Landscape Assessment of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park

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The Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park was established in 1993 to preserve an important aspect of the history and evolution of the conservation movement in America. This 550-acre forest on the slopes of Mount Tom in southern Vermont is one of the oldest planned and managed woodlands in the U.S. With over 200 years of land stewardship by the families of George Perkins Marsh, Frederick Billings, and Mary and Laurance Rockefeller, this land exemplifies early development and continuous adaptation of forest conservation practices. A geographic information systems (GIS) database of historical and current environmental and cultural features was created based on historical surveys, aerial photography, GPS, maps, and field data. This GIS database provides a sound foundation for the continued management and stewardship of these lands.

A total of 39 GIS data layers have been developed which encompass both current and historical conditions within the park. Historical aerial photographs from 1939 to the present, high resolution IKONOS satellite data, and historical maps and surveys have also been incorporated within the database. Those data layers include:

- **Historical Data Layers**
  - Land Parcels
  - Buildings
  - Surface Water
  - Springs
  - Carriage Roads
  - Corner Boundaries
  - Boat House
  - Cox Monument
  - Stone Fences
  - Irrigation Pipe

- **Current Conditions Data Layers**
  - Property Boundary
  - Forest Stands
  - Plantations
  - Existing Buildings
  - Roads and Paths
  - Satellite Data
  - Structures
  - Topography
  - Land Use
  - Aerial Photographs

- **Natural forest stands dominate the park, comprising 63% of the land, followed by forest plantations (26%). The park forests are dominated by hemlock, mixed hardwoods, pines, and maples.**

The mansion and gardens comprise the architectural focus of the property, while forests dominate to the west toward Mount Tom. The landscape contains an array of natural and man-made features, including forests, plantations, fields, pastures, carriage roads, trails, and vistas.

Frederick Billings purchased 247 acres of land from Charles Marsh Jr. in 1869. The property increased in size throughout the next 30 years, as Billings purchased many surrounding farms and parcels. By 1900, the estate grew to over 1,400 acres of land.

Marsh homestead in background, circa 1860’s