

Irreplaceable America

NOMINATION GUIDELINES

Deadline: March 20, 2026



A special open call that underscores the vital importance of preserving heritage places that encompass the multifaceted history of the United States.

Taos Pueblo, New Mexico. Photo credit: WMF.



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Cover: Top row, from left to right: Bridge to Crafts Careers Program (C) Jonathan Clemente/Woodlawn Cemetery; Historic Route 66 (C) Photographersnature/Wikimedia Commons; Mission San Xavier del Bac, Arizona (C) Charles Albanese FAIA/World Monuments Fund. Middle row: Bears Ears National Monument , Utah (C) Josh Ewing; Buffalo Central Terminal, New York (C) Joe Casico; Alabama Civil Rights Sites (C) Charles Albanese FAIA/World Monuments Fund. Bottom row: Alabama Civil Rights Sites (C) James Barker; Mount Lebanon Shaker Village, New York (C) Amy Freitag; Taos Pueblo, New Mexico (C) Rick Romancito, *The Taos News*.

Irreplaceable America

In honor of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, World Monuments Fund (WMF) invites nominations for Irreplaceable America, a special open call that underscores the vital importance of preserving heritage places that encompass the multifaceted history of the United States.

World Monuments Fund will recognize ten sites that reflect the breadth of the American experience and demonstrate how heritage can shape the nation's future. The announcement of the program's selected sites will align with anniversary celebrations in July 2026.

Through this special initiative, WMF seeks to raise awareness, inspire action, and foster collaboration to ensure that the places central to America's story are preserved for future generations. Building on 60 years of leadership in heritage conservation, World Monuments Fund welcomes nominations from anyone—individuals and organizations alike—and offers selected sites a proven platform to attract

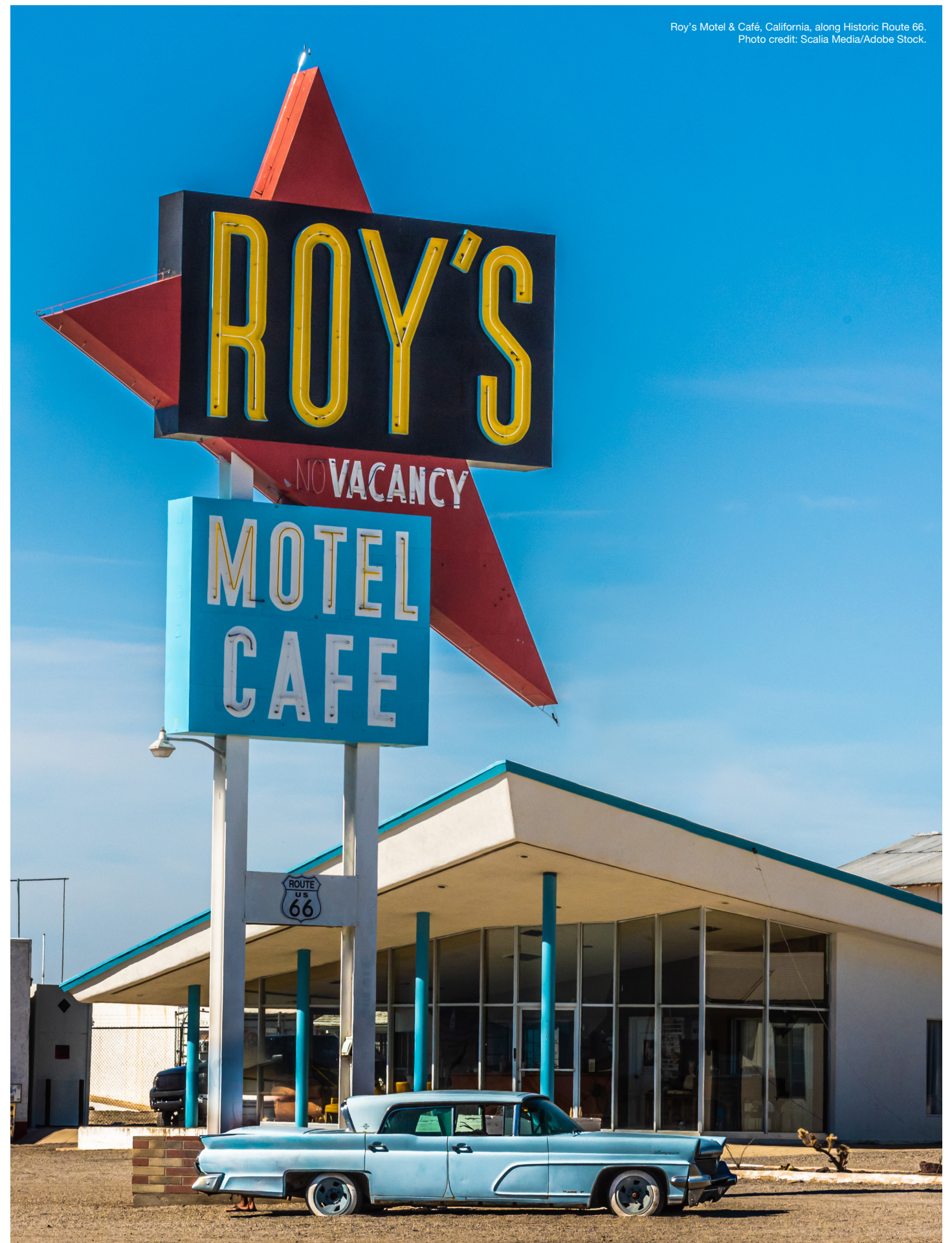
new resources, engage with WMF experts, and advance preservation projects to safeguard the country's unique heritage sites.

