

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING AND PRESERVING HISTORIC OBJECTS

What would you do if you discovered an old object on your station that looked important (e.g., a duck stamp signed by “Ding” Darling or magnifying glass used by Rachel Carson)? Where do you preserve the key documents and objects that mark the opening of a new station or a station that was founded over 100 years ago? These materials are an integral part of a station’s history, and, therefore, the heritage of the Service—so are some of the unique and antiquated equipment used by the station. Saving important documents and objects housed in refuge or hatchery offices, regional offices, or other Service facilities, is an important responsibility that all Service personnel should consider part of their everyday job. In addition to holding historical objects in trust for the American public, preservation of the Service’s heritage can provide material for education about the Service’s mission and accomplishments in conserving the nation’s fish, wildlife and plant resources. It is paramount that our generation ensures that the remnants and reflections of our proud heritage are not lost to generations to come.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) is second only to the Smithsonian Institution in holding natural and cultural objects in trust for the American public. With over 117 million objects and documents, Interior’s collections run the gamut from art to zoology. As part of DOI, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has its own unique heritage and a prominent place in the Country’s conservation history to contribute to this collection. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide Service personnel with basic information on what and how to preserve significant Service documents and objects. This information is intended to be used only as a quick reference for questions about preservation in the Service. For more specific assistance, you can reference the documents cited below, visit the website (training.fws.gov/history/preservation.html), or contact your Regional Museum Property Coordinator listed below.

Deciding What to Save

The first thing to remember about preservation is that **‘If it is treated as junk, it becomes junk’**. Therefore, knowing what has historical significance and what does not is important. There are no hard and fast rules, but here are some general guidelines that can point you in the right direction.

If a document or object is associated with, or signed by a significant figure, it should be saved. A significant figure can be a President, Service Director, prominent conservation figure (such as Rachel Carson or Jay N. “Ding” Darling), or other person important to a station, cause, or program. Special attention should be given to documents, including hand-written notes or documents with annotations by a significant figure.

If a document or object is associated with a significant event, program, or activity (e.g., a station’s founding, the condor recovery program), it should be saved.

If a document or object is rare, extremely old, or otherwise considered valuable, it should be saved.

If an object or document represents a common activity that was used in the mission of the station or Service, representative samples should be saved for posterity. For instance, the cannon net from Swan Lake NWR, fish hatching jars, and banding pliers represent what we do, and how we have accomplished our day-to-day activities. Objects like these should be represented in Service museums.

If a document or photograph captures the history of the land prior to the development of a refuge or hatchery, it is important and should be saved.

Lastly, your instinct can help identify other items not covered by the previous examples. If you have a feeling that something is historic and of importance to the heritage of the Service, the document or object should be kept. Don't be afraid to trust your instincts!

Museum Property

The following categories of items already exist as Service museum property and provide further examples and definitions of the types of objects to consider preserving for the historical value:

Archaeological Collections: Archaeological artifacts usually resulting from systematic research on Service lands. Artifacts and records of the project must be curated by law and regulation.

Ethnographic Materials: Items associated with traditional culture and life ways of indigenous or ethnic groups, such as clothing, blankets, baskets.

Art: Paintings, drawings, prints, wildlife mounts, antiques, sculptures, and tapestries.

Documents Which are not Official Records as defined by the National Archives: Commissioned photographs, documents associated with an important event or person in Service history, audio and visual images.

Historical Objects Related to FWS: Early equipment or tools, historic fire arms, decoys, furniture, scale models, and boundary signs.

Botanical Collections: Herbariums.

Geological Collections: Soil samples, core samples and geophysical specimens that document land forms or in support of engineering studies.

Zoological Collections: Prepared biological specimens, wet specimens, type specimens, voucher specimens, wildlife mounts with scientific, historic, or long-term educational value.

Paleontological Collections: Vertebrate and invertebrate fossils found on Service lands.

Environmental Samples: Samples of water, soil, air; collected to document base line conditions for long term research, monitoring, or other analysis.

