Threatened Treasures: Creating Lists of Endangered Historic Places

by Mary Humstone
Threatened Treasures: Creating Lists of Endangered Historic Places
by Mary Humstone

America’s historic treasures are a non-renewable resource. Once they are gone, they are gone for good. This list is a wake-up call to all Americans. Saving these places is not someone else’s job. Ensuring that our past stays alive is the best gift we could give to Americans of the new millennium.

— Richard Moe, National Trust for Historic Preservation

In 1988, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched its first list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. The list alerted the public that some of our most treasured historic, cultural, and architectural sites—the Vieux Carré in New Orleans, petroglyphs in New Mexico, the Antietam Battlefield in Maryland—were in danger of being lost forever due to inappropriate development or neglect. The list was an immediate success with the media and with the public, evoking powerful images of the places preservationists were fighting to protect. The National Trust calls the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list “one of our most effective tools in the fight to save America’s irreplaceable architectural, cultural and natural heritage.” Since 1988, the list has brought national attention to more than 110 significant buildings, sites, and landscapes, 23 of which have been saved, and only one of which has been lost.

Since 1988, dozens of state and local preservation organizations have followed the Trust’s lead and developed and publicized their own lists of threatened historic places. These lists are successfully used at the local, state, and national levels to draw public attention to the fate of historic resources, to generate legislative support for preservation activities, and to bring preservation efforts to the attention of the media. Although an endangered listing does not guarantee protection or funding for sites, it can provide the catalyst needed to save a historic place by raising awareness and rallying resources.

Preserving heritage can be a difficult concept to grasp, and preservationists often struggle to convey their message to a public audience. Targeting specific buildings and sites through an endangered historic places program can help put a face on preservation and make it more understandable and appealing to the general public.

This publication is designed both for organizations that are considering launching an endangered historic places list, and for those interested in evaluating and fine tuning an existing program. It addresses issues ranging from evaluating the benefits of a list to preparing for the responsibilities of a list, and provides step-by-step suggestions for developing selection criteria, soliciting and judging nominations, publicizing the announcement, and providing the follow-up assistance needed to save listed properties. The publication draws on the experience of preservation organizations throughout the country that have effectively used endangered lists to achieve their preservation goals.

Why Have an Endangered Historic Places List?

Goal 1—Saving Historic Places

Many preservation organizations credit their endangered historic places lists with phenomenal results in saving historic resources. The 1997 listing of Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C., by the National Trust for Historic Preservation mobilized more than 1,000 volunteers and resulted in $75,000 in cash donations and in-kind services from individuals, including members of the armed forces, who were shocked at the deteriorated condition of such an iconic place.

The West Baden Spring Hotel in Indiana, a National Historic Landmark, benefited from a double listing by both the National Trust and the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana.

— Photo courtesy of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana.
important site. The support generated by the listing eventually led to $1 million in federal matching grant funds for perpetual maintenance of the cemetery. The 2000 listing of the Gold Hill Mining District in Boulder County, Colo., sparked renewed interest in the oldest gold mine in the state, a National Historic Landmark that was threatened with development. Listing brought the site to the attention of local citizens and county officials, who worked with Colorado Preservation, Inc., to negotiate purchase and perpetual protection by Boulder County Open Space. The West Baden Springs Hotel in Indiana, a National Historic Landmark that had been empty and deteriorating for more than 15 years, benefited from double listing by both the National Trust and the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. The national attention attracted benefactors who helped Historic Landmarks purchase the hotel, and are helping to fund its rehabilitation.

A site's placement on a statewide or national endangered historic places list enhances grass-roots preservation efforts. In Michigan City, Ind., local volunteers had worked for years to try to convince officials to preserve the Michigan City Lighthouse Catwalk. The endorsement given by the site's listing as one of the Ten Most Endangered Historic Places in Indiana was the catalyst that finally attracted the attention of officials and led to saving of the site.

Goal 2—Publicity
Sometimes a historic place is endangered because the significance of the site or threats to the site are not well known. A front-page story in a newspaper can raise the profile of the site and provide a catalyst for preservation.

Launching a list of endangered places is an effective way to generate publicity for your preservation organization and activities. Because the list deals with specific places with their own distinctive stories, it is naturally appealing to the media. The threat takes the list of places from the features page to the front page. The resulting publicity is not only good for the project, it also benefits the sponsoring organization with increased name recognition, members, and vol-
unteers. “The local papers eat this up. It’s a very strong educational tool,” says Robert Erwin, formerly of Preservation Oklahoma.

Sometimes a listing results in exceptional media coverage. For example, the National Trust’s 2000 listing of Soldiers’ Home, Abraham Lincoln’s summer presidential retreat and the only major Lincoln site in the country that has not been restored, generated intense media interest resulting in a front-page story in The New York Times. Within a few weeks of the listing, it was named a national monument by President Clinton.

**Goal 3—Advocacy**

State and local preservation organizations are constantly advocating for preservation of historic resources, whether with developers, state legislators, city council members, county commissioners, or the general public. Creating a list of most endangered historic places helps to focus the organization’s efforts on a manageable number of significant resources, rather than diluting efforts by trying to save everything. A carefully chosen list of endangered places can reflect an organization’s preservation goals in a very concrete way. For instance, an organization with a goal of protecting rural landscapes could choose a significant and representative farmstead for its endangered list, thus providing the public with a specific example of what it is trying to achieve. A picture of a stately barn is worth a thousand words about rural preservation, just as a picture of a historic downtown hotel speaks volumes about downtown revitalization.

The Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana sees preservation advocacy as a key role of its endangered historic places list. Historic Landmarks views the program as a “Ten to Save” list, the foundation of the organization’s preservation work plan. Preservation advocates in Wyoming launched their brand new organization with an endangered historic places list as a way to graphically describe to the public and the media what the organization hoped to accomplish.

Endangered historic places lists have been used effectively as lobbying tools when seeking funding for historic preservation programs. Preservation Oklahoma’s 2000 listing of the state’s county courthouses capped a multi-year effort to develop and pass legislation to fund courthouse restoration. “The listing made it clear that this was a priority for preservation in the state, and the ten courthouses we chose as emblematic of the problem helped people understand what we were talking about,” says Preservation Oklahoma’s Robert Erwin.

**Goal 4—Education**

Endangered Historic Places lists can also be used to educate the public about preservation. The lists help convey the range of historic sites that preservationists are concerned with. “The program helps people understand that historic preservation is not just about landmark buildings. It’s also the everyday buildings that give a broader sense of how a community has evolved,” says George Edwards, executive director of the Preservation Alliance of Virginia. The lists provide a graphic illustration of significant resources and the obstacles that must be overcome to preserve them—thought-provoking material for slide shows, lectures, exhibits, and videos. For several years the History Channel has produced a one-hour documentary on the National Trust’s annual list of 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, an educational tool that introduces a huge new constituency to some fascinating places in American history. Preservation Oklahoma takes its Endangered Historic Places list on the road, through a speakers’ bureau offering slide presentations and discussions on current preservation issues. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana has incorporated its list into a popular preservation education program. Preservation Alliance of Minnesota has created traveling exhibits of its most endangered sites, which are displayed in museums, libraries, city halls, and bank lobbies throughout the state.

**Pitfalls—What Can Go Wrong**

While endangered historic places lists can accomplish these goals and more, things can also go wrong. As with any high visibility project, your list will be subject to intense public scrutiny. It is critical to think through the process thoroughly, and be sure you have the necessary commitment of time and money, before launching an endangered historic places list. Some considerations include:

- Have a fair process for soliciting and judging nominations that actively seeks to represent all constituencies in the state or region. Don’t risk being accused of being arbitrary, elitist, or single-focused in your selection.
- Be prepared to do thorough research. Don’t rely on word of mouth for important information such as an owner’s attitude toward a historic property. “Trust, but verify,” is the advice of Robert Erwin of Preservation Oklahoma. If possible, staff or board members should visit nominated sites before the final decision is made.
What’s in a Number?

