



Dearfield Special Resource Study | December 2023

We are pleased to share that the National Park Service is conducting a special resource study of Dearfield in Weld County, Colorado. Established by entrepreneur Oliver Toussaint (OT) Jackson in 1910 and reaching its peak in the late 1910s to the early 1920s, Dearfield grew to become the largest African American homesteading settlement in the state and a symbol of Black prosperity and economic self-reliance in the American West. Authorized by Congress under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (PL 117-328), the study will evaluate Dearfield's potential for inclusion in the national park system.

Public input on the vision for Dearfield's preservation is an important component of this special resource study. Please consider sharing your thoughts and ideas about Dearfield during the public comment period between December 8, 2023, and February 23, 2024. Input is welcome and encouraged from any member of the public with an interest in Dearfield.

To provide opportunities to learn more about Dearfield and the study process, the National Park Service also intends to host one virtual and two in-person public meetings, one in Denver and the other in Greeley, in January.

All members of the public are invited to attend. More information on upcoming public meetings and how to submit comments is included in this newsletter packet, as well as on the project webpage (https://parkplanning.nps.gov/dearfield_srs).

After the comment period closes, the National Park Service will evaluate Dearfield using congressionally established criteria for national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for direct NPS management to determine whether the site meets the criteria for inclusion in the national park system. This analysis will be submitted to the Secretary of the Interior, who will then transmit findings and any recommendations to Congress for consideration. New units of the national park system can only be established by an act of Congress or presidential proclamation.

Your thoughts and ideas are important to us.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
The NPS Study Team

About the National Park Service

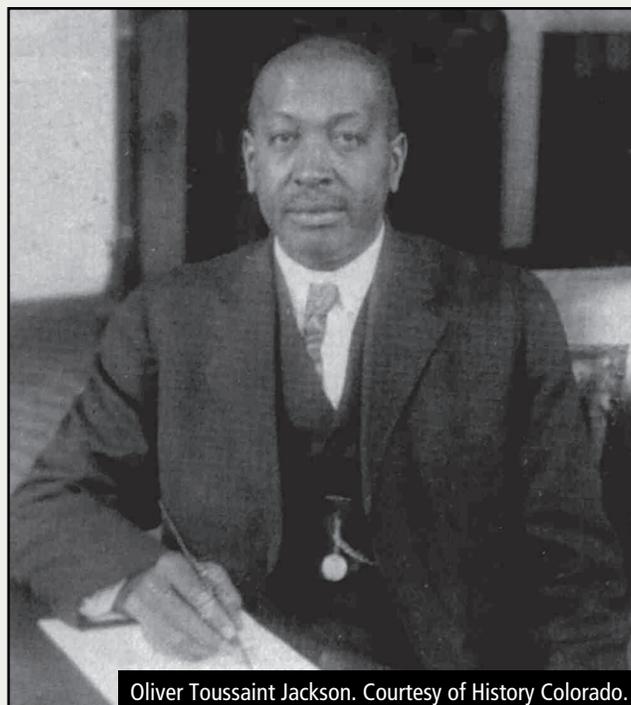
The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world. The National Park Service is a bureau within the Department of the Interior and manages more than 400 park units that comprise the national park system. Administration of park units occurs in many ways, from traditional units that are federally managed to nontraditional units that rely on partnerships and may have little, if any, federal landownership.

About the Study Area

Dearfield was the largest African American homesteading settlement in Colorado and one of the most important Black homesteading communities in the American West. Founded in 1910 by OT Jackson, what began as a few families living in tents and dugouts on partly purchased and partly homesteaded land in Weld County grew to become part of an extensive 19,000-acre agricultural colony of predominantly African American ranchers and farmers. Inspiration for Dearfield stemmed from the teachings of educator Booker T. Washington, an advocate of African American advancement through education, landownership, and entrepreneurship. Driven by the promise of economic self-sufficiency and social advancement, Dearfield followed a long history of Black homesteading extending from the end of the Civil War.

