



Listing New York's Canal System on the National Register of Historic Places



Opening of the Barge Canal, Waterford

The NYS Canal System is the most extensive canal system in North America and is nationally significant for its pivotal role in the growth and development of New York State, the states of the upper Midwest, and the nation. It not only contributed to the advancement of transportation, commerce, and engineering, but also played a key role in the emergence of an American national identity.

Listing New York's canal system in the National Register of Historic Places will further recognize its historical and architectural significance to the state and nation.

The New York State Canal System

The Erie Canal and a network of connecting waterways have been in continuous operation since 1825, longer than any other constructed transportation system on the continent. The system was enlarged several times during the 19th century. Channels, locks, bridges, and other structures that are now in use were built as part of the Barge Canal improvement between 1905 and 1918.

The system is owned and operated by the New York State Canal Corporation, a subsidiary of the New York State Thruway Authority.

Today, navigable portions of the system include:

- Erie Canal, which connects the Hudson River with Lake Erie, 338 miles to the west;
- Champlain Canal, which connects the tidal portion of the Hudson River with Lake Champlain, 63 miles to the north;
- Oswego Canal, which follows the Oswego River from the Erie Canal 23 miles north to Lake Ontario;
- Cayuga-Seneca Canal, which connects the Erie Canal to 92 miles of canalized rivers and lakes, including the Seneca River and Cayuga and Seneca Lakes.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, it is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. To be eligible for National Register listing, a property must meet the Criteria for Evaluation, which involves examining the property's age, integrity, and significance.

There are currently more than 80,000 properties listed in the National Register representing 1.4 million buildings, structures, sites, districts, and objects.

Some structures and segments of New York's 19th century canals are listed on the National Register. The entire network was determined eligible for listing in 1993 and Congress recognized the

national significance of New York's canal system in 2000 when it established Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. Yet there is no comprehensive National Register listing for the entire system in any of its distinct phases of development.

Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, in collaboration with the Heritage Documentation Program of the National Park Service, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, New York State Canal Corporation, and New York State Museum, is preparing a National Register Historic District nomination for the Barge Canal system to further recognize its significance to the state and nation.

Nomination for the Barge Canal

The period of significance for the nomination is 1905, when construction of New York's 20th century canal system began, through 1957, when the St. Lawrence Seaway opened, dramatically altering the system's role as a commercial waterway. The nomination includes 524 miles of navigational channels and canal structures on the four active branches of the NYS Canal System. The nomination is confined to structures and channels built and maintained by the State of New York for canal operations and will not include upland properties in public or private ownership. Because it is wholly owned by the State, the Barge Canal can be nominated as a single contiguous, albeit very large, historic district.

Comprehensive National Register listing of New York's 19th century canal resources is a bigger challenge. Some elements were obliterated by subsequent canal and highway construction. Many segments were formally abandoned by the State and transferred to private and municipal ownership after the Barge Canal went into operation.

Still, a remarkable number of early canal structures survive, largely intact. Discontinuous resources and many owners require that these significant resources be addressed through a more complex Multiple Property nomination. Work done for Historic District designation of the Barge Canal system could contribute to a Multiple Property Listing in the future, should additional funding and support be available.



The nomination process is anticipated to take 12 to 18 months.

The Nomination Process

Step 1: Research and Preparation

Preparing a National Register nomination for listing the NYS Barge Canal as a historic district requires extensive research and documentation. The nomination includes a written statement of historical significance, description of contributing elements, and an inventory and evaluation of features that contribute to the canal system's significance.

To complete this task, the Erie Canalway has engaged the services of the Heritage Documentation Program of the National Park Service. Interdisciplinary teams will collect and integrate existing information and resource inventories, fill data gaps,

and compile GIS data of cultural resources and heritage documentation to serve as the basis for National Register Listing.

Step 2: State Review

Nominations are first reviewed at the state level by the State Historic Preservation Office and New York's National Register Review Board.

Step 3: National Review

Complete nominations, with certifying recommendations, are submitted by the state to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. for final review and listing by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places.

Benefits

Listing in the National Register presents a number of benefits, including:

- **Recognition and Stature**- Listing further raises the stature and recognition of national significance of the NYS Canal System as a direct and continuously operating descendent of DeWitt Clinton's Erie Canal – the waterway that opened a continent.
- **Comprehensive Data Collection**- The nomination process provides a structure to collect and integrate existing information about the canal system that is currently in numerous locations and formats.
- **Economic Opportunities**- Listing provides opportunities for specific preservation incentives reserved only for properties listed in the National Register, such as federal preservation grants for planning and rehabilitation and federal investment tax credits.
- **Tourism and Marketing**- Listing increases the visibility and marketing potential of the canal as a national and international heritage tourism destination.

- **Resource Protection**- Listing encourages preservation of historic resources by documenting a property's historic significance. In this case, surveys and maps required for nomination will provide comprehensive information about historic resources of the canal system that need to be considered by property owners and managers, municipalities, state agencies, and others working on construction or development projects near the canal.

- **Environmental Review**- Listing helps to streamline environmental review and permitting requirements of the NYS Canal Corporation by clearly identifying historic resources.

- **Public information**- National Register documentation, available in a variety of print and electronic forms, is a tool for teachers, students, residents, visitors, and anyone else who is interested in New York's canal heritage and where they can find it on the ground.

Restrictions

Listing in the Historic Register does not restrict private property owners. From the federal perspective, a property owner can do whatever they want with their property as long as there are no federal monies attached to the project.

The property owner must comply with state and local regulations or preservation laws. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a branch of

the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is the state agency that oversees historic preservation efforts in New York.

For more information:

National Register of Historic Places Fundamentals, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/index.htm>

Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, www.eriecanalway.org