Why 11 most endangered historic sites? How should you choose the right number for your list? The World Monuments Fund list of endangered places includes 100 sites from around the globe. The Kansas Preservation Alliance listed only three new sites in 2000, although the organization maintains a “watch” list from previous years. You might want to base your decision on a catchy slogan, such as New York’s “Seven to Save.” If your goal is to save all the sites on your list within a year, you’ll want to pick a manageable number. If you are more interested in calling attention to the widespread threat to historic resources in your city or state, a larger number would serve you well.

Many states, for example Maine, Virginia, Connecticut, Oklahoma, and Colorado, don’t have a defined number, but allow the list to fluctuate according to demand, number of nominations received, and challenge of the projects. “We won’t list more than we can reasonably hope to help in a year,” says Colorado Preservation, Inc.’s Rachel Yank. “If we have very challenging projects, we will limit the number on our list.”

Local Lists

While this publication deals primarily with statewide lists, many local preservation organizations are creating endangered historic places programs of their own. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana estimates that 30 of its local “affiliates” have endangered historic places programs. In some cases, the local media have responded to the state list by asking, “What are our endangered places?”

“Preservation happens locally and local lists can have a real impact,” says Tina Connor of Historic Landmarks. “They can also generate interest in the statewide list.” However, other statewide representatives caution that local lists could lessen the impact of the state list, and might detract from the statewide program if not properly managed. In any event, it is advisable for local organizations to coordinate with the statewide organization before launching a most endangered historic places program.

Endangered Historic Places Lists Step-by-Step

Step One: Organizational Commitment

While you don’t necessarily need a big budget and staff to launch a successful endangered historic places program, a public program of this kind requires a serious commitment from your organization. Once you have developed the materials and announced the program, you must be prepared to carry out a fair and professional process of site selection, announcement, and follow up assistance.

Who Will Do It?

At the minimum, you should have a staff person or a volunteer committee of three or more people dedicated to implementing the program. Most statewide programs operate with a combination of these: a staff person working with a committee made up of board members, representatives of other organizations, and volunteers. Colorado Preservation, Inc., employs a full-time staff person to manage its endangered historic places list and follow-up technical assistance. Oklahoma’s program is managed by its executive director, who fits the program into the many other duties of that position.

Committees vary greatly in size and make up. Many groups try to include a planner, architect, archeologist, and other preservation professionals on this committee. It is also a chance for a passionate, active group of advocacy-oriented volunteers (not only those involved directly in planning or commission work) to get involved in a worthwhile preservation effort. Colorado Preservation, Inc., aims for diversity in geographic location, ethnic background, and age for its review committee of 40 to 60 volunteers. The D.C. Preservation League’s program is run by its Landmarks Committee, which includes staff members as well as board members and other volunteers. Other groups seek representation from partner organizations and agencies, such as local universities, the state historic preservation office, state historical society, and state chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

- Develop a process for evaluating all possible political ramifications of your selections, and determining how much you will be willing to risk to list a controversial project.
- Be clear about your goals for the program, and be sure to communicate them to the public. Be wary of raising expectations. If your list is just a call to action, and you don’t have the resources to help save the properties yourself, say so.
- Be prepared for disappointed partners—not every worthy project will make it to your list. How will you deal with those who fear that if they don’t make the list their project won’t get any attention?
**What Will It Cost?**

It is difficult for most organizations to isolate their budgets for endangered historic places programs because the programs are a part of almost everything they do. If your organization is staffed, staff time must be figured into the budget. Even organizations who manage to run programs on a volunteer basis will need a cash budget for photography, printing and mailing of solicitation and announcement materials, holding a press conference (if desired), and travel to nominated sites. Colorado’s budget for the program is $70,000, which includes a full-time staff person, travel, photography and printing costs, and consultant costs to conduct assessments of the listed properties. Much of that budget is dedicated to the technical assistance aspects of the program. The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota runs its program “on a shoestring” according to former director George Edwards, spending only $2,000 per year in photography, printing, and mailing costs.

Several states have been successful in securing sponsors for their endangered historic places programs. Colorado Preservation, Inc., received a generous grant from the Colorado Historical Society’s State Historical Fund, which was matched with contributions from individuals and corporations. The Preservation Alliance of Virginia launched its program in 2000 with grants from two foundations to cover the administrative and publicity costs of the program.

**Step Two: Selection Criteria—What Places Belong on Your List?**

Developing selection criteria in advance will help you decide what kinds of properties you want to include on your endangered historic places list, and will streamline the selection process. The National Trust for Historic Preservation specifies that properties included on its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list must be “threatened by neglect, deterioration, lack of maintenance, insufficient funds, inappropriate development or insensitive public policy.” Sites generally need to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (or have substantial significance on the local level), and have strong grass-roots support.

Historic Massachusetts has an internal listing of “Most Endangered Historic Resources Listing Criteria” that includes:

1. Historic significance
2. Threat
3. Extent to which the listing will help the endangered resource
4. Community commitment
5. Geographic distribution
6. Variety of type

**Historic Significance**

You want your list to reflect historic places that are important to your state and/or community. How will you ensure this? Using already established benchmarks such as eligibility for or listing in the National or State Register or local landmark status can make this task easier. Some states allow a case to be made for “overwhelming significance” of nominated properties that are not officially designated. For example, Colorado Preservation, Inc., does not require any official designation, but rather relies on the local community to make the case for historic significance.

**Threat**

How bad does it have to be to qualify for the list? Is it futile to list properties that have no foreseeable hope? Or does this help to draw attention to the sad plight of historic resources in your community or state? You want to be able to slap the “Saved!” sticker on at least some of your listed properties, but you don’t want to dilute the list with obvious savings. The best answer to this question lies in your organization’s goals for the program. If your program stresses technical assistance to listed properties, you won’t want to waste valuable staff time on hopeless cases. However, if the main goal of your program is to raise awareness, a loss may not be such a bad thing.

Sometimes a “save” is just what’s needed. In its 2000 list, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota...
Concrete Paving Association have all received well deserved praise for their creative partnership. This helps us as we continue to work together to save our streets.”

Will It Make a Difference?
This is where preservationists have an opportunity to project into the future and try to determine exactly how listing will help the endangered resource. Will public attention turn the tide in favor of preservation, or is the owner in question immune to public pressure? Has the resource already received a lot of media attention with no significant results? Is there a chance that listing the site will make the preservation job harder? What are the possible negative consequences?

Most endangered historic places nomination forms generally ask these questions. It’s up to the staff, review committee, and board of directors to evaluate the answers. If your program involves technical assistance to listed properties, you will need to evaluate exactly what your organization can do once the property is listed and how much staff or volunteer time it will require. A work plan for each property, with expected results, is a good way to approach this issue.

Community Commitment
Many groups, including the National Trust, require evidence of strong community commitment before a site can be listed. It is extremely difficult—and rare—for a national or state organization to be the “do” group on a local preservation project. A local preservation organization or more informal “friends” group is needed to carry out the concentrated, day-to-day effort that a successful project requires. The sponsoring organization must carefully consider the ability of the local group to perform the tasks, as well as the local political climate. If local officials are adamantly opposed to a project, its chance of success is slim.

Geographic Distribution
Whether you are working on the national, state, or local level, selecting sites with broad geographic distribution will help make your list more interesting and appealing to a greater number of people. Lists that concentrate on one area to the exclusion of others are subject to criticism from the media and the public. If you have a statewide list, be sure that all of the state, including both rural and urban areas, is represented.

Several programs use formulas to ensure geographic diversity. Preservation Oklahoma has divided the state into four quadrants, plus two metropolitan areas. Each list contains at least one property from each quadrant and no more than two from each metropolitan area, with an even number of urban and rural sites. Colorado Preservation, Inc., divided the state into seven regions, each with a committee that solicits and reviews its own nominations.