Dearfield's establishment is linked to a succession of homesteading legislation, including the Desert Land Act of 1877. The settlement grew at a time when a dryland farming movement was underway in the West, and the adoption of different farming techniques was transforming areas previously thought to be only useful for grazing into valuable agricultural lands. Dearfield's subsequent prosperity was connected to success in dryland farming, as well as a spike in crop prices associated with the United States's entry into World War I. Using dry farming techniques, claimants grew corn, oats, barley, alfalfa, hay, potatoes, Mexican beans, sugar beets, cantaloupes, and strawberries. They also raised cattle, horses, hogs, turkeys, geese, ducks, and chicken.

Agriculture was only one part of the Dearfield story. In addition to its farms, the colony boasted a school, dance hall, blacksmith shop, grocery, restaurant, several churches, and other establishments. Dearfield hosted an annual fair, held social dance events, and drew in visitors from urban areas such as Denver, transforming it into a cultural hub for rural and urban Black Americans. By 1918, a second, smaller town of Chapelton was established within the colony to the southeast of the Dearfield townsite, becoming an alternate commercial, social, and educational center. At its peak between 1919 and 1923, Dearfield was a thriving colony that may have had as many as 300 residents, its existence a beacon that inspired African Americans well beyond its boundary.



Oliver Toussaint Jackson. Courtesy of History Colorado.



Courtesy of the City of Greeley Museums.



Courtesy of the City of Greeley Museums.



Courtesy of the City of Greeley Museums.

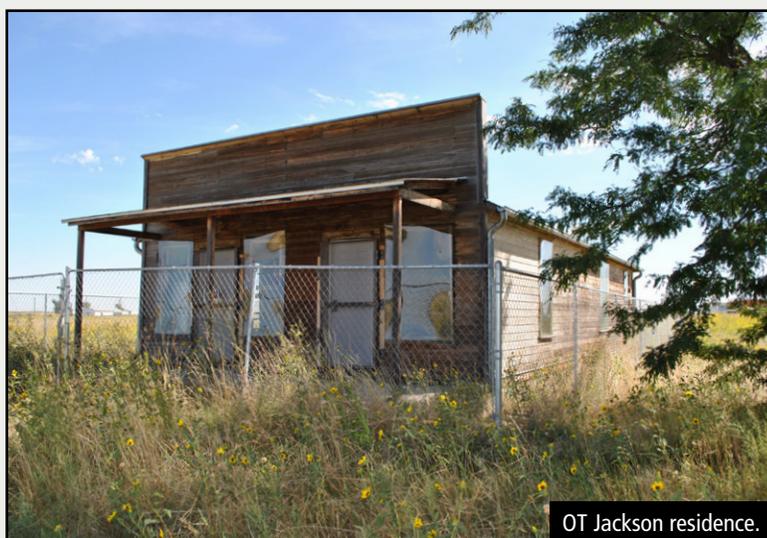
About the Study Area

Despite many successes, the decades after World War I were harsh. The relatively wet 1910s gave way to the drier 1920s and then the extreme drought of the 1930s. Reliant on natural rainfall and without water rights, Dearfield farmers were unable to sustain crops. The ensuing Dust Bowl and Great Depression ultimately led to the colony's downfall.

Today, two intact original buildings remain in the Dearfield townsite area—a filling station and OT Jackson's residence—as does the main street alignment, other partially intact or fallen historic buildings, and numerous archeological resources. In 1995, Dearfield was listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its representation of the African American colonization movement and association with leader and entrepreneur, OT Jackson. Much of the core townsite area is owned by the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center of Denver, which, along with other state/local entities, preservation organizations, and institutions, has been working to preserve Dearfield and its important resources and stories.



Filling station.



OT Jackson residence.

