a typical conservation or preservation easement, but its objectives relate more closely to planning goals. Conservation Society staff work with the owners of each prospective property to identify character-defining features and long-term property objectives. These stakeholders craft a legal agreement that promotes preservation of the camp or cottages; requires use of natural materials for repair or replacement; and restricts future alterations to building height, footprint, and materials. Society staff offer guidance and monitoring to reinforce the easement terms, bringing in preservation advisers as needed. Campstead easements provide long-term stewardship for these resources and protect the shoreline. And the restrictions on future land use can reduce property values, which in turn can keep property taxes lower than they would be on an unencumbered property.”
While campstead easements help preserve and protect individual properties, they aren’t the solution for the larger-scale issue. “Preserving these intertwined resources is critical to preserving the low-impact, rustic quality of life and the cultural landscape that has defined the Squam Lakes watershed for over a century,” said Roger Larochelle, executive director of the Conservation Society. “Just as a forest defines the natural landscape, farmsteads, fields, stonewalls, and rustic camps define its human landscape. Preserving these cultural resources also helps to conserve the watershed, minimize development, and ensure that the traditions of Squam are passed along for future generations.”

**NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION PROJECT DESIGN AND PROCESS**

The Squam Lakes National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form submitted in 2012 was unusual and innovative, weaving historical data into a narrative that explains how and why the Squam watershed evolved into a pristine natural area with a rich cultural heritage. It not only details the historical evolution of the area over a period of 250 years but also articulates the character-defining elements of both the buildings and built landscapes, thus laying the groundwork for managing future growth. Further, the form establishes a framework for producing subsequent National Register nominations within the watershed, which has proven to be of great interest to property owners and local groups.

While planning the National Register Multiple Property nomination, project leaders kept both organizational goals and on-the-ground protection objectives in mind. They felt confident that the project would help them build or strengthen relationships with local groups and property owners, increase membership and financial support for their work, and enhance conservation and preservation activities. The project was a citizen initiative, while the Conservation Society served as its fiscal agent. The Society also worked with the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance and the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (the state historic preservation office) to develop a multifaceted project.
Whitmore, a member of the Society’s board, served as the chair of a committee of conservationists, historians, and historical society representatives from each of the five towns in the Squam Lakes. The committee raised funds to hire Elizabeth Durfee Hengen of Concord, New Hampshire, to produce the National Register nomination and consult on other aspects of the project. Hengen had 30 years of experience with diverse cultural and historic resource planning projects and had helped develop the campstead easement model. In addition, she had recently completed a National Register nomination for the watershed of Chocorua Lake, another well-loved New Hampshire lakeside community, at the time the largest nomination geographically in New England.

The multiple property nomination consists of an overarching cover form and individual registration forms. The cover form functions as an umbrella: it identifies and comprehensively lays out the two historic contexts—Settlement & Development and The Summer Influx—and describes the property types that illustrate those contexts. It also establishes the geographic limits and the time periods they cover, thus allowing individual properties and districts to be evaluated for eligibility within the overarching nomination.

Hengen determined, and the committee agreed, that the Squam viewshed was the most appropriate boundary. Much of
Squam’s three lakes are ringed by peaks, ridges, and other focal points of the natural landscape that are visible from the water. In areas without such focal points, the boundary follows a mix of the watershed limits, town lines, topographical lines, conservation lands edges, and rear lot lines along roads.

Having established a geographic boundary, identifying property types that had not previously been formally defined in New Hampshire and describing their associative features became the next major task. Based on Squam’s evolution and physical character, Hengen developed definitions to distinguish its camps from cottages, organized camps from private camps, farmhouses from farmsteads, and country houses from country estates—work that will serve others nominating similar resources. She also analyzed recreational resources such as boathouses, town beaches, trails, and bridle paths. Per Hengen’s definitions, a typical Squam camp was:

- Built without formal plans and without an adherence to an architectural style;
- Cobbled together over time;
- Located on the shorefront and oriented toward the water;
- Traditionally approached from the water—road approach brings one to a back entrance into the kitchen; and
- Built on a ledge or footings of stone, granite, or concrete.

The camps’ site characteristics include:

- Trees and shrubs along the shoreline for screened and framed views and natural sightlines;
- Unpaved footpaths that weave through the woods to link the buildings and provide access to the water;
- Unpaved driveways;
- Hand railings along paths made from logs and saplings found on the property;
- Buildings sited to harmonize with and cause minimal disturbance to the landscape;
- A few trees and boulders left close by the buildings and sometimes protruding through a porch; and
- A lack of formal landscaping.
And their physical characteristics include:

- Low rooflines with gable or gambrel roofs and exposed rafter tails;
- No cellars;
- Wooden siding painted dark or earthen colors—or left to weather—with trim in a similar or subtly contrasting color;
- Posts, brackets, railings, and other details fashioned from logs or twigs, usually with bark left on;
- Window sash that is double-hung, casement, sliding, or drop-down with divided muntins to frame views and reduce glare from water; and
- A major porch on the lakeside functioning as an extension of the living room, sometimes separated by a hinged wall, and a minor porch at the kitchen entrance.

