

Collaboration Results in New Mount Taylor State Register Listing

TCP Nomination Addresses Tribal & Landowner Concerns

June 5, 2009

The state Cultural Properties Review Committee permanently listed Mount Taylor as a Traditional Cultural Property in the State Register of Cultural Properties, the Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Cultural Affairs announced this afternoon.

In a unanimous vote, the committee said a revised nomination achieved a balance that protects the sacred qualities the mountain has held for the five nominating tribes for thousands of years, and addresses concerns raised by private landowners who felt their property rights might be curtailed by the TCP designation.

"I would like to thank the tribes for bringing the nomination forward, for sharing their closely held spiritual beliefs and making all of us more aware of the importance of Mount Taylor," said CPRC Chairman Alan "Mac" Watson. "In the same regard, the private property owners and others with rights to Mount Taylor who expressed their concerns deserve thanks for helping us achieve a balance that lets this committee help preserve the varied — and sometimes perceived as conflicting — interests of all the parties involved."

The committee took an innovative step by asking private property owners whose land is not excluded from the TCP to come forward within the next two weeks with a notarized legal description of their land. The information would be used to draw a semi-permanent map of the TCP within 30 days, which would modify existing maps of the TCP. The map would continue to be modified over time by HPD should additional private property be identified, and an ongoing list of private property owners made a part of the nomination. The provision reflects common preservation practices that allow the shape and scope of historic districts to be altered over time depending on the changing conditions of a district's contributing and non-contributing resources.

From March 2008 until the public comment period was closed on May 20, 2009, HPD and other state entities received approximately 2,000 letters and e-mails addressing the Mount Taylor nomination. By a 4-1 ratio, people expressed support for the nomination. At a May 15 public hearing held by the CPRC, 64 people registered to speak in favor of the nomination and 47 in opposition. The nomination listed today incorporates concerns raised during the hearing and in correspondence HPD has received during the last year and three months.

"This nomination has engendered strong emotions and thoughtful discussion among many New Mexicans as well as within the ranks of local, state and federal government staff members," said Cultural Affairs Secretary Stuart Ashman. "Certainly the value of Mt. Taylor as a Traditional Cultural Property has never been in question, but neither has been the importance of balancing the spiritual beliefs of our Indian tribes and the inherent rights of private property owners. I have great respect for all the groups and individuals who worked together to make this nomination successful."

The nomination follows a year of investigation, collaboration and consultation between the pueblos of Acoma, Laguna and Zuni, the Hopi Tribe and Navajo Nation, and more fully develops how different elements of the landscape hold greater significance to one tribe than to another. The revised nomination does not include private landholdings on the mountain, which in general are fenced off and no longer accessible to the tribes both physically and spiritually, and have ceased to hold significance for them. For this reason, private landholdings are "noncontributing" to the TCP and are excluded from the provisions of the State Register nomination.

"The State Register nomination that was approved today clearly establishes this landscape as a Traditional Cultural Property worthy of protection and preservation" said Katherine Slick, State Historic Preservation Officer and director of HPD. "At the same time, the tribes have established in their nomination that private landholdings on the mountain no longer contribute to the elements that give Mount Taylor its cultural significance, and that the private property does not need to be afforded the protections provided by a State Register listing."

The land area identified in the nomination is 434,767 acres with 89,938 acres of private lands within the boundary deemed noncontributing, which would establish a 344,729-acre TCP.

The TCP boundaries were decided by the location of six "guardian peaks," which are the mesas of San Mateo, Jesus, la Jara, Horace, Chivato and Bibo and surround the mass of Mount Taylor. The boundaries roughly follow those of the Cibola National Forest Mount Taylor Ranger District, an area determined by the National Park Service to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and qualified for federal protection under the National Historic Preservation Act that address TCPs.

Different guardian peaks hold more significance for certain tribes, while others ascribe more value to the mountain as a whole. Acoma Pueblo, for example gives great importance to Mount Taylor's San Mateo Mesa from where their ancestors chose 35-foot ponderosa pine timbers to build the nearly 360-year-old San Esteban del Rey Mission, and carried them 30 miles, seeking to impart a spiritual quality to the mission whose construction resulted in the deaths of many of their people. The Hopi view the mountain as a community cultural site. They have demonstrated that 28 of their deities, 26 Hopi and 10 Tewa clans have close cultural connections to Mount Taylor, and that the shrines and archaeological sites on the mountain are the footprints of the ancestors.

"The nomination achieves the tribes' goal of finding common ground in their differing beliefs that includes their respective historic and cultural affiliation with the mountain," said Slick. "The survival of the mountain, which they see as a living, breathing spiritual being, is what is essential for their traditional and cultural practices to continue."

Within the TCP, there are 316,456 contributing resources, which include pilgrimage trails, shrines, more than 1,000 archaeological site, plants, animals, mineral gathering sites and view sheds. The contributing resources also include buildings, sites, structures and objects and are associated with camps, burial sites, agriculture, spirituality, recreation and culture, including petroglyphs and other works of art.

Land that is included in the TCP and the thousands of cultural resources that contribute to its spiritual quality, convey a relationship to traditional cultural practices or beliefs, and remain relevant to cultural and historical relationships that survive to this day. Land that was excluded from the listing was found to longer convey these qualities.

The tribe's statements of significance, individually and collectively, the nomination puts forth, demonstrate that the mountain and its surrounding mesas fulfill the federal requirements of a TCP, which is that it be rooted in history and important to maintaining cultural identity in the modern world.

State of New Mexico
Historic Preservation Division, Department of Cultural Affairs
407 Galisteo Street, Suite 236, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