Variety of Type
Including a variety of building types on your list is also important to add interest and to expand the lessons learned from the list. Sites should represent the broad range of historic resources found in your state, ranging from a single downtown building to an industrial complex, an archeological site, or a historic home. A good mix of property ownership, including private, government, and institutional owners will also help illustrate a range of preservation problems and solutions.

included the “Granitoid Streets of Duluth” even though an agreement had been reached for their preservation before the list was released. In this case, the decision was made to keep the project on the list since it was such a good example of a preservation save. “The positive publicity we have received from the listing has really helped our project,” says Carolyn Sundquist, chair of the Granitoid Working Group in Duluth. “The city, the engineering consultant, and the

Duluth’s Granitoid Streets appeared on Minnesota’s Endangered Historic Properties list as an example of a preservation save. The streets, which were designed for automobile travel as well as horse and carriage, date from 1909 and 1910. — Photo courtesy of LHB Engineers and Architects
While most organizations have a similar list of criteria, how each of these is weighed will vary according to the organization’s goals for the list. “After a site meets the first two criteria of exceptional value to the community and in the highest degree of jeopardy, our decision rests on whether or not being on the list is going to help it,” says Reid Williamson, president of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. “We don’t consider properties for their notoriety or usefulness in attracting attention or dollars.” Roxanne Eflin of Maine Preservation says, “Active local involvement with the potential for a true, high profile rescue helps to raise the site to the top of the list.” The National Trust looks for maximum visibility with its final selections, “We consider this a great educational tool, and we want to maximize the exposure the list gets,” says the Trust’s assistant director of Communications, Patricia O’Connell.

**Step Three—Soliciting Nominations**

**The Nomination Form**
The nomination form should be simple enough for a non-professional to fill out, but complete enough to give your committee the information it needs to make an informed decision. Consider your evaluation criteria when creating the nomination form, and be sure all areas are covered. Set a reasonable deadline—at least two months from the time of the announcement. Information generally includes:
- property name and address
- nominator and owner contact information
- property designation
- a brief description and history of the site
- current condition
- why the site is significant
- the threat to the site
- how listing will help save the site
- name and contact information for local organization working on this issue/site
- opposition to preservation of the site
- support for preservation of the site
- additional comments/recommendations
- request for applicant to include good quality photographs or slides, as well as any available supporting materials such as news articles, brochures, and other printed materials
- letters of support

**Getting the Word Out**
A call for nominations can be announced through your organization’s newsletter, website, and/or a direct mailing, and by contacting organizations and agencies such as your regional National Trust office, state historic preservation office, statewide nonprofit organization, local historical societies or preservation organizations, and city and county preservation offices, including Certified Local Governments. Some organizations take a more proactive approach to collecting nominations for their endangered historic places lists. Colorado Preservation, Inc., has found that calls to individual contacts throughout the state are effective in getting people to think about nominees. “Someone has to drum up nominations,” says Monta Lee Dakin. “They don’t come in on their own.” In addition to soliciting nominations through press releases, a website, and newsletter, Preservation Pennsylvania staff call board members, agency representatives, and key contacts from throughout the state, and keep an ongoing file of potentially threatened properties. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana relies on staff from its five regional offices to solicit and evaluate nominations.

**Sure Saves versus Long Shots**

Preservation organizations vary in their approach to listing properties that look like hopeless cases. Following are two approaches to this issue.

**Select only those that can be saved.**
Until the recent demolition of the Mapes Hotel in Nevada, the National Trust noted, “Not one site named to this list has ever been lost.” To be listed on the Trust’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list, properties must have a reasonable chance of being saved. Indiana and Colorado likewise select sites that are considered savable. For example, Indiana operates under the philosophy that with ten sites listed and a goal of saving each of them, the positions on the list are too valuable to be occupied by properties for which intervention seems impossible. However, they report that many of the places they see as savable might be considered “lost causes” by others. Monta Lee Dakin, executive director of Colorado Preservation, Inc., believes that losses are a major detriment to the program. “We are building up momentum with our successes,” she says. “A loss destroys the public’s confidence that we will do something positive for all the sites on our list.”

**Considering severely endangered sites that can be used as a lesson if lost.**
Some organizations believe that losses can be used as educational tools, and therefore include properties that are severely threatened with no immediate solution in sight. If a property is lost, it is used as an example of what could happen to other sites in the future. Preservation Oklahoma is one of several organizations that operates under this philosophy, stating, “We learn just as much from our losses as we do from our victories.” In fact, Oklahoma’s Most Endangered Historic Places list was first seen as an opportunity for “friendless buildings” to get some public exposure. The loss of a historic building elicits an emotional response from people that often results in more effort being applied to the next preservation challenge.
The call for nominations is also an opportunity for media coverage. A press release should be sent to the appropriate newspapers, radio, and television stations letting the community know that your group is seeking nominations for your endangered historic places list. The press release should include information about criteria for nominations, the mission statement of the organization, and the organization’s goals for the endangered historic places list. Unless you have a predetermined number already chosen for your list, you may not want to advertise how many endangered sites there will be, as you don’t yet know how many nominations you will receive.

**Step Four—Evaluating & Selecting Nominated Sites**

So now you have your nominations—maybe 10, maybe 100. Now what? Your staff and/or endangered sites committee should schedule a long meeting! If they receive copies of the nominations (or a summary) in advance, committee members will have a chance to review and rate them in advance of the meeting. A rating sheet or ranking form is a useful tool. Some staffed organizations streamline the selection process by having staff sift out inappropriate nominations that don’t meet the basic program criteria and by creating a summary report of nominated sites. Colorado Preservation, Inc., provides its regional committee members with a “committee worksheet” to help them evaluate nominations. Committee members are encouraged to visit nominated sites and interview local contacts to help them evaluate the properties.

At the selection meeting, nominations are reviewed, discussed, and ranked. The procedures for this vary from state to state. While it is helpful to use numerical rankings in which points are awarded for how well the project meets each of the list’s criteria, discussion of a project’s merits is always a useful part of the process. It is also helpful to have a staff person or committee member who has visited the site give a report at the meeting. The review committee should carefully consider both the positive and negative effects of listing a site.

You will probably make a first cut of nominations into categories of “definite,” “possible,” and those that are probably not appropriate for this year’s list, but might be revisited in the future. Look over your top choices and check for...
Organizations vary in their policies governing who has the final say on the list. Oklahoma’s list is determined by the selection committee, made up of representatives from Preservation Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Historical Society, the state historic preservation office, and the Main Street program. In Colorado and Minnesota the selection committee makes a recommendation to the board of directors, which makes the final selection. This allows the board members to consider issues that might adversely affect the organization as a whole, and to veto projects that they believe could be harmful.

**Endangered Sites: Carry Them Over or a One-Time Shot?**
As your list continues into subsequent years, another issue to consider is whether properties will be eligible to be “carried over” onto the next year’s list if they are still threatened. The National Trust used to carry over continually threatened properties from year to year (for example, Antietam Battlefield appeared for four years) until the threat began to recede. Several years ago, the Trust changed its policy to a one-time listing of each site in order to maximize the publicity power of the list. “In order to get the media’s attention, it has to be new,” says the Trust’s Patricia O’Connell.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee member name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Colorado’s Most Endangered Places List Ranking Sheet**

Please rank the site according to the following items using the numbers 0 (lowest) through 5 (highest).

1. _____ Site faces immediate damage, destruction, elimination, etc.
2. _____ Site faces significant long-term threat.
3. _____ Site is currently salvageable.
4. _____ The threat to the site can be eliminated completely.
5. _____ The threat to the site can be eliminated within the next two years.
6. _____ There is a local body interested in helping CPI save the site.
7. _____ Site is architecturally significant.
8. _____ Site is important to the history of a specific culture, gender, race, religion, industry, etc.
9. _____ Site is unique, rare, or best example of cultural, architectural or archeological style.
10. _____ Site is locally significant or is designated as a local landmark.
11. _____ Site is believed eligible or is listed on the State Register.
12. _____ Site is believed eligible or is listed in the National Register.
13. _____ Owner is a willing participant in this nomination.
14. _____ Owner is a willing participant in saving the site.
15. _____ Site’s current situation exemplifies preservation issues.
16. _____ Listing on the Endangered Places List would be helpful to saving the site.
17. _____ Site is designated as National Historic Landmark.
18. _____ Reviewer recommends listing.

