

Cultural Resources GIS and Federal Emergency Management Agency: Documenting Cultural Resources in the Wake of a Disaster

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast region and created the single largest disaster for cultural resources that the United States has witnessed since the inception of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. Among other things, the National Historic Preservation Act created the National Register of Historic Places, our nation's catalog of important cultural resources. The Act also stipulates under Section 106 that any Federal undertaking which may adversely affect National Register eligible cultural resources be mitigated. For FEMA, the Katrina/Rita event is the largest Section 106 project ever.

The Cultural Resource GIS Facility was asked by FEMA to create a strategy for documenting all of the cultural resources which may be adversely affected by FEMA activities, for Section 106 compliance. Using a combination of GPS and GIS, the Cultural Resource GIS Facility created a methodology to identify and evaluate all of the affected properties in Orleans Parish and the surrounding parishes, and provided a means for historic preservation professionals to review and determine the historic integrity or significance of each property through GIS. The strategy was successfully implemented, and is ongoing in Louisiana.

