

Levels of Investigation

INTRODUCTION

The Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) has a flexible format so that it can be used for various landscape types, address different management objectives, and guide treatment activities. While every CLR should be similar in format and content, not every CLR needs to contain the same level of information or have the same outline of contents. A project agreement defines the level of investigation for a CLR. (See *Landscape Lines 1: Project Agreement*.)

THREE LEVELS OF INVESTIGATION

The level of investigation refers to the type and extent of information gathered and processed during three activities conducted for a CLR. The three activities are historical research, existing conditions investigation, and analysis and evaluation. The National Park Service (NPS) *Cultural Resources Management Guideline*, defines the level of investigation for these activities as exhaustive, thorough, and limited.

DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF INVESTIGATION

Within a CLR, the level of investigation required for historical research, existing conditions investigation, and analysis and evaluation may be different. For example, the historical research piece of a CLR may warrant an exhaustive level of investigation because no previous research on the landscape exists. In contrast, the existing conditions investigation may require only a limited level of investigation because reliable information is available from another source, such as a recent, detailed site survey. (See Figure 1.)

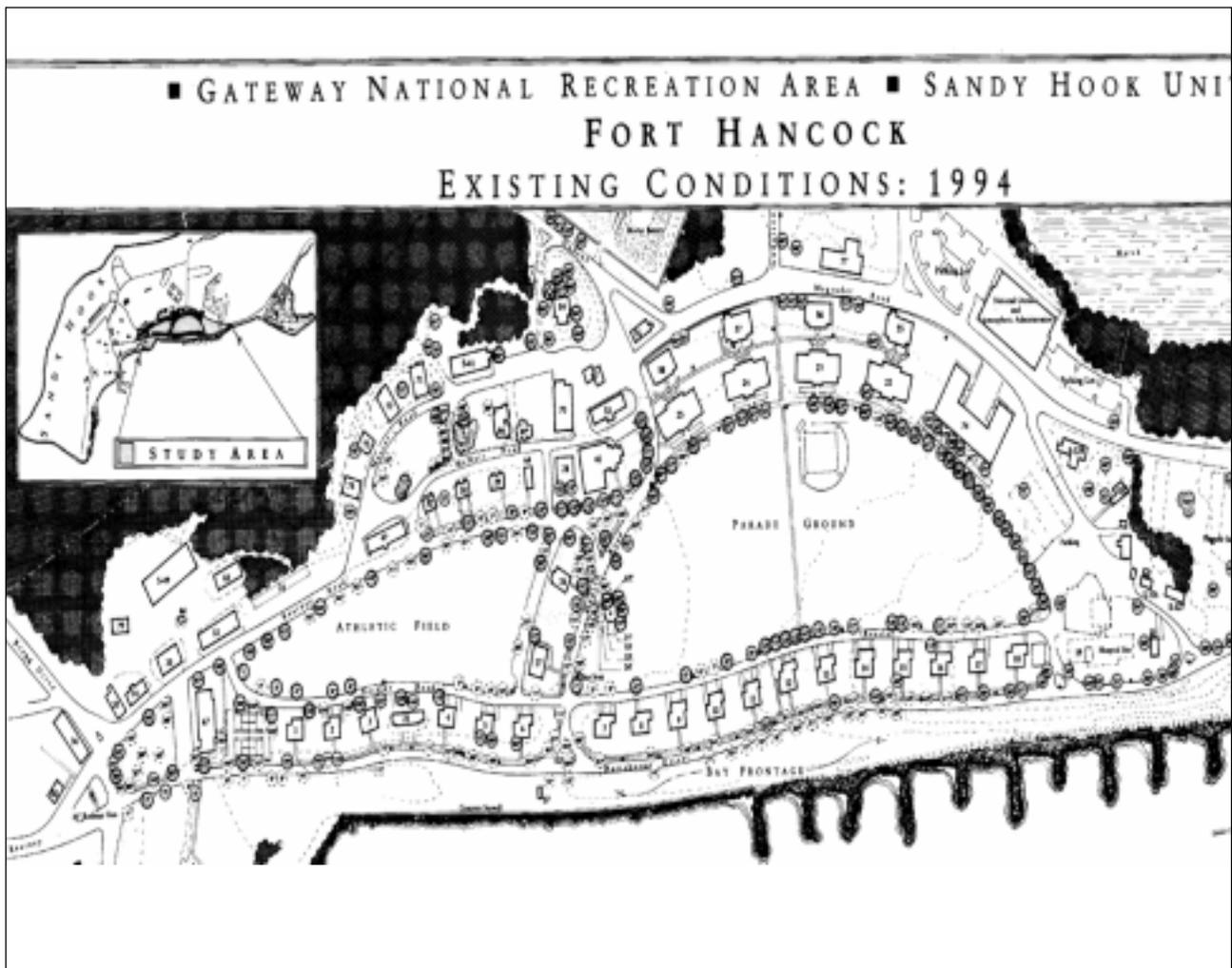


Figure 1. Management objectives for the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery CLR influenced the level of investigation for both the historical research and existing conditions investigation. A limited level of historical research and a thorough level of existing conditions investigation were required to create management zones, which indicated a historic zone, a buffer zone, and a development zone for new interments. Andrew Johnson National Cemetery. (NPS, 1988)

The level of investigation is influenced by several key factors:

- legislative mandate
- management objectives
- resource significance
- resource complexity
- proposed treatment
- operations and programs

Legislative Mandate

The legislative mandate or enabling legislation for a park describes the primary resources to be managed. In some cases, the enabling legislation for a park is very general with regard to the management of specific cultural and natural resources. In other cases, there is a clear statement that the landscape should be managed as a cultural resource. For example, the enabling legislation for Weir Farm National

Historic Site in Connecticut states that the site is established for the purpose of “...maintaining the integrity of a setting that inspired artistic expression and encourages public enjoyment...” If preservation of a cultural landscape is identified in legislation, it may warrant an exhaustive level of research and documentation. However, if the legislative mandate does not give specific direction for preserving a cultural landscape, this does not imply that an exhaustive level of investigation is unwarranted; rather, it means the process of defining the objectives and level of investigation is not directed by legislative mandate.

Management Objectives