_____ Total Score (0-90)
Category Listings

In 1993, the National Trust surprised the media and the public by listing the “State of Vermont” on its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. This switch from individual sites and historic districts to an entire state was a bold move with interesting consequences. Listing the state of Vermont definitely got the attention of the media and spotlighted Vermont preservationists’ struggle to keep Wal Mart and other big box chain stores out of their state. “If you agree that the basic principle of the most endangered historic places list is to raise public awareness, you would have to call this one a success,” says Dwight Young, senior communications associate of the Trust. However, concrete results of such a listing are difficult to define. Since 1993 the Trust has included other broad-based or “generic” listings: “Historic Black Churches of the South,” “Historic Buildings Threatened with Formosan Termites,” “The Corner of Main and Main” (representing the threat of “big box” drugstore development on traditional downtowns), “Historic Courthouses of Texas,” “Historically Black Colleges and Universities” and “Historic Neighborhood Schools” — category listings that represent a broad policy issue as opposed to an individual landmark.

Category listing can be especially effective when used to further the policy goals of an organization. For example, Preservation Oklahoma used the category listing of historic courthouses of Oklahoma to help pass legislation providing special funding for their preservation. Similarly, the Trust’s listing of “The Corner of Main and Main” provided a platform for discussion with owners of national “big box” drugstores on the impact of their projects on historic buildings and neighborhoods, which led to an agreement by several major drugstore owners that they will not demolish National Register-listed properties.

Category listings have their downsides as well. The Trust’s listing of the “State of Vermont” grabbed all the headlines, to the exclusion of the other ten sites on the list. Even in those states that had an “11 Most” listing, the big news was Vermont. Category listings can also dilute the impact of the message. While it is easy for the public to grasp the concept of “preserving the Brown House,” preserving “the Bungalows of Wyoming” might be a little harder to visualize. Then there’s the issue of technical assistance. Are you going to provide services to every bungalow owner in the state? They might expect it if you’re not clear what your category listing means. Finally, it is difficult to measure the success of a broad category listing, unless it is linked to a specific campaign or legislative effort, or unless specific results have been outlined at the start. For example, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana listed “Historic Bridges of Indiana” with the goal of saving two bridges a year for the next three years. The organization also made a decision to limit the listing to three years.

Because of these problems, some organizations prefer to use one building as an example of a broader issue. For example, Maine listed the Limington Town Hall, threatened by a proposed new structure two miles outside of town, as an example of threats to historic village centers from sprawl development. South Carolina listed four small-town railroad depots as an example of the decline of the railroad and subsequent abandonment of these community icons. Another very effective alternative is that used by Preservation Pennsylvania in 1998, when the organization filled all ten slots on its endangered historic places list with different schools from around the state.

Property Owners and Politics: Potential Challenges

Anything as public as creating an endangered historic places list is bound to attract criticism as well as praise, and you should be prepared for negative consequences of any listings. Careful research during the review process can help avoid problems, however it is important to be aware that the more people you talk to, the more risk you run of your list being leaked to the press. A media strategy should be considered along with a political strategy in developing policies concerning notification of property owners, city officials, and others.
Pennsylvania at Risk 1998: Endangered Schools

In 1998, Preservation Pennsylvania used its Pennsylvania at Risk list to cap a two-year statewide research and advocacy effort aimed at changing state Department of Education policies governing the use of older school buildings. The 1998 list was a special report on endangered schools: all ten slots on the list were filled with schools from around the state, representing a variety of architectural styles and threats. Another 50 threatened schools were included in the report, which also summarized the policy issues. The Pennsylvania at Risk list was released at a press conference in the state capitol rotunda, in the presence of representatives of Preservation Pennsylvania and the National Trust, as well as many of the local organizations whose schools were included in the list. Also present was a state representative, who announced that legislative hearings on the issue would begin immediately.

“The press ate it up,” says Preservation Pennsylvania’s Susan Shearer. “Our phone rang constantly over the next few days with reporters doing newspaper articles. And we were featured on countless radio and TV news broadcasts.”

Less than three months later, Preservation Pennsylvania was able to announce the release of new Department of Education guidelines encouraging the reuse of historic school buildings for continued educational use.

“As part of an overall strategy of trying to change the way the Department of Education treated historic schools, the list was very effective,” says Shearer. “The list personalized our effort, and gave us specific situations to refer to in our advocacy work,” she says. It also put a human face on the effort, as the local people who were trying to save the listed schools appeared in media interviews and lobbied at the state capitol.

The list gave a tremendous boost to the organization’s efforts in terms of visibility. “It was something the media could really use,” says Shearer. Newspaper and television coverage carried the preservation message throughout the state. Preservation Pennsylvania credits the Pennsylvania at Risk report with the organization’s success in changing the rules for historic schools. “It’s not something we’d want to do all the time,” says Shearer, “but if you have an overriding issue that affects the entire state it’s worth considering.”

The most common complaints come from the property owners themselves. Most programs report at least one instance when the owner of a listed property has threatened to sue the organization. To avoid problems with property owners, it is important to find out whether the property owner is aware of the nomination, and how he or she feels about it. Careful research can help avoid problems. One organization reports listing a property at the request of a local historical society, only to find out that the owner had been trying to restore it and was angry that the listing would undermine his effort.

Endangered sites may be selected in spite of property owners’ opposition, although most organizations try to ensure that owners are aware of the intended listing and are advised of exactly what it means. Because committee members and local contacts are often reluctant to contact property owners, who might be neighbors or business associates, it is usually advisable for staff to make the call. A phone call is preferable to a letter, since the property owner will probably have questions that can be addressed on the spot. However, some programs simply notify property owners in advance of the public announcement by sending a copy of the press release.
Keeping the tone of the notification positive and emphasizing the importance of the historic place (e.g. “Congratulations, your historic site has been named as one of the most important places to save in our region”) will be helpful in dealing with property owners. Keep them informed of developments such as when the list will be released, feedback from the community, and possibilities for technical assistance. Also, honor a property owner’s desire for confidentiality. If the owner’s name is not widely known, don’t mention it in the publicity about the site.

In some cases, the threat of public shame through an endangered listing may be enough to force neglectful owners to find within themselves a new dedication to historic preservation. You may be able to save a property simply by telling a bulldozer-happy developer with a great deal of business interest in the community that his or her property has been nominated for the state’s most endangered properties list, and will be broadcast throughout the media. On the other hand, be aware that listing could also have the opposite effect. The owner of a one-room schoolhouse in Minnesota, afraid that listing was going to require him to preserve the building, made a pre-emptive move and demolished it as soon as the list was announced.

Politics will almost always play a part in one or more of your endangered sites. Has the mayor publicly opposed preservation of a crumbling downtown commercial building? Does one of your group’s major funders have a financial interest in a piece of farmland you’re trying to save? Most organizations notify local officials about a listing and give them a chance to comment, before the list is made public. Colorado Preservation, Inc., learned this lesson the first year of its program, when two mayors called to complain that they had not been part of the endangered list nomination process. Now the staff or committee members call elected officials to get their feedback before the list goes to the board of directors for final approval. That way, the political implications of listing a site are known and can be factored into the decision.

Listing a property could also impact a board member or donor to the organization. In these cases, and cases of political opposition and owner opposition, it is useful to have a policy of final board approval for the nomination process. The board of directors is charged with maintaining the strength and reputation of the organization, and is best equipped to make these kinds of decisions. Each site should be carefully analyzed to weigh the possible negative consequences against the potential benefits. In some cases, the organization may decide the risks are too great. On the other hand, there may be times when the importance of a resource outweighs potential negative political consequences.

**Step Five: Maximizing the Media: Announcing and Promoting Your List**

“If it bleeds, it leads.”

Lists of endangered historic places, or “bleeding buildings,” are classic examples of this old media adage. Your local newspapers and radio and television stations are going to love this new controversy. They’ll quickly send out their favorite muckraker to dig deep into the issues of why these places are threatened, who owns them, and what’s going to happen to them. You have only one chance to make this event stand out. The release of your endangered historic places list should be a media coup. Most organizations credit the list with spreading the preservation word far beyond their ordinary constituency. Following are some suggestions based on the experience of existing programs.

**Preparing a Press Kit**

Before you announce your list, be sure that you have all the materials you will need to make an impact on the media. Your press kit should include:

- a press release announcing the list
- name and phone number of primary contact and local contacts (make sure you choose people who are readily available)
- a complete list of the properties, with brief description and statement of significance, reasons for the threat, and local contacts
- black and white photographs of each site, and information about how to download images from your website, if available
- a map of your state or region, showing the location of each endangered site
- published promotional materials (brochures, posters, etc.)