DEARFIELD, COLORADO

COLORADO ENTREPRENEUR AND MESSENGER FOR THREE GOVERNORS. MR. O.T. (OLIVER TOUSSAINT) JACKSON FILED A DESERT CLAIM TO CREATE THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN AGRICULTURAL COLONY OF DEARFIELD IN MAY 1910. DR. JOSEPH H.P. WESTBROOK, M.D., OF DENVER PROCLAIMED AT AN ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING IN 1909 THAT THE FIELDS "WILL BE VERY DEAR TO US," THUS GIVING THE COMMUNITY ITS NAME. THE FIRST SETTLERS MOVED HERE IN 1911, AND BY 1920 DEARFIELD HAD MORE THAN 200 RESIDENTS, TWO CHURCHES, A SCHOOL AND A RESTAURANT, AND PLANS TO BUILD A CANNING FACTORY AND COLLEGE. BY THE TIME RESIDENTS AND AGRICULTURAL EXPERTS SERIOUSLY NOTICED THE DIMINISHING RAINFALL, EASTERN WELD COUNTY WAS PART OF THE DUST BOWL AND DEARFIELD NEVER RECOVERED. IN 1946, DEARFIELD HAD A POPULATION OF ONE. TODAY DEARFIELD REMAINS A SYMBOL OF WESTERN PRIDE AND EMPOWERMENT FOR MANY AFRICAN-AMERICANS.

IN THAT SPIRIT THIS HISTORICAL MARKER HAS BEEN DONATED BY ANADARKO PETROLEUM CORP AND THE GREELEY MONUMENT WORKS SEPTEMBER 26, 2010.

Study Area Map

The Dearfield study area includes a section of the historic Dearfield townsite located in Weld County along Highway 34 between Greeley and Wiggins, Colorado. The study area comprises approximately 162 contiguous acres broken into 90 private property parcels and Weld County right-of-way. Aside from several post-Dearfield era buildings and a few modern residences, most of the study area lands are undeveloped.

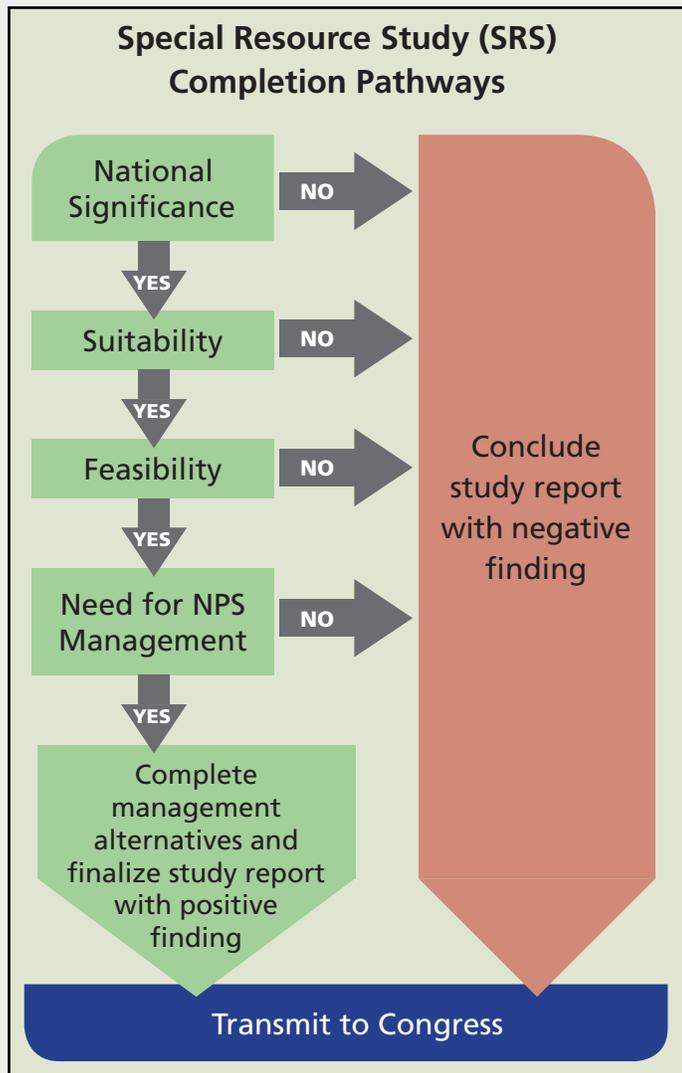
Many of the parcels in the core Dearfield townsite are owned by the Black American West Museum and Heritage Center of Denver, which works with several universities, preservation organizations, and other state and local entities to interpret the site for the public and preserve its two standing historic structures and archeological landscape.



