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Report Brief

The United States is losing important parts of its cultural heritage at an alarming rate. Preserving America's prehistoric and historic sites contributes to our quality of life, and that of future generation, by increasing our understanding of U.S. history. It also provides economic benefits such as jobs and increased tourism.

To carry out their legal responsibilities for preserving these important historical resources, Federal agencies must have cost-effective methods for studying and protecting them. Modern technologies provide cost-effective methods to help stem the loss of irreplaceable resources, especially if developed in other fields can be transferred to preservation. The lack of adequate technology transfer demonstrates a conspicuous need for an institution to coordinate research, disseminate information, and provide training about new technologies. Congress could establish:

- a **Federal Center for Preservation Technology** within the Department of the Interior or some other agency;
- a **National Center for Preservation Technology** managed by a consortium of universities; or
- a **Preservation Technology Board** composed of professionals from all parts of the preservation community, to provide guidance for a Center.

The stewardship of prehistoric and historic cultural resources has not received sufficient attention within the Department of the Interior and other Federal agencies. Congress could consider altering the institutional structure of Federal preservation efforts by:

- establishing a separate agency to manage all Federal cultural programs;
- creating an independent agency devoted to the care and protection of prehistoric and historic cultural resources;
- reorganizing the Department of the Interior to provide for an Assistant Secretary for Natural and Cultural Resources; or
- leaving the current Federal preservation structure intact.

Even if the structure were left intact, Federal agencies could still improve their efforts by developing sustained, organized maintenance programs for historic

improving coordination and information sharing amongs ; and focusing on using new, efficient technologies.

Some foreign countries have been using advanced technologies for preservation longer than the United States. In some cases their technologies represent significant U.S. practices. Foreign experience with preservation techniques, methods, and should be examined closely for possible transfer to U.S. applications.

Preserving Historic Structures.—Tax incentives now available for rehabilitating qualified historic buildings demonstrate the value of the public-private sector partnership in historic preservation. Their continued availability would assist the retention of many more of America's historic structures.

Landscapes Preservation.—Significant prehistoric and historic landscapes continue to be lost because they are not recognized as important to U.S. history. Implementation of the Olmsted Heritage Landscapes Act of 1985 (H.R. 37) could aid the collection of information on all U.S. historic designed landscapes. It could also enhance public awareness of prehistoric and historic landscapes.

Shipwreck Preservation.—Historic shipwrecks in coastal waters, receive very little protection from current Admiralty Laws. Yet they contain a wealth of important information concerning the exploration and settlement of this country. Passage and implementation of the proposed Abandoned Shipwrecks Act (H.R. 3558/S. 2569) would make it possible to preserve significant historic shipwrecks for future generations by ceding their jurisdiction, ownership, and oversight to the states.

Stemming Looting and Vandalism.—Both are serious threats to prehistoric and historic cultural resources. Advanced monitoring devices may aid the law enforcement process, but the United States also needs to improve enforcement of policies dealing with illicit excavation and trafficking in stolen artifacts. Congress could consider amending the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 and other statutes to permit private registration of antiquities obtained in supervised archaeological excavations on private land.