Preservation organizations have come up with very creative ways to promote their lists. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana prints a poster of each year’s listed sites and has also produced a brochure containing detachable postcards of each site that can be mailed to public officials, developers, and media contacts. Colorado Preservation, Inc., produces an endangered historic places brochure each year, with photographs of the sites and information about the threats.
Preservation Pennsylvania devotes the entire spring issue of its eight-page quarterly newsletter to the announcement of its list.

**How Will You Announce It?**

Should you hold a press conference, send press releases, or announce the list at a special event that the media is likely to attend? All of these alternatives have been used effectively by preservation organizations. The National Trust holds a national press event, with simultaneous local events at the listed properties. Some statewide organizations also announce their list simultaneously at a few different sites across the state. For example, the Preservation League of New York State announced its 2000 Seven to Save list at concurrent news conferences in Albany, Rochester, and Niagara Falls. Many states have found that Preservation Week is an excellent time to release their list annually. Others don’t want to detract from Preservation Week celebrations and prefer to announce their lists in conjunction with a special dinner and awards banquet or other regular event like a statewide conference where a large gathering of the preservation community is guaranteed. Whatever the venue, focus on the release of the list rather than the event.

Preservation Pennsylvania held a press conference to announce their 1998 listing of 10 endangered historic schools, but most years the organization relies on press releases to the major media markets to get the word out. Local contacts at each site will often follow up with a local press event. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana has also held press conferences at individual sites to announce the list, but has found that targeting specific local events at the listed properties and cultivating relationships with individual preservation-minded reporters is a more effective use of their time. “When reporters are really interested, they might do a series of articles over time, instead of just a one-time shot. In the end, this gets us more coverage,” says Tina Connor of Historic Landmarks.

Colorado Preservation, Inc., announces its list at its statewide conference, and usually tries to get an elected official—this year it’s a U.S. Senator—to be present at the announcement. Having a VIP present almost guarantees good coverage.

No matter how the list is announced, in order for it to be news worthy, it has to be a surprise. Be sure to notify all involved parties that the list is confidential until the official announcement has been made.

**Press List**

Prepare and maintain a good media list including large and small newspapers, television and radio stations, magazines and newsletters of community organizations, and web sites in your area. If possible, include names of specific editors, reporters, or feature writers who have shown a particular interest in historic preservation or the activities of your organization. Try to work with each member of the press as individually as possible with regard to coverage of your story.

**Press Release**

Press releases can be used not only to alert the media to the announcement of your list, but also to inform property owners, legislators, city and county officials, heritage organizations and other interested parties. The release should be typed, double-spaced on your organization’s letterhead, with a headline in the center and contact information in the upper right hand corner. All the essential information (who, what, where, when, and how) should be included in the opening paragraph. The release should include information about your endangered historic places program and your organization as well as the listed sites and should engage the press by stressing the statewide, regional, or national significance of one or more of
your sites. Use quotes from your organization's spokesperson or a local contact for one of the listed sites to vividly explain the threat. If you have a website, you can refer to it in your release, and also offer the possibility of downloading images from your website. If you don’t have a web site, you should get one, as the media very often prefers to communicate this way.

One good place to get ideas about endangered historic places lists is through the websites of statewide preservation organizations. The National Trust's website maintains links to state endangered historic places lists, and is a good place to start when shopping for website ideas. (www.nationaltrust.org). Following are some other excellent websites to visit:

- Alabama Historical Commission and Alabama Preservation Alliance: Places in Peril: www.preserveala.org
- D.C. Preservation League: www.dcpreservation.org
- Maine Preservation: www.mainepreservation.com
- Preservation Alliance of Minnesota: www.minnpreservation.org
- Preservation League of New York State: www.preserverny.org

Press Conference
Press conferences take time and careful planning, but they can be a very effective way to announce your endangered historic places list. A press event will pique the interest of the media and often results in better coverage than mailing press releases. It is an efficient way to get information out at one time and one place, with your spokesperson available to answer reporters' questions on the spot. Make sure you pick a time of day when everyone isn’t on deadline (early afternoon is usually best) and invite everyone—your group’s members and fellow preservationists, public officials, and all media within about a 60 mile radius. A press advisory should be sent out announcing the news conference, although more formal invitations are also appropriate. Holding the news conference at one of the endangered sites is a great way to allow the media to photograph your spokesperson announcing the list with a dramatic threatened building in the background. Be sure to mention in your advisory that the press conference is being held at one of the endangered sites and include directions.

It’s always a nice gesture to serve food at your news conference, and indicate that you are doing so on the invitations. The press and your other guests will appreciate this hospitality.

Have available sufficient copies of your endangered historic places press kit. If you are not holding the press event on site, enlarged photographs of the threatened properties make excellent backdrops and add to the visual interest of the event, especially if you hope to attract television coverage. Provide maps of your area with endangered sites indicated, so that the media can visit and photograph sites on their own.

Be prepared to deal with controversy. Inevitably at least one of your sites will be a political “hot potato,” and this is probably the site that the media will use for headlines. You may have to answer some tough questions about properties whose owners may not be happy with their property's new status. Remember that although you may need to face some political heat, this generates more ink or airtime for your efforts. Be sure you use an official spokesperson for your organization and be sure that person is well briefed and prepared for difficult, controversial questions. Similarly, if you use local contacts, choose them carefully. The president of the local “friends” organization might not be the most informed or most well spoken, or most available—an important point when dealing with the press and deadlines. Local contacts should be coached about the sponsoring organization and the list as a whole in addition to being knowledgeable about their own projects.

Other Ways To Get the Word Out
After the big announcement, you will still have plenty of opportunities to get the word out. Listings should of course be announced in your newsletter and on your website. Your website should contain images of the listed sites that can be downloaded by the media. In addition, your spokesperson could participate in local radio and television talk shows to promote the list and your efforts to preserve the endangered sites.

Step Six: Follow-Up and Technical Assistance
Unfortunately, simply listing a property on your endangered historic places list does not guarantee its protection. Once the list is announced, your organization's real work starts. Follow-up work on endangered properties and technical assistance for property owners varies depending on the organization's goals for the program and available staff time and funding. Some organizations view their endangered historic places lists as the staff's "to do" list for the year, with the goal of making significant progress toward a save before the next year's list comes
out. Colorado Preservation, Inc., is fortunate to have a full time staff person dedicated to technical assistance for endangered properties. CPI considers its endangered historic places list and its technical assistance program to be one and the same. Similarly, the properties on Indiana’s Ten Most Endangered Places list head the work plan of Historic Landmark Foundation of Indiana’s field staff. On the other hand, Preservation Oklahoma, with one staff person, lacks the time to devote to helping individual projects and uses the list more as a “wake up call” to local organizations, officials, and individuals. No matter what your organization’s capacity, you will want to have a plan for each site on your list, with specific goals and objectives.

Technical Assistance
Properties listed as endangered can benefit from a range of technical assistance. Often preservation organizations help by conducting field visits to provide on-site advice and analysis, and by convening key partners to save a listed property. Endorsement of a project by a state and/or national organization is often the catalyst needed to bring reluctant partners to the table and to influence decisions at the government or corporate level. The heightened visibility offered by a most endangered historic places listing can galvanize local support and bring needed volunteers to the project as well. “The network we have provided [to our most endangered sites] has opened new doors to property owners that they never knew existed,” says Maine’s Roxanne Eflin.

Some organizations offer property assessments, undertaken by staff or outside consultants, as a first step in determining the feasibility and cost of preserving a threatened property. In some cases statewide organizations have been able to use their networks of contacts to find a preservation-minded buyer for a threatened property. Most endangered properties need money, and most sponsoring organizations try to identify funding sources for listed properties and in some cases will even make the contacts. For example, after eight years on Indiana’s Ten Most Endangered Places list, the limestone buildings on the Stinesville Main Street were rescued through a combination of grants from several state agencies and private foundations as well as a loan from Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana.