Frequently Asked Questions

What Is a Special Resource Study?

A special resource study evaluates the eligibility of an area to be designated as a unit of the national park system. The National Park Service collects information about the quality of resources in the study area and engages in a successive evaluation of congressionally established eligibility criteria. If the resources meet the criteria, the National Park Service evaluates the potential for visitor enjoyment and efficient management, as well as analyzes the feasibility and appropriateness of different management options. The National Park Service provides its findings to the Secretary of the Interior, who then presents a recommendation to Congress. Regardless the study's outcome, new units of the national park system can only be established by an act of Congress or by presidential proclamation.



What Role Does Public Involvement Serve in a Special Resource Study?

The first step of a special resource study is gathering information about the study area through research and public input. Information received from the public helps the National Park Service better understand the following: what is most important and unique about the area; how much support exists for preservation, public use, and potential designation; and what the public envisions for the area's future, including management ideas, activities, or experiences. Public comments also inform whether there are any issues or concerns that should be considered during the study process.

How Will Dearfield Be Evaluated?

The 1998 National Parks Omnibus Management Act (54 United States Code 100507) established the process for identifying and authorizing studies of new national park units. Under the law, a study area must meet all four of the following criteria to be recommended as an addition to the national park system.

1. National significance determines if the site has nationally significant natural and/or cultural resources.
2. Suitability determines if the site represents a natural or cultural resource that is not already adequately represented in the national park system or by another land-managing entity.
3. Feasibility determines if the site can be effectively administered by the National Park Service to ensure long term protection of the resources and visitor appreciation.
4. Need for NPS management determines if the site requires direct NPS management that is clearly superior to other management approaches.

The National Park Service will evaluate the study area according to the criteria above for national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management. The criteria are analyzed in a linear fashion. If, at any point throughout the special resource study process, NPS staff determines that the site does not meet one of the criteria, the study will terminate and a document with a negative finding will be prepared for Congress.

What Are Some of the Possible Outcomes of the Study?

Over the last 20 years, approximately one in three completed congressionally authorized studies has resulted in a positive finding, whereby the study area meets all of the criteria. Many studies conclude that resources do not meet the required criteria or that existing management, technical or financial assistance, or local, state, or private initiatives are preferable to the establishment of a new national park unit. If the Dearfield special resource study results in a recommendation from the Secretary of the Interior that Dearfield warrants addition to the national park system, Congress may or may not act on or follow the recommendation. There is no timeframe for legislative action.

Does the National Park Service Support Dearfield's Designation as a Unit of the National Park System?

The National Park Service's goal is to take an objective look at Dearfield's history and resources and develop an unbiased study report for the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary may ultimately make a recommendation supporting or not supporting Dearfield's designation as a national park unit.

What Happens If Dearfield Is Designated as a Unit of the National Park System?

Developing a new unit of the national park system is a slow process. In the event Congress were to designate Dearfield as a national park site, NPS operations would likely be at a minimal level for some time. The National Park Service operates in a constrained fiscal environment and does not have the capacity to open fully staffed units immediately after designation. It may take many years for the National Park Service to develop visitor facilities and for an increase in visitation to occur.

If a Park Were Designated at Dearfield, Would the National Park Service Acquire the Land?

