

McGraw Ranch: The Way Forward
Executive Summary and Management Brief
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In September 2014, Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) staff sought assistance from Colorado State University's Public Lands History Center (PLHC) regarding the park's McGraw Ranch, an historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places and a NPS identified cultural landscape. The previous year, a massive flood inundated Colorado's Front Range, wiping out entire sections of Highway 34 in the Big Thompson River canyon that leads to Estes Park, the gateway to ROMO. The flood filled Cow Creek, the stream running through McGraw Ranch, eroding the stream bank, damaging the ranch lands, and endangering historic buildings. As a historic district and landscape, McGraw Ranch required careful deliberation in park plans for clearing the flood's damage while maintaining the historic integrity of the ranch. ROMO staff asked the PLHC to provide expertise in its need to rectify environmental damage while preserving the district's historic significance. CSU architectural historian Janet Ore and CSU landscape architect Brad Goetz co-supervised graduate student or recent graduate researchers for this project. Landscape architecture student Nicole Sittner assisted Goetz with recommendations for damage mitigation and mapping, and history graduate students Jaci Wells and Kim Bauer researched McGraw's preservation history and wrote the reports.

The PLHC's initial work centered on clarifying the historic features of the McGraw Ranch site. Since the ranch's nomination to the National Register in 1998 and its cultural landscape inventory in 2002, numerous discrepancies about extant structures, overlooked elements, evaluations of significance, and later alterations have clouded park decision making. Researchers identified and resolved the ambiguities in the CLI, conducted oral interviews, and researched and wrote an administrative history of the Ranch's preservation. Concurrently, the landscape architects examined the landscape and prioritized projects to restore the flood damage while maintaining the site's historic integrity. Following the guidance of Brad Goetz, the team assembled a list of recommendations for restoration efforts. In early 2015, the PLHC delivered the recommendations, historical report, amended CLI, and research materials to Ben Baldwin on a flash drive. Following the completion of these products, Jaci Wells evaluated plans of action that would best benefit the long-term management challenges that McGraw Ranch faces. Her analysis is included in this report and follows this project summary.

During the contract period, PLHC worked to prepare a comprehensive map of McGraw Ranch showing the site's features and their determined or potential status as contributing to the historic district. ROMO provided AutoCAD information collected from the 2002 Cultural Landscape Inventory in the hopes that PLHC could create a working map that included both environmental and building components. However, glitches ensued. Brad Goetz and Jaci Wells discovered that the information provided by ROMO was outdated and did not provide the information necessary to create an accurate and useful map. Therefore, they decided to focus solely on mapping the buildings. When ROMO obtains more accurate data, its staff can add the vegetation and landscape features later. The PLHC has delivered the map with this report.

In summary, the PLHC has delivered to ROMO the following products:

- an administrative history of McGraw Ranch and its preservation
- updates to the 2002 Cultural Landscape Inventory
- a working map that documents the buildings
- a bibliography of historical sources
- recommendations for immediate preservation treatments to the damaged landscape
- notes from oral interviews
- a compilation of established and new historical research materials that will ultimately go to the park archives.

Finally, following in this report, the PLHC provides recommendations for the long-term preservation and management of McGraw Ranch.

McGraw Ranch as a Landscape of Exceptional Importance:

In evaluating long-term management recommendations, the PLHC researchers kept the exceptional historic significance of McGraw Ranch to Rocky Mountain National Park at the forefront of their analysis. It is the last extant dude ranch in the park where once such resorts proliferated. Before ROMO's creation in 1915, the mountainous regions on both the eastern and western sides of Fall River Pass had developed a vigorous tourist economy. Resorts and dude ranches catering to guests sprang up, especially on the east side near Estes Park where extensive operations in places like Moraine Park continued into the 1960s. Gradually, ROMO acquired these inholdings, and following its mission, systematically removed all traces of human activities and returned the land to a natural state. Because the National Park Service acquired McGraw Ranch relatively late in 1988, the site retained an intact dude ranch landscape. When ROMO proposed demolishing the more than 15 buildings and structures, public outcry proved so great that park administrators abandoned these plans and eventually rehabilitated the historic district into an NPS research and learning center. The project received national attention when the National Trust for Historic Preservation stepped in with funding and state and local public and private entities contributed both money and labor for the preservation efforts. Thus, McGraw Ranch is unusually important; it represents early Colorado mountain ranching and its evolution into a consumer industry, a history virtually erased from ROMO. More recently, McGraw Ranch preservation represents new park policies coming to the fore in the 1990s and a successful adaptive reuse of a historic landscape. Both the public and the park consider McGraw Ranch one of ROMO's cultural gems. Weighed with this outstanding historic significance, the historic preservation and environmental restoration of McGraw Ranch take on high levels of importance. ROMO staff and consultants should carefully consider the historic importance of this site in every level of decision-making concerning McGraw Ranch.