Occasionally statewide organizations have lobbied successfully for direct funding for listed properties, such as the state appropriation won for the townsite of Dearfield, one of Colorado Preservation, Inc.’s endangered sites. In some states listing on the most endangered historic places list gives a project priority status when applying for competitive state grants or loans. Listing on Preservation Pennsylvania’s list, for example, gives a project priority status for state funding through the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s Keystone Grant Program.

Organizations that lack the resources to provide on-site technical assistance can still provide some services, for example creat-
T
he D.C. Preservation League’s Landmarks Committee manages all aspects of the organization’s endangered historic places program including soliciting and evaluating nominations, making recommendations for listing to the board of trustees, developing programs to raise public awareness about the plight of threatened sites and developing preservation solutions to preserve them. The 20-member committee is made up of staff and board members of the organization, as well as local architectural historians and other professionals.

When a property is selected for the most endangered historic places list, a task force is set up chaired by a member of the Landmarks Committee. The name and phone number of each task force chair is published with the list of endangered historic places so that interested persons can easily get involved with a project. The task force coordinates all follow-up activity leading to the preservation of listed sites. Activities might include surveying historic resources, convening meetings with local community members, developers, and city officials, and identifying sources of funding for threatened properties. For example, in the Anacostia River Basin, a site on the DCPL’s 2000 list, the task force identified 27 cultural resources and prepared a map of them with the help of graduate students. The project raised public awareness of previously unrecognized historic resources.

One very positive outcome of the endangered historic places program has been the establishment of community “friends” groups to support specific preservation projects. “When we have brought the community together around an issue and helped to form a community “friends” group, we feel we have had a positive impact that goes far beyond the saving of the historic resource,” says Jerry Maronek, co-chair of the Landmarks Committee. One group presently under formation, Friends of the Stevens School, has brought together a coalition of parents, teachers, neighboring businesses and institutions as well as community leaders to help ensure the preservation of one of the nation’s most important and Washington’s oldest historically African American elementary schools. Landmarks Committee members give presentations at PTA meetings, set up media interviews and offer assistance to the friends’ group. Another group, formed to support the endangered 1827 Holt House on the grounds of the National Zoo, has a technical committee that includes DCPL members who are architects and engineers who work with the Smithsonian Institution staff.

As part of the D.C. Preservation League’s public awareness campaign, the task forces also sponsor site visits throughout the year to specific endangered properties. These opportunities are advertised in newspapers and on the DCPL website (www.dcpreservation.org) and are generally very well attended. “People are interested in seeing these projects first hand,” says Maronek. “The site visits help generate interest in and support of the projects.”

The site visits help generate interest in and support of the projects. It’s also important to let the public know what they can do to help, whether it’s writing a letter to the mayor or purchasing the threatened property. Several organizations add this information to the announcement of their lists. For example, the “Make the Save” caption on Indiana’s annual poster tells what is needed to save each listed site. Under the “Get Involved” heading, Maine’s website lists local contacts for each of its endangered properties, and the D.C. Preservation League sets up a task force for each threatened site and lists the chairman on its website.

Education
In addition to direct technical assistance for listed properties, many organizations use the most endangered historic places program to further their educational efforts. Endangered properties provide thought-provoking material for exhibits, posters, lectures and other programs. For example, the Frederick County (Md.) Landmarks Foundation produces a full color poster of its most endangered historic places list in conjunction with a local magazine, and uses proceeds from poster sales to help support the program.

For the past two years, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, with underwriting from an architectural firm, has created a traveling exhibit of its most endangered historic places. The professionally designed exhibit is compact and portable, and can easily be shipped and set up in city halls, libraries, bank lobbies or museums. The exhibits are displayed in about 30 communities each year, and are also used at state conferences, workshops, and other meetings. “The exhibits spark conversations in local com-

D.C. Preservation League
Advocacy

Endangered historic places lists have been effectively used by preservation organizations to further their advocacy efforts. Broad category listings in particular can draw attention to a statewide issue and help preservationists make their case before the state legislature and/or state agencies. In addition to Pennsylvania’s schools and Oklahoma’s courthouses, endangered historic places lists have been used to help save courthouses in Texas and state-owned historic buildings in Maine.

Many organizations send their endangered historic places list announcement and follow up reports to all state legislators. Maine Preservation has used its list to create display materials for legislative coffees and lunches.

In 1999, the New Mexico Heritage Preservation Alliance listed the New Mexico Night Sky on its endangered historic places list, describing it as an important and threatened cultural resource. The announcement was timed to coincide with the start of the legislative session, and the excellent media coverage the list generated was used to educate both legislators and the public about the issue. The listing gave supporters of the Night Sky legislation a broader, more public platform from which to advocate their position, and was successful in evoking a powerful image of what was at stake if light pollution was not controlled.

In collaboration with other groups and individuals, the Alliance lobbied successfully for the protection of the night sky, resulting in passage of the Night Sky Protection Act. “The listing brought people with different interests together in support of the concept of the Night Sky,” says Kak Slick, president of the Alliance. “We were able to make a persuasive case that New Mexico’s Night Sky is part of our human cultural resources.” The Alliance is now working with individual communities to help them pass local Night Sky protection ordinances.

Keeping the Public Informed

Expectations will be high that your group will become involved in and even responsible for these endangered places. The media and public will be very interested in what is happening with your list, and you will undoubtedly receive many inquiries about the status of the sites. Don’t be accused of creating a list and then ignoring it while endangered properties become even more endangered, or even lost. Most organizations include updates on endangered

Indiana’s Top Ten
Endangered Buildings

- Using your poster, locate the endangered building sites on an Indiana map.
- After locating the 10 sites, make some generalizations about the areas where they are located.
- For what reasons could a building become endangered?
- Draw a poster urging the preservation of each building. Work may be divided among groups.
- Using the information you have about the sites, make a travel brochure for each city with an endangered building.
- Develop a collage of the 10 endangered buildings or select endangered buildings in your community.
- Develop a board game based upon the 10 most endangered buildings.
- Make a list of the 10 most endangered buildings in your community. What can you do to attract positive attention to them?
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper expressing concern over a local endangered building.
- Develop a creative story written from an endangered building’s point of view. Describe how it feels to be vacant and endangered. What would you like to happen to you?
properties as a regular feature of their newsletters. Websites should also be updated regularly. In addition, you might want to consider reporting major breakthroughs to the press. If you have cultivated relationships with one or more reporters, they will probably be eager to publish follow up stories on your projects.

Maine Preservation uses its newsletter to inform people about the status of previously listed endangered sites. In 2000, the organization used an all-American baseball theme to help make its point, through the *Alumni Score Card*. Home Runs are great saves. For example, the 1891 Maine Eye and Ear Infirmary (a Grand Slam!) was saved and rehabilitated for medical offices and apartment units. On Base are sites that are on their way to preservation; Warming Up sites are still uncertain; Still in the Dugout are frustrating sites where no progress can be reported; and Out! is used to report sites that have been lost. Each section lists a description of the site and current status of efforts underway.

**Case Study: Colorado Preservation, Inc.**

Following on the success of the National Trust’s program, Colorado Preservation, Inc. (CPI) launched its most endangered historic places program in 1997 to raise awareness about Colorado’s threatened historic, archaeological, and cultural resources. The program is the core around which CPI’s fieldwork and technical assistance are organized. A full-time staff person manages the program, with help from the executive director and a volunteer intern. Critical to the success of the program are the 40 to 60 volunteers who participate on the regional selection committees. “These committee members not only help manage our endangered historic places list, they have also become our ‘eyes and ears’ around the state,” says CPI’s executive director, Monta Lee Dakin.

The program has an annual budget of $70,000, most of which is earmarked for staff time in administering the selection and announcement process and providing technical assistance to listed properties. Funds are also used for printing an illustrated brochure of each year’s endangered sites, professional photography, mailing, office supplies and equipment, and hiring consultants to assist local projects. Since 1997, the program has been funded by a grant from the Colorado Historical Society’s State Historical Fund, with a match provided by CPI.

A major goal of Colorado’s most endangered places program (CMEP) is to represent all of Colorado. To that end, CPI divided the state into seven regions. Each region has its own selection committee, which solicits and reviews nominations. In forming the regional committees, CPI strives for diversity in ethnic background, professional experience, age and gender, so that the population of all parts of Colorado is represented. “A big part of my job is recruiting members for the regional committees,” says Rachel Yank, CPI’s technical advisor, who manages the most endangered places program. Committee members serve a two-year term.

