

VANISHING TREASURES: A LEGACY IN RUINS
Ruins Preservation in the American Southwest

LONG RANGE PLAN

January 1998
(Revised March 1998)



Keet Seel Ruin, Navajo National Monument

*A ruins preservation program is essential to provide a last defense against
the loss of these tangible symbols of America's heritage.
An effective program can preserve the integrity, information and special
meanings that these places hold for this and future generations*

National Park Service
Intermountain Region

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VANISHING TREASURES

LONG-RANGE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

After 20 years of inadequate funding, backlogged treatment needs, and a lack of information on condition, thousands of prehistoric and historic ruins at 38 National Park Service units in the arid west are threatened with severe deterioration and collapse. These architectural resources, some of which are World Heritage sites, are important to our national heritage, and hold significant meaning for a number of traditional communities as well. In addition, only a few highly skilled preservation craftspeople are employed in the National Park Service today, and many of these are retiring after 30+ years in the service. The lack of funding has prevented their specialized knowledge from being passed on to a new generation of craftspeople.

“Vanishing Treasures: A Legacy in Ruins” is a grass-roots initiative designed to address both the devastating destruction of these irreplaceable historic and prehistoric structures as well as the impending loss of preservation expertise. The Vanishing Treasures (VT) Initiative seeks an increased level of funding support for preserving these structures and providing for the training and development of preservation specialists. Although the duration of the Initiative depends upon the volume of dollars authorized by Congress each year, it is estimated that supplemental Federal funding over a 13-year period will eliminate or greatly reduce the backlog for these structures.

Three primary thrusts define the VT Initiative. First, the program seeks to eliminate resource loss by addressing emergency project needs where structures are in immediate, imminent danger from natural erosive factors or the cumulative pressures of visitation. Secondly, the Initiative focuses on replacement of an aging workforce that often has unique craft skills that will be lost without the addition of new, often younger workers who have the opportunity to work with these aging mentors prior to their retirement. Third, throughout its lifespan, the Initiative would move from a posture of dealing with emergency projects and urgent personnel loss into a proactive program. Structures would be evaluated, ranked, and the best preservation options selected. Skilled craftspeople and other professionals would have career status with benefits and career development options analogous to other segments of the Federal work force, in order to ensure work continuity in the area.

This long-range plan seeks to achieve the Vanishing Treasures goals outlined above through the implementation of the following four action items: 1) develop a comprehensive computerized data management system, 2) establish adequate funding levels to achieve specific goals, 3) enact a career development and training program, and 4) establish clear guidelines for planning and accomplishing preservation actions. A summary of these action items, including Tables 1, 2, and 3 that provide a breakdown of funding projections and costs for backlogged projects and career development and training needs, are presented below.

DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The VT Database Workgroup was established to implement the goals outlined in the 1995 VT Strategic Plan. All of the goals related to the database section of the strategic plan are focused on providing data to serve as a basis for accurate and defensible budget requests. The workgroup targeted four goals: 1) develop a standardized system to measure inventory and condition assessment, accomplishment, materials and labor costs, and deferred workload, 2) develop an electronic method for submission of the resource data gathered in goal one and work toward interfacing related software systems, and interface related databases to provide more efficient utilization and improved data tracking, 3) develop a system to prioritize funding requests, 4) coordinate and/or develop a management system to aid in planning work and tracking accomplishments.

Goal 1: Develop a standardized system to measure inventory and condition assessment, accomplishment, materials and labor costs, and deferred work load. Work on this goal was started in 1996 with the completion of the first inventory and condition assessment call for VT parks. Thirty-five of the forty-one solicited parks responded. The data compiled in the call identified the broad range of information about the resources. The data are presented in the *Preliminary VT Database Summary Report*. The data provided valuable initial information about the status of VT resources and clearly identified how much we don't know about some of the resources. Currently the workgroup is preparing for a second Inventory and Condition Assessment call that is to be distributed in February of 1998.