Restoration Needs Requiring Immediate Action:

Stabilizing the stream bank through the ranch and especially near the main ranch house.

- The 2013 flood that swept through McGraw Ranch seriously damaged its landscape, most significantly by causing major erosion to the stream bank adjacent to the ranch. As a result, the stream bank is unstable, and the creek flows much closer to the ranch

buildings, especially the main house, than it did historically. No natural or engineered stabilization features exist to prevent the stream from further eroding the bank and undermining the structures. The ranch house and other buildings are in immediate danger from this creek bank erosion. The PLHC recommends that ROMO hire as soon as possible an engineer who can devise a historically-sensitive remediation to prevent further erosion of the stream bank. Another flood occurring in the near future, possibly even a small one, could erode the stream bank enough to seriously damage, even wipe out, buildings and expose a buried swimming pool located close to the creek.

Long-term Preservation and Management Recommendations:

Stabilizing erosion of the ranch site and erosion affecting ranch buildings

- The 2013 flood and its torrential rains caused significant erosion to the site, particularly as water rushed down the hillside into the ranch, cut out new channels, and deposited berms of silt against buildings and structures. Though the threat from this erosion is not as dangerous as the stream bank erosion, ROMO should engage engineers and/or landscape architects as soon as possible to examine causes for damage and to devise stabilization and management plans to prevent further damage. These stabilization strategies should utilize the ranch's historic physical features such as canals that were created to prevent this type of erosion. Engineers should evaluate the historic northern irrigation ditch, the southern irrigation ditch that feeds the historic pond, and the current, historic, and natural stream channels. This report recommends using a licensed geotechnical engineer who is experienced in addressing issues of erosion, slope stabilization, and stream channel stabilization. This expert should fully understand working within the Secretary of Interior's Standards and Guidelines of Historic Rehabilitation and the identified features of the McGraw Ranch Cultural Landscape Inventory.
- Park staff or engineering consultants should evaluate the stability of the roadways and parking spaces around the historic cabins and develop recommendations for stabilization measures. This should include the northern access road above the guest cabins and the parking spaces between the guest cabins and north of the main lodge.
- Staff or experts should evaluate the stability of the small culvert to the north of the entry road and its surrounding area. Included should be an assessment of the culvert overflow's potential to damage the entry road and its line of historic blue spruce.

Historic Documentation Recommendations:

-Oral Interviews: McGraw Ranch has a long history associated with Rocky Mountain National Park that further research could augment. Many McGraw family members still live in the area and have a vested interest in the management and preservation of the ranch. It is critical to obtain interviews with people such as Fran McGraw to document the ranch's history, and most importantly, the physical and landscape features that provide the site's historic character and

landscape. Though some of this oral history has been collected, more interviews need to document the post 1990 preservation efforts. People who should be interviewed include:

Fran McGraw (McGraw Family)
Cheri Yost (ROMO-NPS)
Bill Thompson (ROMO-NPS)
Jim Lindberg (ROMO-NPS)
Michael Welch (ROMO-NPS)
Randy Jones (ROMO-NPS)
Estella Cole (Colorado SHPO)

These people all assisted the McGraw Ranch rehabilitation and are familiar with the decisions to keep or change certain elements during the rehab. Additionally, they can explain the expectations for the property's long term management established during the rehabilitation process. Many of these people have moved on to different positions but remain available particularly through Cheri Yost.