This U.S.-focused, nomination-based initiative will run in tandem with the 2027 edition of the World Monuments Watch, WMF's flagship global advocacy program that spotlights 25 sites every two years. Irreplaceable America is focused exclusively on heritage places in the United States and its territories and operates on its own timeline and selection process. However, nominations submitted to Irreplaceable America will automatically be considered for inclusion on the World Monuments Watch—no separate nomination form is required.

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What selected sites receive:

- National and local media coverage and publicity aligned with the 250th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence
- Spotlights in WMF's digital and printed materials
- One year of strategic consultation with WMF heritage experts
- Opportunities to develop preservation projects in partnership with WMF



Roy's Motel & Café, California, along Historic Route 66.
Photo credit: Scalia Media/Adobe Stock.



What We're Looking For

World Monuments Fund invites nominations for U.S. heritage sites that speak to the depth and significance of the country's story, reflecting the people, events, and ideas that have shaped the land and the communities that inhabit it over time. Nominations are free to submit and are open to all.

While the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence's adoption offers a moment to reflect on the nation's founding, WMF invites nominations from any time period, whether for sites whose histories stretch back millennia or for the modern landmarks that shape contemporary life.

Eligible places may include historic buildings, neighborhoods, sacred sites, civic landmarks, industrial and engineering sites, cultural landscapes, parks, or other spaces of shared memory and meaning. Sites may be monumental or modest, urban or rural. They may be publicly or privately held but should offer public access.

What matters most is their significance to their local community and their power to illuminate an essential chapter of the American experience.

WMF is especially interested in sites where preservation can respond to urgent challenges or catalyze new opportunities for communities: addressing environmental threats, promoting equity and participation, strengthening local economies, or sustaining living traditions.

How It Works

Nomination Process: February to March 2026

Nominations open in February 2026 through an online form. Anyone—whether a community group, preservation organization, or individual advocate—may submit a site by describing its significance to the nation’s history, the challenges it faces, and opportunities for preservation action that benefit local communities.

Review and Selection: Spring to Summer 2026

All submissions will be reviewed by WMF staff and external reviewers representing diverse perspectives on heritage and preservation. Final selections will be made by an expert panel composed of leading voices in U.S. history, heritage, and preservation. Ten sites will be recognized by WMF based on their cultural significance, the need for action, and the potential for preservation to bring positive community impact

Announcement: July 2026

The sites selected for Irreplaceable America will be announced in July 2026, ahead of the announcement of the global 2027 World Monuments Watch, as part of nationwide celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Implementation: 2026 Onward

Following the announcement, WMF will work with selected sites and their nominators to raise awareness and develop strategies for advocacy, conservation, community engagement, and fundraising. These collaborations will help advance preservation initiatives that strengthen connections between people and places across the United States.



Buffalo Central Terminal, New York. Photo credit: Joe Casico.

Examples of our Work Across the United States

World Monuments Fund has already made a difference to a range of American heritage places working with local partners.



Photo credit: Josh Ewing.

Bears Ears National Monument, Utah

Bears Ears National Monument was included on the 2020 Watch for the urgent threats facing this vast ancestral landscape, including looting, erosion, and limited support for Indigenous-led stewardship. WMF has since partnered with the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and relevant government bodies to assess cultural resources, stabilize vulnerable sites, develop Indigenous-informed planning, and promote respectful visitation and long-term protection.



Photo credit: Readytogo/AdobeStock.