A clear understanding of a CLR's management objectives is critical to defining the appropriate level of investigation for historical research, existing conditions investigation, and analysis and evaluation. When information is already available on the site history, management objectives may require only a limited level of historical research. When current site data does not exist, an exhaustive level of existing conditions investigation may be required. Other management objectives for a CLR may include the following:

- determination of historic significance according to National Register criteria for eligibility
- information gathering for resource management in the absence of a proposed treatment (such as preservation)
- information gathering for park interpretation of the resource

It is critical that the level of investigation of historical research, existing conditions investigation, and analysis and evaluation matches the complexity of the management issues.

Resource Significance

Resource significance is a factor that influences the level of investigation. There are four levels of resource significance.

- International: cultural landscapes that qualify as World Heritage Sites based on their universal significance.
- National: cultural landscapes that qualify as National Historic Landmarks are listed in the National Register as nationally significant, or are determined to be nationally significant by an act of Congress.
- State: cultural landscapes that qualify for the National Register and are determined to be significant at the state level.
- Local: cultural landscapes that qualify for the National Register and are determined to be significant at the local level.

Cultural landscapes that are nationally significant, such as the Blue Ridge Parkway or the grounds of the White House and President's Park, may warrant an exhaustive level of investigation because of their value to the nation and to ensure that management protects these values. Cultural landscapes that are significant at the state or local level, such as a backcountry homestead in Colorado, a settlement community in Wisconsin, or a sheep ranch in eastern Oregon, may not require an exhaustive level of investigation because they are not unique and are more representative of a type of historic property.

Resource Complexity

The physical scale and complexity, as well as the historic complexity of a landscape, may necessitate additional time and effort in preparing Part I of a CLR, titled “Site History, Existing Conditions, and Analysis and Evaluation.” Although complexity does not affect the type of information gathered in preparing a CLR, it influences the effort required to review all the research materials of landscapes with extensive site histories or to document landscapes that are large, have complex spatial relationships, or have a high density of features.

Proposed Treatment

Treatment for a cultural landscape is often decided through the park planning process. Treatment may or may not be decided before a CLR is prepared. If a proposed treatment has been decided, a CLR documents implementation of the treatment. If treatment has not been decided through the planning process, but management objectives require a CLR to recommend a treatment, a CLR augments, or is combined with a Site Development Plan to determine a preferred treatment and physical design. This is outlined in the CLR project agreement along with specific questions to be answered. (See *Landscape Lines 1: Project Agreement*.)

The following two examples show how the type of proposed treatment can influence a CLR’s level of investigation.

