



Foundation Document Overview

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park

Vermont



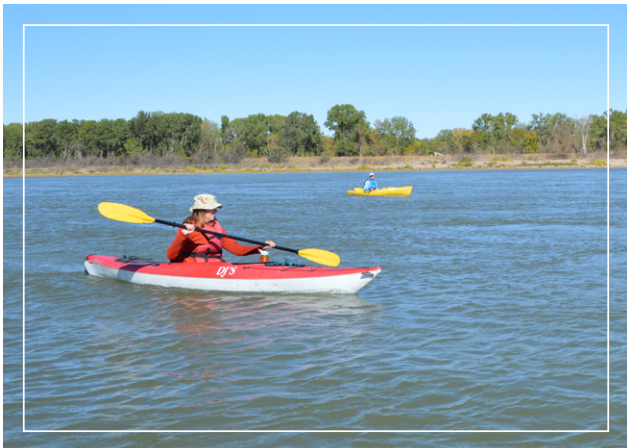
Contact Information

For more information about the *Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: mabi_superintendent@nps.gov or (802) 457-3368 or write to: Superintendent, 54 Elm Street, Woodstock, VT 05091

Purpose



The purpose of MARSH-BILLINGS-ROCKEFELLER NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to interpret the history and evolution of conservation stewardship in America; to preserve the Marsh-Billings Mansion and surrounding lands through active stewardship; and to recognize and interpret the contributions of George Perkins Marsh, Frederick and Julia Billings, Mary Billings French, and Laurance S. and Mary French Rockefeller.



Significance

Significance statements express why Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The park was the home of three generations of nationally significant conservationists. It is the birthplace and family home of the pioneering environmentalist George Perkins Marsh; the model gentleman's farm of the industrialist and conservationist Frederick Billings, his wife Julia, and their three daughters; and the seasonal home of the philanthropist and conservationist Laurance S. Rockefeller and his wife, Mary French Rockefeller.
- Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park grounds and historic forest illustrate the evolution of the U.S. conservation movement in New England from its mid-19th-century beginnings through the late 20th century.
- The park's Mount Tom Forest is the oldest continuously scientifically managed forest in the United States.
- Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park's diverse museum collection consists of objects owned by the families including household furnishings, fine art, decorative arts, clothing, and archives. The collection of landscape paintings featuring works associated with the Hudson River, Luminist, and Barbizon Schools, assembled by Frederick and Julia Billings and expanded by Laurance S. and Mary French Rockefeller, is particularly significant for its association with the role of artists in the development of the U.S. conservation movement and the early advocacy for the creation of the national park system.
- The property is an outstanding example of a model gentleman's farm of the country place era (1880–1930). The design of the landscape is the work of four important designers in landscape architecture (Robert Morris Copeland, Charles Platt, Martha Brooks Hutcheson, and Ellen Shipman) and includes a rare example of intact 19th-century carriage road system design.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Mansion and Residential Complex**
- **Mansion Grounds and Gardens**
- **Mount Tom Forest**
- **Carriage Roads and Trails**
- **Collections**
- **Scenic Views**
- **Community Connections**
- **Stewardship Institute**



Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Archeological Resources**
- **Other Contributing Structures**
- **Natural Resources and Protected Species**

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Commitment Across Generations.** Stewardship is a commitment to caring for home, land, and community that is passed from one generation to the next, requiring each new generation to assess and adopt practices of the unique social, economic, and ecological issues of their times.
- **Mindfulness and Spirituality.** Reflection, contemplation, and restoration of mental, physical, and spiritual well-being were important to the families who lived here and informed their work and care of the land, encouraging visitors today to examine their own personal connections and beliefs among health, well-being, and spirituality and how they live well in the places they call home.
- **Stewardship in Practice.** The practice and philosophy of caring for place and the resilience of land and people inspire an examination of the role each of us can play in caring for our homes, communities, and shared legacy of natural and cultural treasures in everyday actions.
- **Sight is a Faculty, Seeing is an Art.** These words by George Perkins Marsh encapsulate the importance of learning about landscapes and the people who live there through astute observation using multiple perspectives, including ecology, economics, and the arts—an approach to stewardship shared by Frederick Billings, his wife and daughters; by Laurance S. and Mary French Rockefeller; and by the collective diversity of visitors to the park. and his daughters, Laurance S. and Mary Rockefeller, and the collective diversity of visitors to the park.



Description

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont, was the first unit of the national park system to focus on the theme of conservation history and the changing nature of land stewardship in the United States. The park has an important place in the history of conservation stewardship. Its significance lies in both people and practices—several prominent American conservationists and more than a century of continuous, careful stewardship are evident in the park's landscape, buildings, and museum collections.

The park, a gift to the people of the United States from Laurance S. and Mary French Rockefeller, represents several generations of conservationist thought and practice. It was the grandfather of Mary French Rockefeller, Frederick Billings, who created the estate in the late 19th century. He established a progressive dairy farm and a professionally managed forest, both significant improvements in a region severely depleted by deforestation and overgrazing. In these efforts, Billings had been influenced by the writer, statesman, and conservationist George Perkins Marsh, who earlier had grown up on the property. In his landmark book, *Man and Nature*, first published in 1864, Marsh described the spreading ecological destruction of the U.S. countryside and argued for a new ethic of responsible stewardship.

Today, the park is a cultural landscape of great historic significance and integrity. It reflects the continuity of more than a century of careful management by Billings, his wife and daughters, and Mary French and Laurance S. Rockefeller. This landscape, with its forests, fields, and gardens, offers tangible evidence of

the historical contributions of George Perkins Marsh and Frederick Billings to the theory and practical application of land stewardship principles. The park is an excellent place to interpret their contributions, as well as the more recent contributions of Laurance S. Rockefeller to U.S. conservation and the national park system.

The park seeks to interpret the evolving concept of stewardship, defined broadly as the act of people taking care of the special places in their communities and beyond. The Stewardship Institute, a program of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, examines contemporary innovative practices in stewardship in collaboration with a wide network of public and nonprofit partners.

The park operates in partnership with The Woodstock Foundation, Inc., and the adjacent Billings Farm & Museum, a working dairy farm and a museum of agricultural and rural life. During Frederick Billings' lifetime, the farm and forest properties were operated as parts of a single estate, and today visitors have the unique opportunity of experiencing both landscapes side by side.