The Dearfield study area comprises approximately 162 contiguous acres broken into 90 privately owned parcels. If a park were to be created, Congress would legislate a boundary that may or may not conform to the study area. Land within that boundary could remain in private hands, or Congress could authorize the National Park Service to acquire property within a park boundary in the future. Generally, these properties may only be acquired by purchase from willing sellers, or through donation or exchange.



Grocery store remains.

Could Private Property Rights Be Affected by Being within a Boundary of a National Park Unit?

No. Private property owners retain rights to their property. The National Park Service does not regulate land uses or activities on private lands within a park boundary. Those lands—including any lands identified as having potential for acquisition by the National Park Service—are subject to no more restriction than private lands outside the boundary. Federal, state, and local laws and regulations that apply to private land would continue to apply.

When Will I Learn the Results of the Study?

The National Park Service will publicly release the study findings after the report has been transmitted to Congress. The National Park Service does not release preliminary findings or drafts of the study, nor does it indicate whether the study is likely to recommend inclusion in the national park system before the study's transmittal to Congress.

What Are Other Programs of Support Available to Dearfield Besides Designation as a National Park Unit?

The National Park Service supports and encourages a variety of management options for resources. Other management models where the National Park Service is not the direct landowner or manager and instead serves in a support or partnership role can be established. The National Park Service administers the National Historic Landmark Program, providing technical and financial assistance to designated national historic landmarks. Moreover, the NPS-led Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program supports locally led projects intended to engage future generations in the outdoors.

The National Park Service also manages several grant programs that support historic preservation and outdoor recreation. Dearfield has received NPS grant assistance through the African American Civil Rights Grant Program. These programs and others allow the National Park Service to support local managers of historic properties nationwide.

National Park Service affiliated areas preserve sites outside the national park system that are linked by importance and purpose to the larger system. These related areas are established by Congress or by administrative action of the Secretary of the Interior under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935; however, unlike national park system units, these sites are not federally owned or directly managed by the National Park Service. Affiliated areas can receive federal funding and technical assistance under some circumstances.



How To Participate

We encourage you to learn more about the special resource study process and share your thoughts and ideas during the open comment period from December 8, 2023, to February 23, 2024. Comments can be submitted in several ways:

- Online via the project webpage (preferred) at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/dearfield_srs. Click on the ‘Open for Comment’ menu tab to access the online comment portal.
- By mail. Send written comments to the following address:

National Park Service
Denver Service Center
Attn: Dearfield SRS / Charles Lawson
12795 West Alameda Pkwy
Denver, CO 80228

The National Park Service will hold two in-person public meetings and one virtual public meeting to explain the study process. Each meeting will follow the same format, beginning with a short presentation and concluding with discussion and an opportunity to ask questions. The virtual meeting will be recorded and remain available via the project webpage after the meeting has concluded. Any member of the public with an interest in Dearfield is invited to attend.

Denver Meeting

Tuesday, January 16, 5:00–7:00 PM MST

Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library
Cousins Gallery, Third Floor
2401 Welton Street
Denver, CO 80205

Greeley Meeting

Wednesday, January 17, 5:00–7:00 PM MST

Greeley History Museum
714 8th Street
Greeley, CO 80631

Virtual Meeting

Friday, January 19, 10:00 AM–12:00 PM MST

Join the meeting with the Microsoft Teams [link](#) or visit the project website (https://parkplanning.nps.gov/dearfield_srs) and select the “Meeting Notices” tab.

Study team contact: dearfield_study@nps.gov

Thank you for your interest in this study!

Your Input

Your input is important to us. In your comments, we are particularly interested to hear your thoughts and ideas about the following:

1. What is your vision for preserving Dearfield and how would you like to see the site managed?
2. What types of activities and experiences would you want to see as part of the site in the future?
3. What features, values, and stories do you believe are most important or unique at Dearfield and why?
4. Do you have any other ideas or concerns that the National Park Service should be aware of and address in the study process?
5. Do you support or oppose a potential national park unit designation for Dearfield? Why or why not?



Granary remains.