

106 SUCCESS STORY

Preservation of Historic Guest Ranch Provides Home for Scientific Research Estes Park, Colorado

“The restoration of McGraw Ranch is a great example of a national park working in concert with private entities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and History Colorado to support the rehabilitation of a significant historic resource to provide the park with facilities to support ongoing research of natural and cultural resources in the park. A win-win for all.”

— VAUGHN BAKER
Superintendent,
Rocky Mountain National Park



THE STORY

In 1884, Indian Head Ranch was established near Estes Park, Colorado. Initially 160 acres, the ranch was sold and expanded over the years until John and Irene McGraw purchased the thousand-acre property and renamed it in 1909. Even though unprofitable, Irene McGraw continued to run the cattle ranch after John died in 1917. In 1935, the family built cabins and operated it as a guest ranch until 1973, using “Ranching with Ease” as their motto. The guest ranch’s marketing received a boost when it was used for U.S. presidential candidate Alf Landon’s campaign headquarters in 1936. The property changed hands several times, until the National Park Service (NPS) acquired it in 1988. Located in Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), McGraw Ranch was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1998.

THE PROJECT

Landscape restoration across RMNP was part of the management plan when the NPS acquired McGraw Ranch. In 1994, RMNP initiated plans to demolish the ranch structures and restore the landscape for elk habitat.

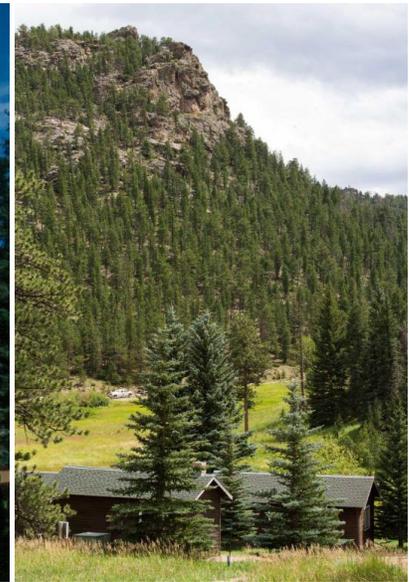
THE 106 PROCESS

The NPS was the federal agency responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Under Section 106, agencies also consult with Indian tribes, state and local governments, and organizations and individuals that have a determined interest in the historic property to seek agreement on measures to address the effects.

The proposed demolition of the ranch structures elicited local and national opposition. Both the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and the National Trust for Historic Preservation requested further study to identify alternatives to demolition. The RMNP superintendent suggested converting the ranch buildings to a

Photos: Above, McGraw scenic pond (photo courtesy National Trust); Right, Sterling Holdorf and Ben Sanchez square hew a log which replaced a rotted sill on the ice house; Volunteer groups came from all over the country to help the park crews restore the buildings at McGraw Ranch. (photos courtesy NPS)

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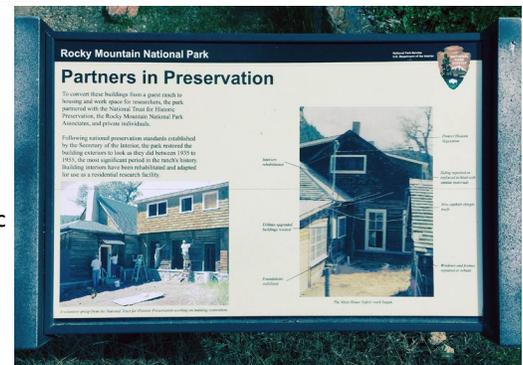
Photos: Above, the house after restoration (photo courtesy National Trust); Right, mountain view (photo courtesy NPS); Partners in Preservation park sign

research facility as a possible alternative, but funding the building rehabilitations became an issue. In December 1994, the NPS, ACHP, RMNP, and the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to document the structures, interpret the property for visitors, and demolish a later infill cabin. The MOA also included a stipulation that the historic structures would be preserved, provided funding for their rehabilitation and maintenance was raised within three years of the execution of the agreement. According to the MOA, if the funding targets were not met, RMNP would remove all structures, leave the building footprints, and make the area suitable for elk. Recognizing the value of the project, RMNP committed funds for the infrastructure improvements, and the private fund-raising effort was successful. Today, McGraw Ranch has become an important NPS research center, with overnight accommodations, a small lab, kitchen facilities, and work space for researchers. While not open to the public, the history of the ranch is interpreted for visitors.

THE SUCCESS

McGraw Ranch is a model for federal agency collaboration with non-federal partners in developing a variety of sources to finance the reuse of the structures and support research. Rocky Mountain National Park Associates and the National Trust committed to raise private donations and organized volunteer work crews to support the \$2 million project. Park gate fees contributed \$1.2 million for the project, and another \$350,000 came from Colorado's State Historical Fund.

Now RMNP's research program is the fifth largest in the NPS. The research projects extend beyond elk studies to include a butterfly inventory, rare plant studies, fire history, and glacier monitoring. Preserving and reusing the McGraw Ranch facilities supports RMNP's goal to bring science to the park so managers can make better decisions to protect the park's resources while saving an important part of Colorado's heritage.



Consulting Parties:

- National Park Service
- ACHP
- Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer
- Rocky Mountain National Park

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION
401 F Street NW, Suite 308, Washington DC 20001
Phone: 202-517-0200 • Fax: 202-517-6381 • achp@achp.gov • www.achp.gov



Preserving America's Heritage