- Develop an interdisciplinary ROMO advisory team from the various park divisions that handle the administration of McGraw Ranch.
 - Because ROMO is a large park with many divisions and groups, creating an interdisciplinary advisory team for McGraw would foster teamwork in decision making and ensure that cultural resource concerns are considered in planning stages. This could help alleviate last-minute upsets that may result in complicated mitigation controversies.
 - Bringing together historians who work within the Resource division with staff in Interpretation, this advisory board could help disseminate a broader understanding of the park's history needs.
- Update National Register nomination for McGraw Ranch Historic District.
 - The PLHC recommends amending the nomination to extend the period of significance to the fifty-year limit. Now, the period of significance for McGraw Ranch ends at 1948, which was the limit in 1998 when the nomination was written. By extending the period of significance, buildings that were non-contributing simply by being less than fifty years old (but still representative of the criteria arguments) would become contributing. This is a simple way to clarify their historic status.
 - An amended nomination should include the cultural landscape features and arguments from the CLI. This would help ROMO staff know which environmental features are historic.
 - The park should conduct an archaeological survey of the McGraw Ranch landscape to identify important historic and pre-historic sites. These should be included in the amended nomination.
 - Finally, because of the national and state prominence of the McGraw Ranch rehabilitation, the staff should fully document ROMO's administration and preservation of the site as it will become eligible under a new context of National Park history by 2038.

- Collect, organize, and accession McGraw documents in the park's archives. Materials compiled by PLHC researchers will add to existing documents in the repository.
- Seek continued engagement with external partners to advance historical knowledge and interpretations of McGraw Ranch and Rocky Mountain National Park.
- Seek additional funding for updating historical interpretation, signage, and other media presentations of McGraw Ranch.
- Provide better training of staff to help incorporate history into park planning and to create more engaging interpretations. With only a small number of NPS historians (in the 0170 series with title of 'historian'), educating temporary and seasonal employees about the parks' important histories is a good way of disseminating historic interpretations to the public.
- Upgrade ROMO's History portal on its website so that McGraw Ranch information is easier to find. Make pertinent McGraw documents available electronically through the website.

Management Plan Recommendations: These recommendations are ranked best, better, and good. All of them provide some level of management for the McGraw Ranch, but the best management approach is presented first.

The PLHC recommends that ROMO require a map with any management plan. With this report, the PLHC has provided a preliminary base map that represents the McGraw Ranch historic district. However, because of outdated data and discrepancies between the CLI map and the landscape, ROMO will need to conduct a survey to create an accurate living map. A new map that staff can continually update should include all buildings, structures, objects, and environmental features including vegetation and landscape elements. The map should note the historic status of each feature and receive periodic updates as further research, physical alterations, and the passage of time alter evaluations of significance.

Best Management Plan Option:

Prepare a Cultural Landscape Report

- Typically written after the Cultural Landscape Inventory, the CLR includes a preservation plan for how to treat and maintain the cultural landscape. As a tool for managing McGraw, the CLR will guide decisions so that rehabilitation work supports the historic integrity of the district. Preservation Brief 36 further explains the CLR.
- The first step in creating a preservation plan, the Cultural Landscape Inventory, already exists for McGraw. The Cultural Landscape Report will be a better guide for treatment measures and management decisions.
- Landscape architecture consultants identified the immediate need for a CLR in three priority areas. A CLR will help guide the management of the following:
 - Watershed flow in McGraw moves from north to south, downhill from the ditch on the north side of the district, and causes sheet erosion of the roadways, parking spaces, and open spaces surrounding the buildings.

- Stream bank channel stabilization: if another flood occurs, the stream banks could continue to move towards the main house, undercutting the swimming pool and eventually the buildings.
- Slope stabilization to prevent further damage from soils being deposited onto the site from areas higher up on the watershed.

Better Management Plan Option :

Prepare a Conservation/Preservation Plan with a Landscape Component:

A conservation or preservation plan will detail the accepted procedures for taking care of buildings, landscapes, and other features that are part of the Cultural Landscape and Historic District. The plan provides in-depth guidance on best management practices for each individual building as well as general treatment recommendations. This document is more detailed than a simple Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the State Historic Preservation Office. Typically, a MOA covers some of the day-to-day issues but not the overall management of the site that still requires regular consultation. Adding a landscape component to this document will give more precise guidance on important landscape features and their management on a daily and annual basis. However, preservation plans are far less detailed than a Cultural Landscape Report.

(For a good example of a Conservation Guide that pertains to a former dude ranch historic district within a national park, see the preservation plan for Grand Teton National Park’s Murie Ranch Historic District.)

