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*The National Historic
Preservation Act and its
resulting cultural, educational,
and economic benefits over the
past 40 years, have been vital
to fostering a preservation ethic
across the nation.*

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

Protecting Our Heritage by Preparing for the Unexpected

February 2007

STATUS

The FY2008 Administration budget proposes \$4 million for inventory development.

REQUEST

Katrina demonstrated the adverse consequences of the void in historic site location information. Lack of information has significantly delayed FEMA assistance and put heritage at risk; conducting inventories after the hurricanes was costly and time-consuming. In order to prepare for the next disaster and to expedite preservation decision-making, we request an appropriation of \$10 million for competitive grants to States to digitize paper records (\$5 million) and to conduct new field work (\$5 million) in high risk areas.

Background

Although 40 years have passed since the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Nation does not know where its historic resources are located. While good progress occurred in the 1970's, subsequent budget cuts halted the advances. All of those involved in historic preservation, including agencies and property owners, acknowledge this urgent need. One of the strongest recommendations from the Preserve America Summit was to fund survey and inventory. The Administration made a start with a \$4 million request. However, this is inadequate, focusing solely on digitizing paper records. An equally urgent need exists to conduct field work in high risk areas.

The adverse consequences of lack of digitized information were made clear in the response to Katrina. Aid to victims and FEMA responses was delayed because digitized historic site locations were not available in the hard-hit States of Louisiana and Mississippi. Limited funding has virtually eliminated the States' ability to finish historic site survey field work and to transfer the results to electronic data bases and geographic information systems.

This investment pays off. After the hurricane, the National Park Service detailed an employee to New Orleans to digitize information and conduct new survey. As a result of this work, preservation response times were reduced from 90 days to two weeks. Florida provides another example. Because of its digitized data base and GIS system, the SHPO can electronically transfer historic site information to FEMA in minutes thus dramatically expediting assistance.

At the 40th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act, it is time to launch this effort so that by the 50th anniversary we will know where our historic places are.