---

*Endangered Places lists provide excellent material for education programs in schools. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana came up with questions and projects related to each of its ten endangered sites and included them in a history trunk which was made available to classroom teachers.*

— Photo courtesy of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana.
Applications are solicited during the summer, through direct mail and phone calls to committee members, CPI members, and local heritage organizations, and through media announcements. After the September 15 deadline, Yank prepares endangered places “training manuals” for each committee member, which include information about CPI and the most endangered places program, past lists of endangered properties, copies of the region’s nominations, a one-page ranking sheet, a 4-page review sheet, and guidance on how to review. In regional committee meetings, all seven of which are attended by staff, committee members review the nominations and narrow their region’s selections to the top three or four. Following the regional meetings, all the committees come together for a day-long meeting in Denver and prepare their recommendations to the board of directors, which makes the final selections.

Before the board considers the list, the staff undertakes comprehensive research to uncover hidden problems. In this way, the board can discuss sensitive political and internal ramifications of certain listings and weed out sites that could be problematic.

CPI also floats its list to the regional office of the National Trust, the Colorado Historical Society, and key individuals for their comment. This helps to determine the politics behind the sites and also provides additional information about the site that staff and committee members might not have known about. “In one case, we discovered that a building was slated to be demolished right before we were to announce the list, so we didn’t list it. Last year, the governor and other key politicians would not support the listing of the state capitol as an endangered building, and their support was deemed critical at the time to get the necessary repair work done. So we didn’t list it,” says Dakin.

Competition for a place on the list gets tighter year by year. The pool of nominated properties has grown from 35 in 1997 to 71 for the 2001 list. Criteria considered by the selection committee and the board include: 1) The urgency of the threat; 2) historic significance of the property; 3) likelihood that intervention by CPI will make a difference in the project; and 4) diversity in geography, age of building or site, property type, and ethnic association.

While CPI accepts broad, “category” nominations, they rarely make it through the tough review process. Unless there is a well organized lead group who can clearly articulate the goals of the broad listing and is prepared to act as the advocate, category listings offer too many obstacles: difficulties in defining the project and its goals, too many groups to deal with, too many issues and challenges in delivering technical assistance.

Another consideration for the selection committee and the board is CPI’s proposed work plan for nominated properties. CPI takes very seriously its commitment to provide technical assistance to all the properties on its list. One reason CPI does not have a set number on its annual list is because the organization is limited in the amount of technical assistance it can provide. The list fluctuates between 5 and 10 sites, depending on the amount of time required to provide meaningful assistance to each project. Once a site is listed on the endangered places list, it stays active until it is saved. But a new list is announced each year, resulting in a growing number of historic places that CPI commits to monitoring and preserving each year.

The list is announced every year at the largest historic preservation conference in the state. CPI holds a luncheon especially for the announcement and invites all legislators (who eat for free) and the press (they also eat for free). CPI keeps the entire list secret until the announcement, but several weeks before the conference, staff members work with reporters from the largest newspapers in the state, giving them access to photos and text so they can plan the layout of the paper. Press releases are sent to major statewide media as well as local media in the communities where listed properties are located. The current and past years’ lists are also posted on CPI’s website.

After the big announcement, the real work starts. Assistance to listed properties might include a needs assessment, help with fund raising, grass-roots community organizing assistance, letters of support and public testimony to elected officials, and statewide publicity. Yank does much of the technical assistance work herself, but calls on board members, committee members, and other professionals when she can. In some cases, CPI hires outside consultants to provide specific services for listed properties. For example, for the African American farming community of Dearfield, CPI hired a consultant to coordinate emergency stabilization work in the fall of 2000, and to coordinate implementation of the vision plan for the site.

After five years of the program, CPI can claim three saves, and one loss. But the impact of the program goes far beyond those
numbers. Because of the local organizing required by the selection process, CPI is known and active in all parts of the state. The organization is visible at the state capitol and in the state media. Twenty historic sites in the state are now known to the general public. CPI’s annual conference is growing in popularity each year.

Rachel Yank has two points of advice for those contemplating endangered properties lists:

1.) Provide technical assistance. If you don’t have people from all over the state creating your list, it won’t represent the state and it won’t be as well received. CPI is confident that its list is truly representative of the concerns of the people of Colorado, and it takes that confidence to the legislature, to city halls and county courthouses, to the media, and to the general public.

2.) Statewide representation. If you don’t have people from all over the state creating your list, it won’t represent the state and it won’t be as well received. CPI is confident that its list is truly representative of the concerns of the people of Colorado, and it takes that confidence to the legislature, to city halls and county courthouses, to the media, and to the general public.

Case Study: Frederick County, Maryland

The Frederick County Landmarks Foundation (FCLF) is a local, all-volunteer nonprofit group formed “to provide leadership and actively pursue the preservation of historic, cultural, and natural sites in Frederick County, Md., and to increase knowledge and appreciation of these resources.” Because Frederick County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state and a number of historic places have been lost to sprawl development, FCLF decided to initiate a local endangered places list. An “endangered sites” committee was created to handle nominations, compile the list, and manage public relations.

The entire process took six months from nominations to list release, with a budget of less than $500. FCLF sent press releases to the two local newspapers, two local television stations, a regional magazine, and four local radio stations soliciting nominations. The organization also placed an ad in the local paper to encourage all county residents to participate. The press releases and ads invited residents to request a nomination form, and mentioned that the list would be released in a few months.

About two dozen nominations were received. The endangered sites committee reviewed the applications, selected 11 sites (because that was the number of exceedingly eligible sites), and began notifying property owners of the listings. FCLF chose to include one structure that was “beyond saving,” in order to educate the public on the types of places (in this case, one of the oldest houses in the county) that are being lost. No one was informed of any endangered site listing before property owners were notified.

The Maryland-based regional Frederick magazine was interested in covering the story and wanted exclusive rights to report on the complete list. FCLF made an agreement with the magazine that no one would be able to obtain the complete endangered places list before the press conference, to be held on the date of the release of the magazine. However, two or three sites were leaked to other media who wanted to report on the announcement of the list.
prior to its release, resulting in advance coverage that included a full-page newspaper feature and a half-hour television special that ran the day of the announcement.

The list was officially announced at a news conference, with wine and hors d’oeuvres, where copies of Frederick magazine featuring full-color glossy photos of the endangered sites were distributed to all attendees. The press event was held at one of the endangered sites, an 18th-century stone tavern owned by a developer who granted permission for the use of the property and was invited to attend. With all the cameras and microphones on, the developer offered to donate the house and land to FCLF, creating even more media interest.

The announcement that Frederick Memorial Hospital was planning to demolish its original, still-operating 1900s hospital building (a listed site), was received with much notepad-scrubbing, and in fact appeared as the leading front-page headline in the next day’s paper. This caused a slew of letters to the editor to begin, questioning the hospital’s decision, and resulting in the hospital committing to explore alternatives to demolition.

Eleven endangered places were announced the first year, including a bridge, a train station, a category listing of historic mills in the county, several farmsteads, a downtown block and others. Within 30 days of the news conference, two of the sites—a farm that served as a Civil War hospital and a tworoom African American schoolhouse—were auctioned and purchased by individuals with plans for restoration. One of the county’s best stone mills is now undergoing restoration as an antique shop and mill museum.

Since the release of the list, the media has reported periodically on the status of the list, and FCLF has provided some technical assistance to the property owners, offering information about available tax incentive programs for historic properties. Although the organization has operated as all-volunteer for over 25 years, the board voted to hire an executive director in part because of the overwhelming interest and community support generated by the endangered places list.

The media coverage was complete, thorough, and well received by citizens and media professionals alike. To broaden its educational outreach, FCLF created a display, consisting of a captioned poster of each site, for use in speaking with various groups in the area, and presented an educational session on the endangered places program at the state historic preservation conference. For the second year’s list, the group worked with Frederick magazine to create a large color poster of all of the endangered sites, to sell as a fund raiser for the program.

