



Photograph by Chris Popek



Cultural Resources for Consultants

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) requires reviews of most projects for their potential effects on cultural resources. The process for the review will depend on the lead agency and location of the project.

The Lead Agency

RCO-Funded Projects

RCO is the lead agency for most projects funded through the office. To ensure this is an RCO-funded project, ask the client for the RCO project name and number. Search for project details in RCO's online data system [PRISM](#). The cost to complete the review and any resulting cultural resources requirements may be paid through the RCO grant if the grant applicant requested it.

RCO will do an initial review of the project that includes review of the Department of Archeological and Historical Preservation database, General Land Office survey maps, Lidar data, U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey T-sheets, historic U.S. Geological Survey quadrant maps, historic aerial photos, and published ethnographic works.

Projects with a State Connection

A project sponsored by a state agency or occurring on state-owned or -managed lands (regardless of the sponsor) is the responsibility of the state agency. Each agency has its own process for addressing cultural resources. RCO cannot exempt or determine treatment for projects on state lands. State agencies must provide documentation of compliance with Governor's [Executive Order 21-02](#) or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as appropriate.



Projects with a Federal Connection

If a project is on federal land, includes federal funding, or requires a federal permit, cultural resources compliance typically is the responsibility of the lead federal agency. The review will follow Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Contact RCO for questions about the lead agency before starting work.

Tribal Contact

Please communicate directly with tribal cultural resources staff for technical coordination, report writing, and notification of field work and findings. Provide all communication with tribes to RCO or summarize them in the cultural resources report. RCO will keep lead agency status for formal consultation unless otherwise noted.

WISAARD Number

RCO staff set up and manage cultural resources information in the Washington Information System for Architectural and Archaeological Records Data (WISAARD) system. Please contact RCO before uploading any materials into the WISAARD system.

To be added to a WISAARD project record, e-mail culturalresource@rco.wa.gov with the PRISM project number, sponsor name, and the company and people to add.

RCO cultural resources staff will coordinate review of the report, site forms, and Historic Property Inventory forms with the consulting parties. Archaeological site forms, Historic Property Inventory forms, and all reports should be in “draft” status in WISAARD. RCO will submit materials to Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

Cultural Resources Investigations

Cultural resources investigations will depend on the likely impacts, the location, and what is known about the area. RCO grant agreements generally include details on the level of cultural resources investigations expected.

Cultural Resources Surveys

Most cultural resources surveys should include both surface and subsurface archaeological resources and historic era-built environment resources. All cultural resources field work should follow state and federal regulations and guidance. The survey must align with the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation reporting [guidelines](#). The consultant may propose alternative survey methods, target the investigation, or suggest other strategies for the project by contacting RCO cultural resources staff.



Cultural Resources Survey Report

The consultant should ensure the cultural resources survey report includes the RCO project number and grant program before giving it to the project sponsor for review. The project sponsor should review the report before giving it to the RCO grants manager. Allow 30 days for RCO's review. RCO cultural resources staff will review the report, request any needed edits, and send it to the consulting parties for their comments. RCO will notify the project sponsor and consultant of all comments received. Once the comments are resolved, RCO submits the report in WISAARD and consultation is completed.

No ground-disturbing actions may occur until RCO has given authorization to proceed.

Cultural Resources Background Study

While a full cultural resources study inclusive of subsurface testing and recordation will be required for most projects, sometimes the project scope dictates a phased approach. Some planning and feasibility studies or large-scale acquisitions and restoration projects that have yet to identify specific properties may warrant a background study. A background study is used to identify known cultural resources, develop a management tool to guide project design, and make recommendations for the management of cultural resources identified during the review.

Inadvertent Discovery

Inadvertent Discovery Plans

RCO has a standard [Inadvertent Discovery Plan](#). The plan must always be available onsite. Everyone working on the project must be briefed on the procedures. The consultant may either incorporate the RCO plan into the report or draft a more site-specific plan. If writing a more site-specific plan, the consultant must include all necessary plan instructions and relevant project information, and list RCO as a contact.

Inadvertent Discoveries

If archaeological or historic materials are discovered, work in the area of the discovery and immediate vicinity must stop immediately. The area must be secured, and notification must be provided to tribal cultural staff and committees, RCO cultural resources staff, and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

If human remains are discovered, work in the immediate vicinity must stop, the area must be secured, and notification must be provided to tribal cultural staff and committees, RCO cultural resources staff, the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, and the coroner and local law enforcement, as quickly as possible according to [Revised Code of Washington 68.50](#).