Example 1: If rehabilitation is the proposed treatment for a cultural landscape and the end product of a CLR is a new site plan or design

illustrating the location, extent, and character of new development, then a thorough or exhaustive level of investigation is required.

Take, for example, the rehabilitation of a historic cattle ranch landscape to accommodate a new visitor center with parking and interpretive facilities. Here, historical research must be sufficient to allow for a very comprehensive review and assessment of research materials.

Existing conditions investigation and documentation must clearly illustrate the existing landscape, portray the landscape characteristics and associated features, and identify the conditions within which the rehabilitation can occur. The analysis and evaluation must consolidate and compare data from various sources (programs and professional disciplines) and from different perspectives to evaluate the impact of treatment activities on specific features within the landscape and identify the best option.

Example 2: If preservation is the proposed treatment for a cultural landscape and the end product of a CLR is a list of acceptable plants, then a limited level of investigation may be sufficient.

Take, for example, the replacement of plants around a new visitor center (which is also a historic building) with historically accurate plants. Historical research may include a review of primary historical records, such as drawings or historic photographs, for the purposes of identifying former plant materials. A review of written documents may reveal the historic design intent, function, or character of former

plants, assisting in the selection of new plantings. An exhaustive review of all historic records related to the landscape is not appropriate. Similarly, existing conditions investigation and documentation may be limited to the examination of extant plant materials in the vicinity of the visitor center to identify extant historic plant species and document their condition and character.

The proposed treatment for a landscape defines the level of physical intervention of subsequent treatment activities. The level of intervention increases from preservation, through rehabilitation, to restoration, to reconstruction. It is critical that the level of investigation for historical research, existing conditions investigation, and analysis and evaluation adequately matches the type of information required for the proposed treatment. (See Figure 2.)

Operational and Program Factors

Operational factors, such as time, budget, and staff, and program factors, such as the relationship of the CLR to other projects, can influence the level of investigation. Although operational and program factors have low priority in determining the level of investigation, they often have a profound impact on a project. For instance, funding may determine the amount of time and the staff available for a project, set travel limits on the number of repositories a researcher can visit, and necessitate scheduling the completion of a CLR so that it is available for other planning and construction projects.

LEVELS OF INVESTIGATION

Historical Research

The purpose of historical research is to develop a historic context that defines the significance of a landscape. Historical research is used to compose a site history, which describes and illustrates the appearance of a cultural landscape through each relevant historic period.

Exhaustive Historical Research

Exhaustive historical research uses all primary sources of known or presumed relevance, including the following:

- historic publications, unpublished manuscripts, and historic correspondence
- all pertinent historic graphic records, such as drawings, plans, and photographic materials
- interviews are conducted with knowledgeable persons, regardless of their location

Secondary sources are also reviewed, such as studies, reports, and topical publications. All gathered information is compiled and then documented chronologically in an illustrated narrative.

Thorough Historical Research

Thorough historical research uses selected documentation of known and presumed relevance. This includes primary and secondary sources that are available without extensive travel and interviews with knowledgeable people who are readily available. The findings are presented in an illustrated narrative.