— Mary McCarthy, Frederick County Landmarks Foundation

Texas Courthouses—An Endangered Places Success Story

Spanning a near-century of Texas history from the 1850s to the 1940s, the 225 historic courthouses of Texas are living symbols of the regional rivalries that shaped the state and represent some of the finest works of public architecture nationwide. But inadequate maintenance and deterioration have placed many of these community focal points at risk.

— Margie C. Elliott, Preservation Texas Report, August, 1998

In the mid-1990s Preservation Texas, the statewide historic preservation organization, began campaigning to protect the state’s superlative collection of county courthouses, several of which had been recently destroyed by fires. Along with the Texas Historical Commission and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Texas worked to raise awareness of the threat to historic courthouses and to rally support for their preservation.

The 1998 listing of the Historic Courthouses of Texas on the National Trust’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list brought immediate and satisfying results. At a joint press conference in June 1998, when the Trust’s Most Endangered Historic Places list was announced, Governor George W. Bush proposed the Texas Courthouse Preservation Initiative, which would provide matching grants to counties to repair and restore historic courthouses throughout the state. Preservation Texas and the National Trust’s Southwest Office followed up with advocacy efforts to persuade the legislature to approve Governor Bush’s request. A year later, the legislature committed $50 million to the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program and named the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to administer the program.

In addition to the much needed “bricks and mortar” money for courthouse rehabilitation, the listing helped to leverage support from other sources. To help counties get started, the National Trust developed the “Smart Start” grant program. Smart Start enabled counties to initiate the development of master preservation plans to guide the use of the rehabilitation money provided by THC.
The availability of grants has done much to change counties’ attitudes toward their historic courthouses, and Preservation Texas is helping to foster that appreciation. To raise awareness about the importance of the state’s courthouses and to help counties participate in the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, Preservation Texas and the THC developed a traveling exhibit consisting of 14 panels of photographs, text, and building materials detailing the development of the county system in Texas and the design, construction, and use of the state’s county courthouses. With a grant from the National Trust, Preservation Texas is also publishing a brochure on the courthouses and the preservation initiative. In addition, Preservation Texas and the THC have conducted numerous workshops for county officials and preservation architects. “Courthouse preservation builds community partnerships and spirit,” observes Elizabeth Ann Gates, executive director of Preservation Texas.

Texas preservationists are gearing up to request that the legislature appropriate at least another $50 million, and possibly as much as $200 million, in 2001-2002 to continue the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. To focus advocacy efforts on the continuation of the program, Preservation Texas has formed a courthouse team that consists of representatives of 70 counties. This team will organize a special event at the biennial “Preservation Day” at the state legislature, when county officials and judges will join preservationists to plead their case to state legislators.
A Dos and Don’ts List for a Most Endangered Places Program

**DO** have a most endangered historic places list for your state. It can bring awareness and attention to threatened places that might not otherwise have ever been noticed. This awareness can galvanize support from local citizens to get them to save a threatened place in their community.

**DON’T** create a most endangered historic places list if your organization has neither the funds nor the staff to manage the program. The list is really a program; it should not be just a list. As such, it requires proper management to make it successful and to maintain it.

**DON’T** think that establishing a list is all you have to do. You must provide more than just publicity if sites are to be saved. If you don’t, you will frustrate people who want to help save a site on your list. They will have certain expectations from your organization: they will expect money and they will expect help for the sites. If you cannot provide either one of those, you will have diminished the effectiveness of your list.

**DO** provide technical assistance to each site on the list. Technical assistance is the only way many of these sites will be saved. People often don’t have a clue about how to save buildings in their own communities no matter how much they treasure them.

**DO** have a list that consists of a diversity of places: single buildings, an entire town, cultural landscapes, mining structures, bridges, trails, and industrial plants.

**DON’T** neglect geographical diversity: Make sure the places on your list represent different regions of the state and both urban and rural resources. Reconsider selecting two sites from the same area in the same year. And never select sites from only one part of the state.

**DO** include cultural diversity.

**DO** keep the name of the nominators confidential. It can be difficult for people to nominate a site particularly if it is controversial. Nominating a site anonymously, however, is a way for people to raise awareness about a local problem without upsetting neighbors.

**DON’T** select sites by asking your board or friends for places that they think are threatened.

**DON’T** have your board select the places to be on your list. This is an unfair burden to them (especially if the list generates controversy). And you could be accused of being exclusive. A list generated by a few does not represent a majority view nor does it appear to represent an objective view.

**DO** create a statewide review board to select sites for your list. Having people from all over the state allows you to reply to the most persistent and skeptical reporter: “We did not create this list in a vacuum; people from all over the state decided what our most threatened places were.” That statement packs a lot of power and will put to rest any criticism about favoritism or credibility. Remember that credibility is an essential element for an effective list.

**DO** send out nomination forms all over the state. By soliciting nominations from people from all over the state, your chances of achieving a statewide list are better.

**DON’T** forget to ask planners, CLG staff, and others in key positions to fill out a nomination form or to suggest a nomination. Sometimes a phone call helps to remind people to participate in the nomination process. Remember, without a good number of nominations, the choice of sites will be limited, and you will not be able to craft a well-rounded list. Putting in the time to get nominations will yield a better list.

**DO** select sites that have local support—an individual or group willing to save the site and able to take the lead with the site.

**DON’T** fail to select a significant site if a local leader cannot be found. But understand the difficulty that a statewide organization will have trying to save a site without local support.

**DO** select sites that represent issues—gambling, main street, urban sprawl, university sprawl, vandalism, vanishing landscapes, and mining heritage are a few examples.

**DO** inform property owners that their property has been nominated. The reviewer should contact property owners, local officials and other interested parties to let them know that the site was nominated. Care should be taken to explain why the site was nominated (the threat and the significance) and what it means to be listed on an endangered historic places list.  

*Continued on page 24*
DON’T exclude locally elected officials from the selection process. Local leaders will be supportive of a nomination if it will help their community, but will be angry if they are caught unaware. Their support can make the difference between saving or losing a site.

DON’T list a site without seeing it. This may be obvious but it does happen.

DON’T let a local group advocate for a site during your review process. Have someone not from the area or local advocate group conduct the site visit and carry out the review process. This avoids conflict of interest and bias and ensures that the final decision will be an objective one.

DO involve other preservation organizations such as the National Trust and the state historic preservation office in your selection process.

DON’T be afraid to have one of your listed places be listed on the national endangered list. It can give your state listing more credibility and enable you and the National Trust to work on the endangered place together.

DO choose the time and place of the announcement of your endangered historic places list carefully. In other words, get the most bang for your buck. Plan a big event for the announcement. Keep the list secret until the announcement. Several weeks before the announcement, work with reporters from the largest newspapers in the state, giving them access to photos and text so they can plan the layout of the paper.

DO have a celebrity or someone of note announce the list.

DON’T forget to send a letter to the appropriate person(s) or group(s) that a site will be on the endangered historic places list. Also inform state and federal legislators in whose district the listed site is located. Give them this information ahead of time so that they can become part of the team that will save the site.

— Monta Lee Dakin, Executive Director, Colorado Preservation, Inc.

Acknowledgments
Mary Humstone is a consultant and freelance writer in historic preservation from Fort Collins, Colo., and a former assistant director of the National Trust’s Mountains/Plains Office. The author gratefully acknowledges the help of the following people: Mary T. McCarthy of Preservation Media in Frederick, Md., who provided the initial concept for the publication; Monta Lee Dakin and Rachel Yank of Colorado Preservation, Inc.; Tina Connor, Suzanne Stanis and Andrea Hill of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana; Susan Shearer, Preservation Pennsylvania; Jerry Maronek, D.C. Preservation League; Roxanne Eflin, Maine Preservation; Kak Slick, New Mexico Heritage Preservation Alliance; Robert Erwin, former executive director of Preservation Oklahoma; Patricia O’Connell, Dwight Young and Daniel Carey, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Bob Frame, Preservation Alliance of Minnesota; George Edwards, Preservation Alliance of Virginia; Stanley Graves, Texas Historical Commission; Carol Sundquist, Duluth, Minnesota. Thanks also to the following organizations whose endangered places programs provided additional material for this publication: Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, Historic Massachusetts, Historic South Dakota Foundation, Kansas Preservation Alliance and Preservation League of New York State.