The multiple property approach streamlines a large nomination like this one, providing economy of scale, as information that is common to both the multiple-resource nomination and individual nominations does not need to be repeated, merely referenced on the latter forms. The nomination also allows individual owners to elect whether—and even when—to participate. It can easily be expanded to include more property types or amended as additional research information becomes available.
Included with the cover form were individual registration forms for five highly recognized and well-loved properties on the lake. Since 2012, another 12 have been submitted for nine individual properties and three districts. These have been funded by owners, about half of whom also received aid from a donations-based grant pool.

ROBUST PUBLIC OUTREACH
People inspiring other people, families inspiring other families were at the heart of all communications about this project. At the outset, committee members met with and secured support from multigenerational owners who played prominent roles in the region. Once those owners signed on to support the initiative, others paid attention. According to Whitmore, “These families embraced the idea of preserving the old barns, farms, and lakeside cottages that their grandparents had built and subsequent generations cherish. They understood that this was a way to preserve the heritage of Squam and their own beloved summer places. Listing on the Register became a means to celebrate [each family] for their careful and diligent stewardship of their Squam property.”

Public presentations focused on the history and significance of the area and explained what the National Register is and is not. Coupled with finalized campstead easements, these presentations generated interest and enthusiasm. Two scholarly and accessible books that had been published a few years earlier—Rachel Carley’s

Project leaders wanted to protect views of the lake where shorelines appear largely undeveloped due to the modest scale of the older residences and the use of dark colors and vegetative screening in old and new construction alike.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH DURFEE HENGEN
Squam and Derek Brereton’s Campsteading—also drove momentum for the project.

The project committee’s strategic communications plan ultimately reached property owners, selectmen from all five towns within the project area, heritage and historic district commissions, historical societies, land trusts and conservation commissions, local media, chambers of commerce, the hospitality community, and all the major local nonprofit organizations. The plan reinforced these audiences’ deep connection to Squam while also providing information about the project’s goals and popular topics such as property values and taxes.

Once the National Register work was underway, committee members introduced the project to friends and neighbors and set up meetings that allowed Hengen to view their properties. Convincing these residents that the National Register listing wouldn’t invade their privacy or increase tourism in the area was an ongoing challenge. Communications therefore emphasized the benefits of the National Register listing, including:

- Enhancing pride in the region and showing how to maintain its low-impact character;
- Providing a database to guide growth and development;
- Encouraging additional conservation and preservation work around the lake;
- Offering a proactive approach to, and early seat at the table through, the Section 106 process for federally funded, licensed, or permitted projects, such as cell towers and wind farms, that could be out-of-character with Squam’s landscape;
- Providing some flexibility in complying with building codes and American with Disabilities Act regulations;
- Honoring privacy and offering the ability to redact some information within the nomination; and
- Imposing no restrictions on private actions nor any requirement to open up to the public.

In addition to garnering community support for the nomination, this robust outreach led to fundraising success. The project received funding from more than 150 donors and several foundations. The committee also ran a successful fundraising auction that helped launch the project.
Hengen slightly reformatted and richly illustrated the National Register nomination cover form to make it suitable for public distribution. It has proven so popular that the Squam Lakes Conservation Society offers the 80-page report for sale, with proceeds going into the grant pool that helps owners cover the costs associated with individual property nominations.

**ONGOING POSITIVE IMPACTS**

The National Register Multiple Property Form has provided the first in-depth, comprehensive scholarly documentation of the Squam region’s most iconic properties, building on generations of conservation activity and affection for this special place. The process of developing the form and building community interest in preserving the cultural landscape has exceeded the project leaders’ expectations, yielding many short-term successes and laying a strong foundation for many more.

To date, 17 properties, three of them districts, have been listed on the National Register. They include more than 335 resources on more than 1,300 acres, most of them undeveloped but associated with local history. Listed properties include farmsteads with significant agricultural outbuildings and family cemeteries, rustic shorefront and island camps, a hilltop cluster of 18 cottages that represents the earliest summer development on the lake, country houses, and several family camp enclaves. Two of the properties—Chocorua Island Chapel, an outdoor chapel with well-attended weekly services, and Rockywold-Deephaven Camps, a large organized camp for families that dates to 1897—are Squam’s primary gathering spots. These early phases offer a model for the protection of other properties.

Camp interiors have rustic features, such as stone fireplaces, decorative logs, exposed-stud walls and simple built-in furniture.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH DURFEE HENGEN
A variety of significant initiatives has grown out of the project’s strong foundation of robust outreach and use of the National Register:

- The Squam Lakes Association now hosts an archival repository for the preservation of Squam documents—such as photographs, maps, and guest logs—that historically have been mostly in private hands and typically stored in unprotected, seasonal buildings.

- The master plan for one of the five towns in the watershed includes a new chapter on historic resources that will serve as a good model for the other towns.

- Subsequent conservation easements have made reference to the National Register nomination and the watershed’s historic significance in their purpose statements.

- The Squam Lakes Conservation Society now regularly presents the “Passing It On” program, which offers stewardship strategies for property owners.

This project has inspired several owners of waterfront historic properties outside the Squam watershed, including an early boys’ camp, to produce National Register nominations. Concerned about the impacts of large-scale development, leaders in other parts of the state have also looked at the Squam project as a model for action.

With scores of large-scale energy projects in development around the country, it is more important than ever to help citizens and decision-makers as they identify and protect large cultural landscapes. While this rustic place in New Hampshire is distinctive and even unique, elements of this project could be replicated in a range of other communities. Tapping into people’s connection to place is still at the heart of generating both short-term successes and positive momentum over time. FJ

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