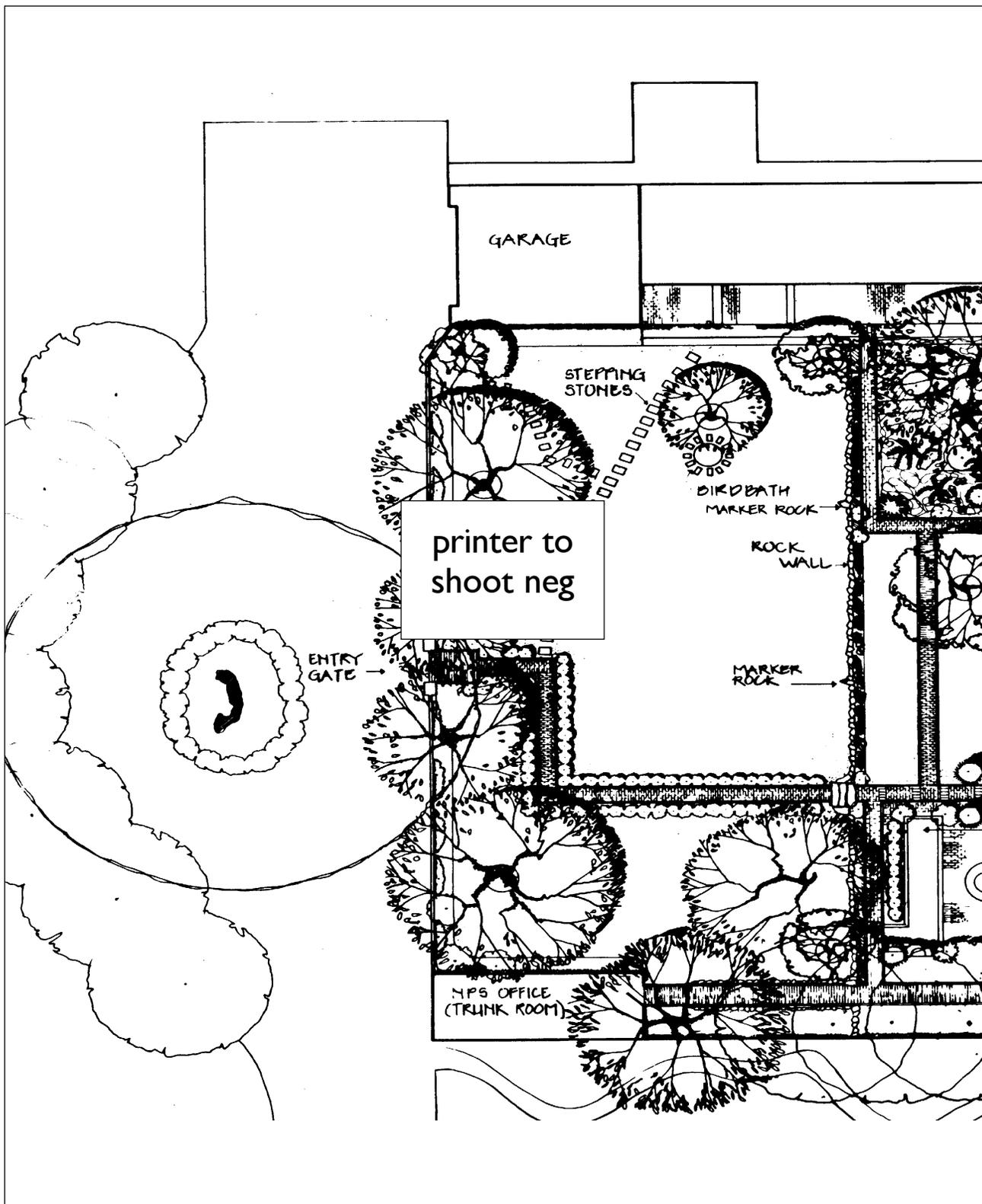


Figure 2. A proposed treatment can influence a CLR's level of investigation for both historical research and existing conditions investigation. The above plan shows a proposed restoration treatment developed as a result of an exhaustive level of historical research and existing conditions investigation. Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. (NPS, 1995)

Limited Historical Research

Limited historical research uses available, selected, and published secondary sources and primary sources, if known. Research may be limited to sources readily accessible within or near a park. Brief interviews are conducted (often by telephone) to answer specific questions. The findings are presented in an illustrated narrative.

Existing Conditions Investigation

Documentation of existing conditions requires a site investigation involving two general activities: site research and a site survey. The purpose of this work is to describe and illustrate the current appearance and condition of a landscape, including all landscape characteristics and associated features. The documentation resulting from a site investigation includes an existing conditions plan, narrative text, and black and white photographs.

Exhaustive Existing Conditions Investigation

An exhaustive existing conditions investigation involves site research, including the collection and review of all available site data from existing sources, including the following:

- natural and cultural resource databases (such as the List of Classified Structures and Cultural Landscapes Inventory)
- park maintenance records
- utility records, zoning, and other political or legal information
- special studies (such as archeological investigations and ethnographic overviews)
- building inventories

- Vegetation Management Plans
- National Register nominations
- Historic Resource Studies
- planning documents (such as the General Management Plan, Statement for Management, Interpretive Prospectus, or Resource Management Plan).
- maps, plans, photographs, etc.

Information on site access, accessibility, land use, visitor services, park operations, and interpretive programs is also reviewed. Other site-related documents from external sources are also examined, including soil surveys, aerial photographs, and United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps.

The site survey involves the extensive identification and recording of existing landscape characteristics and associated features. Their location, appearance, and physical condition are documented in the field using black and white photographs, color slides, sketches, and written observations.

