5.4.E Cultural, Archaeological and Historical Resource Issues

### *Erosion, Development, and Vandalism*

Significant archaeological sites and historical resources are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Legally, significant archaeological sites are those worthy of protection or excavation with public funds. Criteria for eligibility consider content and condition of the site with specifics varying dependent on the age of the site. The oldest sites (Paleoindian) are eligible even if they have been heavily disturbed. The youngest sites (Ceramic period age sites, historic sites) must be minimally disturbed and must yield archaeological data such as fire hearths or separable layers of occupation, in addition to stone tools and other objects.

Erosion, development, and vandalism can all destroy the significance of archaeological sites. The primary protection afforded these sites comes from identification so that they can be protected from threats or excavated by professionals.

At this time, erosion poses the greatest threat to archaeological sites. Unfortunately, artificially raised water levels on many interior lakes, as well as natural land subsidence along the coast, have resulted in water covering or eroding many sites from the Archaic period to the present. The greatest source of material that survives erosion fairly intact tends to be those sites sealed in the stratified sediments of floodplains along the rivers.

Development runs a close second to erosion as a threat to archaeological resources. Since most of the sites are shallowly buried and over 95% of the habitation and workshop sites occur along shorelines, any activity in shoreland areas that disturbs the top two feet of earth has the potential to severely damage a site.

Finally, vandalism, caused by nonsystematic digging for artifacts, can destroy both site and artifacts. Vandalism usually takes the form of unauthorized excavations by artifact collectors who loot sites once locations are publicized. This has resulted in the legal restriction of public access to information concerning the location of known or potential archaeological resources.

### *Information Needs*

As with archaeological resources, a complete inventory of historical resources in the jurisdiction has not been made. Limited state and federal funds hinder efforts to identify the resources. That lack of information combined with the variety and low density of known sites, structures and trails scattered across the jurisdiction's millions of acres, often in remote locations, make it difficult to develop effective preservation strategies. Other problems involving known historical resources include inappropriate alterations that compromise architectural design and values, abandonment and deterioration of structures, and adjacent development which is incompatible with the historic context of a particular resource.

As discussed earlier, an assessment of the overall cultural significance of lakes is incorporated in LURC's lake database. However, of over 1,500 lakes contained in the database, only 10 to 15 percent were surveyed to determine their archaeological potential. Consequently, the primary source of cultural resource information for the agency’s review of development proposals is not complete. Since the majority of sites are located within 300 to 400 yards of the shorelines of canoe-navigable waterbodies, protection efforts may be enhanced by considering whether criteria can be developed for determining when to request MHPC review of permit application on lakes that have not yet been assessed.

Both LURC and MHPC could strengthen their efforts to protect these cultural resources by further cooperation. The following needs warrant consideration (1) a strengthened process for assuring that all applications with potential impacts on significant archaeological or historical resources are being adequately reviewed; (2) criteria for identifying potential archaeological sites not located near shorelines; (3) an estimate of the costs of professional reconnaissance and survey activities, prior to requiring such an evaluation through LURC procedures; (4) an approach to dealing with architectural design issues for both clustered and isolated historical structures and/or sites which occur within the jurisdiction; and (5) joint efforts to obtain funding to further investigate the extensive areas of the jurisdiction not yet surveyed.