Good Management Plan Option:

Memorandum of Agreement between Rocky Mountain National Park and the Colorado Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Create a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Rocky Mountain National Park and the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) for McGraw Ranch Historic District. Such an agreement will establish procedures for undertaking appropriate historic rehabilitation at McGraw without having to take every project through National Historic Preservation Act compliance. This must also include a landscape component in order to manage the natural environment that is part of the cultural landscape and historic district. Ideally, a MOA should be based on an amended National Register nomination that includes a revised period of significance, the historic landscape features, and potential archaeological sites.

Evaluation of Cultural Landscape Management Needs for McGraw Ranch, Rocky Mountain
National Park Project Brief:

In September 1998, McGraw Ranch and many of its buildings were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. They sit on the eastern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park in the Cow Creek Valley and border the Roosevelt National Forest to the north. Spanning 740 acres, the historic district contains about 10 buildings and structures with the ranch complex and accompanying cabins sitting just north of Cow Creek. At one time a homesteaded property, the site became a dude ranch in 1936. Under multiple owners, the dude ranch ran until 1988 at which time the National Park Service bought the site. By directly providing \$800,000, the National Trust for Historic Preservation helped rehabilitate and transition the ranch into a research center. At the time, it was the most money the NTHP had ever contributed to a single project. In 2004, the rehabilitation work won the John Wesley Powell Prize from the Society for History in the Federal Government.

Today, ten years after it won such a coveted prize, many issues still negatively affect McGraw. One of the most immediate is repairing damage from the region's 2013 flood. Although many have called the devastating rain in September 2012 a 1000-year scale flood, it is impossible to know with complete assurance when the next environmental disaster may occur. McGraw's position on a floodplain exacerbates this concern. An additional worry is the already shifting stream bank that threatens to expose the long-ago buried pool and eventually to undermine the integrity of the main house and adjacent buildings. Although work has been done on the property in the years after the NTHP rehabilitation, it has mainly provided band-aid fixes that do not fully address the longstanding problems facing the McGraw historic district.

Maintaining the physical and historic stability of McGraw Ranch is a pressing issue for Rocky Mountain National Park as the site actively supports the park's mission. Encouraged by a 1999 NPS-wide initiative called the Natural Resource Challenge which sought to connect parks to people and to understand parks' environments and their species, McGraw Ranch transformed into a research center. Now the Continental Divide Research Learning Center, the buildings and cabins at McGraw currently host researchers working in the park. McGraw's status on the National Register of Historic Places gives it historic significance both inside and outside the park system, and its protection is of utmost importance. The following recommendations address the park's need to resolve environmental damage while preserving the historic integrity of McGraw Ranch.

Recommendations

The recommendations listed below are broken up into two main categories, labeled highest priority and additional recommendations. Visits to McGraw Ranch and document research showed that some recommendations were more pressing than others in their ability to help streamline management decisions at McGraw.

[Highest Priority – recommendations agreed upon between landscape architects and historians]

1. Prepare a Cultural Landscape Report

- Typically written after the Cultural Landscape Inventory, the CLR includes a preservation plan for how to treat and maintain the cultural landscape. As a tool for managing McGraw, the CLR will guide decisions so that rehabilitation work supports the historic integrity of the district. Preservation Brief 36 further explains the CLR.
- The first step in creating a preservation plan, the Cultural Landscape Inventory, already exists for McGraw. The Cultural Landscape Report will be a better guide for treatment measures and management decisions.
- Landscape architecture consultants identified the immediate need for a CLR in three priority areas. A CLR will help guide the management of the following:
 - Watershed flow in McGraw from north to south causing sheet erosion of the roadways, parking spaces, and open spaces surrounding the buildings from the ditch on the north side of the district, down.
 - Stream bank channel stabilization: if another flood event comes, the stream banks could continue to move towards the main house, undercutting the swimming pool and eventually the buildings.
 - Slope stabilization to prevent further damage from soils being deposited onto the site from areas higher up on the watershed.
- If a CLR is deemed unable to be completed, please see recommendation 7.

2. Prepare an updated map of existing conditions and associated contributing features. Currently, some contributing features are not listed on the map, and other features from the map no longer exist on site.