The following items are examples of objects that are **not** usually considered significant for preservation:

- Official records as defined by the National Archives.
- Most books (See 126 FW 1).
- Mass-produced posters or reprints.
- Working collections and samples consumed in analysis.
- Expendable teaching collections.
- Mounted zoological specimens **having no scientific, historic, or long term interpretive value.**
- Exhibit cases, dioramas, special lighting, or graphics used for display.
- Seized Law Enforcement property.

Tips for Preserving Historic Objects

Once you have determined an object or document is likely to be historically significant, the next step is to ensure that it will be preserved into the distant future. Accomplishing this can be simple - none of these actions are time consuming or difficult to accomplish. The first step is to document the object. Accountability affords the object some level of security! Next, use the following rules of thumb to assist you in preserving materials at your station.

The most important step in ensuring the long-term preservation of any object is to place it in a stable, controlled environment. Doing this will protect it from adverse conditions that would promote or accelerate deterioration. Perhaps the most important environmental factor to control is the relative humidity (RH).

We should think of objects as sponges. They absorb and release moisture from the air around them, which causes shrinkage and swelling. To avoid the constant movement from swelling and shrinking, the relative humidity in the atmosphere should be kept as stable as possible; with optimal levels at about 40% to 55% RH. Temperature should not fluctuate either, as it affects RH (the higher the temperature, the more moisture the air can hold). Temperature should be kept as close to 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit as possible.

The object, especially if it is a document or photograph, should be put into some sort of polyethylene sleeve or protective cabinet, archival box or polyethylene bag. This will help inhibit rapid fluctuation in RH and temperature, and keep out airborne soils, pollutants, and pests. It should be kept out of sunlight, and away from all light if possible. Light is very destructive, and damage is cumulative. In other words, a little light for a long period of time is as bad as a lot of light for a shorter period of time. Direct light also causes a rise in temperature. It has been proven that for every 18 degrees Fahrenheit increase in temperature, the molecular deterioration of an object doubles.

Hot attics and damp basements are probably the worst places to store objects. Think of your museum object as a person. It wants to be in a cool dry place at all times; free of

pests, molds, and airborne pollutants. More detailed tips on taking care of objects by specific material types can be found in CCI Notes and NPS Conserve-o-grams at the websites listed below. These are available at the World Wide Web addresses and from contact people listed below. If you want the item preserved off-site, contact your Regional Museum Property Coordinator or the NCTC Museum Curator for assistance.

If you decide to preserve the item off-site, you can request your item, as well as other items, to use for education and outreach purposes (i.e., public education programs, special functions at your refuge or hatchery, exhibitions, or other special occasions). Items that are maintained by NCTC can be borrowed for many different purposes to help you promote the mission of the Service at your local station or office. You should contact the NCTC Museum Curator for assistance in these matters.

Preservation Contacts

For questions about the significance of an object, how to preserve it, or how to transfer it if you do not want to keep it on site, you may call any of the following Regional Museum Property Coordinators (MPC):

NCTC Museum Curator	(304)876-7285
NCTC Service Historian	(304)876-7276
D.C Booth NHFH Curator	(605)642-7730
Service Archeologist	(202)358-2382

Museum Property Coordinators (MPC): All of these will have access to Service Museum Property manuals.

Region 1 MPC	(503)625-4377
Region 2 MPC	(505)248-7396
Region 3 MPC	(612)713-5439
Region 4 MPC	(413)253-8554
Region 6 MPC	(303)236-8103
Region 7 MPC	(907)786-3399

References

- DM411 Parts I through III, Interior Museum Property Management Departmental Manuals
- 126 FW 1 through 3: Policy, Responsibilities and Definitions; Documentation and Preservation Standards; and Planning, Inventory and Reports

Preservation Web Sites

- For DOI guidance: <http://museums.doi.gov/>
- For Service history and museum assistance: <http://history.fws.gov/>
- For NPS Conserve-o-grams: www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html
- For preservation tips (CCI Notes) from the Canadian Conservation Institute: www.preservation.gc.ca
- For archival supplies: <http://universityproducts.com>