

National Register of Historic Places Spatial Dataset FAQs

Where can I find GIS data for National Register Properties?

The National Park Service's Cultural Resource GIS facility makes unrestricted/non-sensitive GIS data available to the public in a variety of formats including an ESRI geo-database and a REST map service. Links to both can be found [here](#). An online map application that allows you to zoom to local NR features and access scanned documents and photos (where available) can be found [here](#).

Can you provide details on a specific feature or resource?

Basic resource-specific, as well as metadata-related details are available w/in the feature-level dataset. These include things like the resource name, reference code, address, as well as generalized information regarding data development methods. The Cultural Resources GIS facility is not a part of the National Register (NR) program and does not work on any aspect of the policy process involving the listing or removal of resources from the NR list of historic properties. Please contact the [National Register program](#) to discuss the nature of specific resources.

Can you explain why a particular feature looks 'odd' in the GIS dataset?

We cannot speak to any particular feature, no. We can, however, explain some general issues that may have resulted in less-than-desirable geometries for portions of the dataset and these may help to explain any problems related to your feature of interest.

OK then, in general, why does the data look "wrong" in places (AKA: Why do so many polygon features appear jagged, improperly sized, or otherwise askew?)

To properly answer this question, we have to go back to some of the earliest guidance produced for the public on submitting locations of nominated resources to the NR. Detailed instructions related to Using the UTM Grid System to Record Historic Sites can be found [here](#).

The guidance listed above and the NR nomination forms themselves specified that the coordinates of a polygonal (or linear) feature be drawn and recorded as a coarse, polygonal 'envelope' instead of a more refined verbal boundary. At the time, database systems were not equipped to properly transcribe the nature of complex resources on the ground. So, to capture the general location of a feature, nominating entities would draw an area around resources on a map and label each vertex with a letter (A, B, etc). Unfortunately, many times the nominator would then incorrectly list the UTM coordinates of various vertices (either through unfamiliarity with reading map coordinates or just through a simple typo on the form itself). This error might then not only get reproduced in the early NR database, but an additional transposition error might occur if a staff member mistyped the coordinate into the database.

To compound the error, the NR database omitted the vertex label (A, B, etc.) for each coordinate. Thus, it became impossible to distinguish the 'order' of the circumscribed vertices. When the earliest efforts to produce GIS data from the NR database were conducted, it was immediately noted that many of the polygons had serious topology issues. As a compromise, the NR Database Admin at the time ran all of the polygon coordinates through an undocumented third-party software process to re-order those coordinates to avoid things such as self-intersecting polygons. The effort successfully eliminated most of the issues but the result did not necessarily re-order each vertex as expected according to the intent of the nominator. Thus, we ended up with a large number of features with jagged edges or polygons with vertices out of alignment.

Was any of the data ever fixed? Are you doing anything to fix it? When will you fix these issues?

Yes, quite a bit of data was 'fixed'. CRGIS staff took time to edit many point positions, for example, when it was clear there were errors (point floating in outer-space, the ocean, foreign countries, etc). A number of very obvious polygon-related errors were also improved. In both cases, the primary nominating documents were used, where possible, to address those issues and those features that were edited in this manner should be noted within the feature-level metadata of the vector files. However, the number of problems related to the polygon data (in particular) exists that goes beyond the resources of our staff to address them. Additionally, it may not be fully worth the effort as we believe the more appropriate thing to do would be to invest the resources into creating GIS data that displays the intended legal boundaries of the properties. We are attempting to work with selected partners and other trusted sources to begin attempts to correct some of the data. We currently have no timeline on when this will be complete or what the final product will contain but we hope to have updates on our status in the near future.

What are the actual, legal boundaries of a resource?

Those would be the 'Verbal Boundary Descriptions' as noted in the NR nomination form.

I believe I or my organization can help to provide "better" GIS data. Would the NPS be willing to accept my data?