[Additional Recommendations]

- 1.** Stabilize watershed and features affected by the 2013 floods. This may require hiring an engineer and/or landscape architect to evaluate the following environmental problems, devise long term solutions to them, and prioritize their implementation.
- Stabilize the roadways and the parking areas around the buildings.
 - Stabilize the watershed and redirect storm water away from the buildings and roads.
 - Stabilize the stream bank.

- Stabilize extant small (human) scale features such as the stone planters and the pathways.

2. Evaluate the watershed and stream bank.

- Evaluate the stability of the north slope and stream bank and develop recommendations for stabilization measures.
- Include the historic northern irrigation ditch, the southern irrigation ditch that feeds the historic pond, and the current, historic, and natural stream channel. Accomplish this evaluation using a licensed geotechnical engineer who is experienced in addressing issues of erosion, slope stabilization, and stream channel stabilization.

2.1 Evaluate the roadways and parking spaces around historic buildings.

- Evaluate the stability of the roadways and parking spaces around the historic cabins and develop recommendations for stabilization measures.
- Include the northern access road above the guest cabins and the parking spaces between the guest cabins and north of the main lodge.

2.2 Evaluate the small culvert north of the entry road.

- Evaluate the stability of the small culvert to the north of the entry road and the surrounding area.
- Include an assessment of the potential for overflow from the culvert to damage the entry road and line of historic blue spruce.

3. Create a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Rocky Mountain National Park and the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) for McGraw Ranch Historic District. Such an agreement will establish procedures for undertaking appropriate historic rehabilitation at McGraw without having to take every project through National Historic Preservation Act compliance.

4. Develop an interdisciplinary advisory team of RMNP administrators for McGraw's historical needs.

- Because ROMO is a large park with many divisions and groups, creating an interdisciplinary advisory team would help these groups talk about history while fostering teamwork in a bureaucratic setting that might otherwise keep them apart.
- Because historians are under the Cultural Resource and not Interpretation, an advisory board will facilitate a broader understanding of the park's history needs.

5. Update National Register nomination for McGraw Ranch Historic District.

6. Collect, organize and accession McGraw documents in the park's archives.

7. Establish and maintain a schedule of oral history interviews with retiring and retired staff.

- Too often, those who move to a different park or retire take with them valuable information that is lost. Conducting interviews upon an employee departure would help management decisions after they are gone.

In 2011, the Organization of American Historians produced a research document titled “Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Parks.” It speaks to this problem when the authors write: “Too often, some senior employee unofficially becomes the ‘philosopher-king’ of the park, someone to whom people turn for info on particular subjects. Knowledge about the past becomes less the product of training and expertise and more the expression of conventional wisdom.” (pg. 73)

7.1 Conduct interviews with employees from various divisions throughout the park like facilities management, interpretation, among others.

- Establishing a gauge for what ROMO employees do or do not know about McGraw Ranch and its history is a necessary step to identify a streamlined decision-making process.

8. Seek continued engagement with external partners to advance historical knowledge and interpretations of McGraw Ranch and Rocky Mountain National Park.

- With the current vacancy in the CRM position and informational losses stemming from other vacancies, outside entities can provide historical research continuity.

9. Seek additional funding for updating historical interpretation and signage.

- Signs, films, media other information that may need updating.

9.1 Better training of staff to help incorporate and understand histories at parks at a more engaging level.

“Imperiled Promise” found that “[o]nly about 182 of the NPS’s over 22,000 permanent, temporary, and seasonal employees carry the federal title of ‘historian’ (0170 series).” With these few historians, it becomes important for temporary and seasonal employees to receive historical training of the parks’ important histories.

9.2 Upgrade ROMO’s History portal so that McGraw Ranch information is easier to find. Upload pertinent McGraw documents.

10. If a CLR is unable to be completed, ROMO management should produce a Historic Resource Study (HRS) and a new, updated CLI.

11. Periodic review of project prioritization by landscape architects.

- An implementation strategy for rehabilitation ensures that the McGraw Ranch retains integrity with the greatest number of cultural landscape features maintained, stabilized or repaired. Because an implementation strategy cannot identify every project that may be

necessary at this time nor in the future, it is recommended that the McGraw Ranch Management Team conduct a periodic review of project prioritization.