Additional site survey techniques may be used to identify and describe the appearance and condition of landscape characteristics and associated features in the field. These techniques include:

- tree coring to determine the age of historic trees
- aerial photography to identify and record broad patterns of landscape characteristics (such as natural systems and features, circulation, land use, and spatial organization) and associated features

- topographic and hydrographic surveys to obtain accurate location and elevation data for a base map
- archeological techniques, including geophysical surveys and soil analyses to locate and analyze buried ruins and cultural artifacts
- computer technologies to collect and process field survey information, such as the global positioning system datalogger as an inventory tool and geographic information survey as a system for mapping, analyzing, and managing site data

All findings are presented in an existing conditions plan, narrative text, and black and white photographs.

Thorough Existing Conditions Investigation

The availability of recent and reliable site data may make it possible to conduct a thorough, rather than an exhaustive, existing conditions investigation. A thorough investigation differs from an exhaustive investigation in the following ways:

- more existing site data may be used, but less new data will be generated from the site survey
- fewer specialized technologies or techniques will be used in the site survey
- technical and park staff expertise will be used rather than experts from other disciplines
- less labor-intensive techniques will be used to collect site data

A thorough level of investigation may obtain topographic information from an aerial photograph using photogrammetry, whereas an exhaustive level of investigation may use a refined

topographic survey with a close contour interval and include the canopy size and d.b.h. (diameter at breast height) of mature trees.

The findings of a thorough existing conditions investigation are presented in an existing conditions plan, narrative text, and black and white photographs. (See Figure 3.)

Limited Existing Conditions Investigation

A limited existing conditions investigation may use available site data and generate less new data through the field survey than the thorough or exhaustive investigations. A limited existing conditions investigation may focus on just one discrete area of a landscape, use only park and technical staff expertise, and use only the sources of site data available in park files.

In a limited investigation, the site survey may be performed from a less intimate vantage point (such as a motorized vehicle) and only discrete areas may be surveyed and documented on foot. A limited investigation may use existing USGS topographic information or a previous topographic survey rather than contract for a topographic survey on the ground or through photogrammetry. The findings are presented in an existing conditions plan, narrative text, and black and white photographs.

Analysis and Evaluation

Analysis and evaluation involves comparing the findings of historical research with the findings of the existing conditions investigation. The purpose of the comparison is twofold:



Figure 3. The Capitol Reef CLR had a thorough level of investigation for both historical research and existing conditions investigation. Capitol Reef National Park. (NPS, c. 1930)

- to determine the landscape characteristics and associated features of a landscape from each significant historic period
- to understand how the landscape characteristics and associated features contribute to and convey the significance of the landscape (based on National Register criteria)

An analysis and evaluation shows how a landscape has changed over time. The analysis and evaluation may also include a statement of

significance for the landscape and identify landscape character areas and management zones. The findings of analysis and evaluation are documented in a narrative illustrated with graphics, such as plans, sketches, and photographs.

Exhaustive Analysis and Evaluation

An exhaustive analysis and evaluation uses all historic and contemporary site data from historical research and existing conditions investigation. It

may include park operational data, maintenance records, and detailed condition assessments of landscape characteristics and associated features. The analysis and evaluation may involve the collaboration of experts from other disciplines as well as representatives from the public. The gathered information can be used to deal with various issues, such as multiple periods of significance or areas of the landscape that may receive secondary treatments within the primary treatment plan. The findings are documented in a narrative illustrated with graphics, such as plans, sketches, and photographs.

Thorough Analysis and Evaluation

A thorough analysis and evaluation uses relevant findings from historical research and existing conditions investigation. It may involve only park and technical staff expertise and may deal with less complex management issues than an exhaustive analysis. The findings are documented in a narrative illustrated with graphics, such as plans, sketches, and photographs.

Limited Analysis and Evaluation

A limited analysis and evaluation uses findings from historical research and existing conditions investigation that are relevant to specific

management concerns. It involves only the resources and staff expertise readily available and deals with less complex management issues than a thorough analysis. The findings are documented in a narrative illustrated with graphics, such as plans, sketches, and photographs.

SUMMARY

The level of investigation is influenced by a number of factors. Ultimately, the level of historical research, existing conditions investigation, and analysis and evaluation, should match the level of decision making to be directed by a CLR. If the proposed level of intervention in a landscape is high, the level of investigation should be thorough or exhaustive. If funding and staffing issues limit the level of investigation for a CLR, the resultant level of decision making should be limited.

REFERENCE

National Park Service. 1997. *Cultural Resource Management Guideline, NPS 28*, no. 5. Washington, DC: USDI, NPS.

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to tribes.



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