Central Park, New York

WMF has partnered with the Central Park Conservancy to explore how to adapt paths and built infrastructure within this iconic Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux-designed landscape to address climate stress and the evolving needs of the park. This work aims to ensure that Central Park remains a resilient and inclusive public sanctuary for generations to come. Initiated through WMF's Cultivating Resilience program, the project includes a climate risk assessment to model current and future environmental threats and guide long-term planning for physical conservation.



Photo credit: James Barber.

Alabama Civil Rights Sites, Alabama

Nominated by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, these 12 sites include churches, hotels, and meeting spaces central to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The 2018 Watch supported the creation of a consortium to preserve and promote Alabama's Civil Rights heritage and led to Voices of Alabama, an oral history project capturing the sites' stories and their role in the struggle for freedom and equality.



Photo credit: Rick Romancito, The Taos News.

Taos Pueblo, New Mexico

Taos Pueblo was included on the 2010 Watch due to deterioration of its historic multi-story adobe dwellings, which anchor one of the oldest continuously inhabited communities in North America. Through the Watch, WMF worked with the Pueblo to record and pass down traditional building skills, train young apprentices, and use digital documentation to guide maintenance and sustain living traditions.



Photo credit: Photographersnature, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Historic Route 66

Historic Route 66 was included on the 2008 Watch to draw attention to threats facing America's iconic "Mother Road," from fractured pavement and abandoned architecture to the decline of small communities along its eight-state stretch. Since then, WMF has worked with partners to produce an economic-impact study, launch the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership, and pilot a virtual reality tool to strengthen preservation and public engagement.



Central Aguirre is (C) Jacqueline Hayden

Central Aguirre Historic District, Puerto Rico

The Central Aguirre Historic District was included on the 2020 Watch following severe damage from Hurricane Maria, which devastated the wooden-frame houses of this former company town on Puerto Rico's southern coast. Through the Watch, WMF has worked with local partners to stabilize historic buildings, train residents in traditional carpentry and wood construction, and build capacity for long-term recovery that links heritage preservation with community resilience.



Ellis Island, New York City. Photo Credit: Mark Weber/WMF

How Sites Are Selected

Once a nomination is submitted, it goes through three stages of evaluation:

1. ASSESSMENT BY WMF STAFF

Submissions are reviewed by WMF staff expertise in American heritage and related fields.

2. DESK REVIEW BY PRACTITIONERS

Nominations are paired with professionals and preservation leaders

3. FINAL SELECTION BY INDEPENDENT PANEL

An panel of experts in American heritage and related disciplines determines the final 10 sites.

Nominations are evaluated against four criteria. These criteria align with those of the global World Monuments Watch while reflecting the distinctive aims of the Irreplaceable America initiative to highlight the heritage of the United States, its territories, and its ancestral lands.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

How deeply does the place embody, reflect, or relate to the history and identity of a community, region, or the nation as a whole? Can its preservation foster greater understanding of the breadth of histories that have shaped America?

RELEVANCE TO URGENT ISSUES

Does the nomination address imminent threats or time-sensitive opportunities? Does it engage with contemporary challenges facing communities in the U.S., such as environmental risks, disinvestment, or the need to broaden historical representation?

POTENTIAL FOR COMMUNITY BENEFIT

How can preserving the site strengthen local life and civic pride? Is there potential to enhance social, cultural, economic, or environmental well-being through preservation?

FEASIBILITY OF IMPACT

Can WMF effectively support the nomination with its resources and expertise? Are there factors that would enable or constrain meaningful action at the site?

FAQ

1. What does WMF mean by “American” when describing eligible sites?

WMF accepts nominations from anywhere in the United States and its territories, and from any time period, ranging from prehistory to the present day. Nominated sites must be located within the United States or its territories. Sites located outside these areas—even if they have historical associations with the United States—are not eligible for this program and should apply to the global 2027 World Monuments Watch.

2. How does Irreplaceable America relate to the World Monuments Watch?

The ten sites selected for Irreplaceable America will be announced in July 2026. All nominations to Irreplaceable America will also qualify to compete on a global stage for inclusion on the 2027 World Monuments Watch, which will be announced in February 2027.



Florida Southern College (C) Steven Martin/Flickr



wmf.org/apply-irreplaceable-america

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About World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's most treasured places to enrich people's lives and build mutual understanding across cultures and communities. The organization is headquartered in New York City with offices and affiliates in Cambodia, China, France, India, Peru, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Since 1965, our global team of experts has preserved the world's diverse cultural heritage using the highest international standards at more than 700 sites in 112 countries.



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