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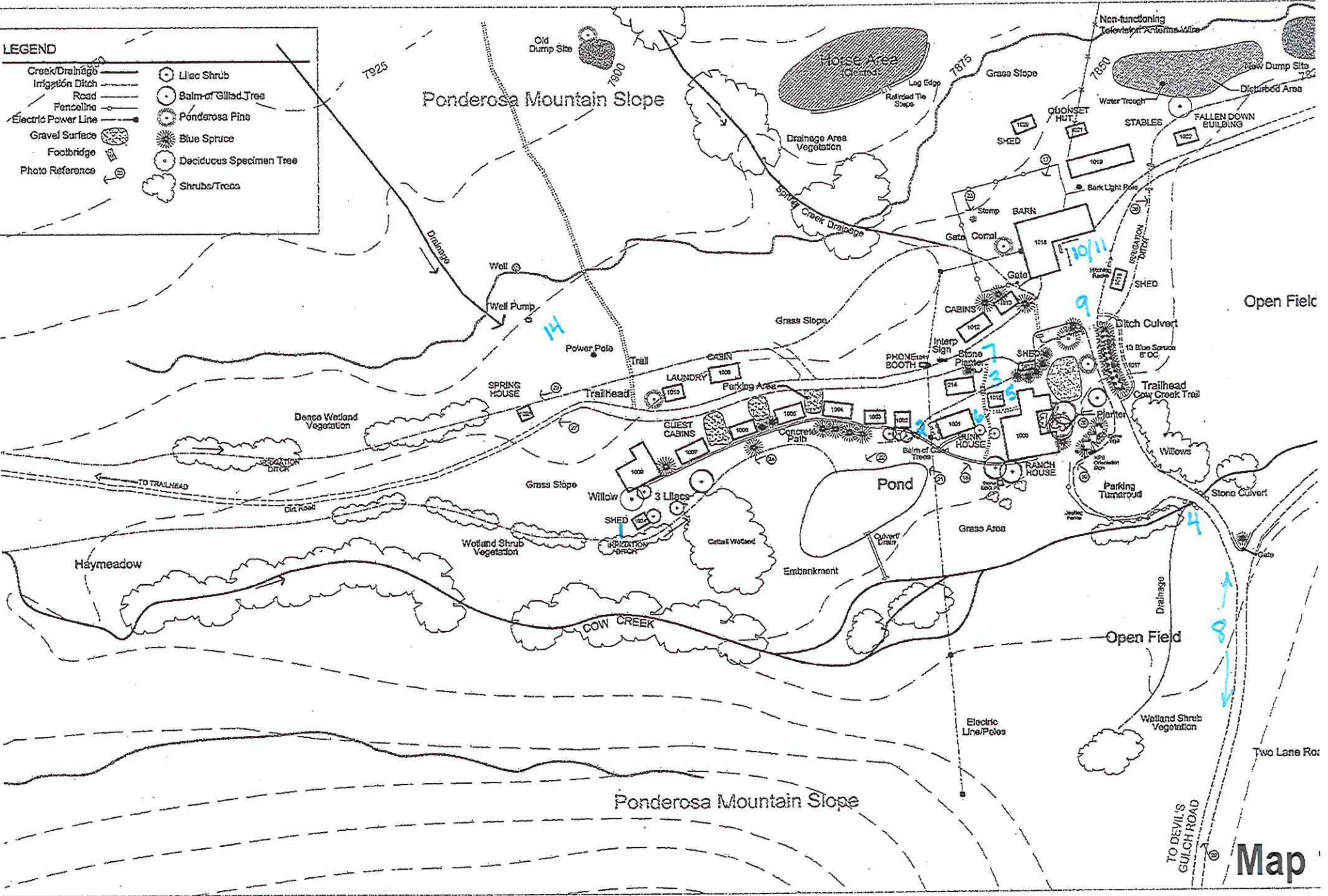
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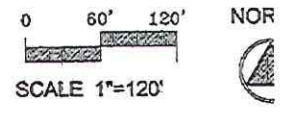
LEGEND

Creek/Drainage	Lilac Shrub
Irrigation Ditch	Balm-of-Gilead Tree
Road	Ponderosa Pine
Fence/Line	Blue Spruce
Electric Power Line	Deciduous Specimen Tree
Gravel Surface	Shrubs/Trees
Footbridge	
Photo Reference	



Information Sources:
 Photographs / Digital Files / Interviews / Site Reconnaissance

Ex. Conditions 1998



Map