We very much appreciate the willingness of individuals and institutions to aid in this effort. At this time, we are finalizing acceptable policy processes with the National Register program for collecting such submitted data. It is our aim to focus primarily on data from 'trusted sources'. Typically, these would be entities such as NPS staff and state historic preservation offices. We are currently implementing a pilot project with FEMA to test a workflow for correcting polygon data at the verbal boundary description level for a small number of states. Once this pilot is complete, we will then evaluate the success of the program and determine if we are able to accept data from additional sources. Feel free to [contact](#) CRGIS with any information related to the nature of your improved data but note that we likely may not be able to accept it at this time.

Do you provide data in other formats (non-GIS or non-ESRI proprietary formats)?

NO. We do not currently have the staffing resources to produce data in either its entirety or for subsets of the data in any other format than what is currently available [here](#).

Do you create or provide centroids of polygons? Is it appropriate if I create centroids myself? Didn't the National Register used to provide that info in both a database table and a .kmz file?

Given that a lot of the polygon data have notable accuracy issues, we do not believe centroids are appropriate for distribution. However, you can certainly produce centroids on your own in a GIS. They would be most appropriate for drawing at small scales. We also recommend using only the data available [here](#) and disregarding any outdated .kmz files you might find online.

Why are some districts or sites polygons while others are points?

Typically, if a property is less than 10 acres in size, nominators were only required to submit point coordinates for the primary resource. CRGIS hopes to eventually create polygons for these properties using the legal, verbal boundary descriptions as guidance.

Where are all of the contributing resources to a site or district in the GIS data?

The National Register nomination form never required users to submit coordinate information for contributing resources, even though site plans or maps detailing those features were required. Thus, they were never stored in the NR database and thus never produced as GIS vector data.

I don't have GIS but I want to see a quick map of resources. Where can I go?

You have a couple of options. First, you could consider downloading a free GIS data viewer online. [ESRI's ArcExplorer](#) will allow you to view and interact with the GIS data. Additionally, we have a web map application online that will allow you to interact with and view the unrestricted NR data in a web browser. You can see that application [here](#). A nice feature of this web map application is that you can quickly find links to available, scanned documentation online including original nomination forms and photographs.

Are all of the primary nomination documents scanned and online?

No. Only a select number of states have their nomination forms and photographs scanned and available through the [NPS Focus web site](#). Please refer to the NR program website for more information as to what is and isn't available. Please note that as of 2015, all of the NR nomination forms, maps, and photographs were sent out from NPS offices in Washington, DC, to be digitally scanned and properly archived. We anticipate that all of these materials will eventually be available online but details, including a timeline for access, have not yet been announced.

Are the original USGS topographic maps and other sketches available online?

Yes and no. The USGS maps were never scanned and they remain as part of the file folder of materials included with the nomination form. Other site plans and sketch maps are hit or miss. Some have been scanned but it's not clear that they were done systematically. As mentioned above, the primary documents are in the process of being scanned at this time.

I downloaded your GIS geodatabase. Is this ALL of the data?

Both the geodatabase and available map service contain ONLY unrestricted vector data. There are approximately 5,000 or so additional items listed on the National Register that have been deemed "sensitive" and are not available for release to the public. In most cases, you will need to obtain direct and specific permission from the National Register staff to allow us to release selected sensitive data elements to you. However, the geodatabase does contain a table showing a listing of ALL listed resources on the national register with information included such as the resource name, date of certification, and the number of contributing resources related to each property. Address/Location information is unavailable for sensitive properties.

Does your data include items that have been removed from the National Register or have been otherwise determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register?

No. The GIS dataset includes only those items with a CURRENT certification status of "LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER". If a resource has been later removed from the NR, we remove it from the GIS dataset.

I want to make a web or mobile application to help people visit local cultural resources including historic homes. Is the National Register dataset appropriate?

CRGIS helps to make the non-sensitive NR data publicly available as a matter of public interest in the hopes that it may aid in not only Section 106-related matters to federal, state, and local agencies, but also to help promote and educate the public about the worthy work done by the National Register of Historic Places, National Historic Landmarks, CRGIS, and over a dozen other cultural resources-related programs at the National Park Service.

While it's entirely possible that private companies and developers could use this data to create apps with the intent of drawing users to visit local historic resources, CRGIS strongly recommends caution before developing such products. Users must understand that a large portion of the NR dataset includes historic homes and properties that are privately-owned and do not allow or want unsolicited visitation from the public.