

Suzanne Richards and David Hems

# Environmental Assessment

## A Tool of Cultural Resource Management



Horizontal boring machine in action at Motherwell Homestead.

The most effective means to protect heritage resources is through legislation. In the absence of specific legislation to protect cultural resources *in situ*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* can be used as a tool towards achieving this goal. This is possible due to two main concepts within the Act. The first is the definition of environmental effects in the Act, which includes a consideration of impacts to cultural heritage. Secondly, the Act requires that environmental effects be considered as early as possible within the planning stages of a project.

The recognition of these factors within the context of a piece of legislation gives added strength in the application of Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management policy. This is particularly true when applying section 2.3 of the policy "Consideration of Historic Value in Actions Affecting Cultural Resources" and section 3.2 "Planning" as they also now constitute a legal obligation under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.

The result, when the process is applied correctly, has led to project proposals using alternative technology for implementation, often with the added benefit of reducing project costs. As an example, a horizontal boring machine was used at Motherwell National Historic Site to install water utility lines rather than by trenching. The complex associations and relationships of the varied buried historic components of this site were left undisturbed since the sub-surface boring allowed for installation of the water-utility line underneath the cultural deposits.

The Act has also provided added impetus for incorporating cultural resource specialists into the design phase of projects, often contributing to change in project design to ensure the protection of cultural resources. Archaeological data was gathered specifically to supply information to the landscape architect for the Fort Walsh National Historic Site landscaping project. This was done to

ensure that the drainage plan which was to contribute to the protection of historic extant buildings did not impact on the buried 1875–83 foundations of the original Fort Walsh. A similar approach was incorporated into the St. Andrews Rectory landscaping projects, where archaeological and historical data were used to re-design the project to prevent or minimize impacts to resources from an 1843 farm occupation.

Of even greater importance, particularly in a period of fiscal restraint, is how environmental assessment can contribute to an integration of both natural and cultural resource considerations. By looking at cultural and natural resources in a comprehensive fashion, it is often easier to find simpler mitigation measures, that provide protection to all resources, rather than attempting to find separate solutions. At Motherwell National Historic Site, the use of a horizontal boring machine not only minimized impacts to buried cultural resources, but also reduced impacts to soils and vegetation. Similarly, the installation of an irrigation system at the Forks National Historic Site with a special plow allowed for the insertion of the hose to the required depth with minimal disturbances.

An additional benefit of cultural resource protection through the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* is the public accountability requirement. *The Federal Environmental Assessment Index*, available in public libraries and on the Internet, provides a convenient mechanism for the general public and/or stakeholders to audit Parks Canada's performance with respect to cultural resource protection at all phases of project work, from planning through to implementation.

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