

Note 24. Stewardship Land and Heritage Assets

Stewardship PP&E consists of items whose physical properties resemble those of general PP&E traditionally capitalized in financial statements. However, stewardship PP&E differs from general PP&E in that their values may be indeterminable or may have little meaning (for example, museum collections, monuments, assets acquired in the formation of the nation) or that allocating the cost of such assets to accounting periods that benefit from the ownership of such assets is meaningless. Stewardship PP&E includes stewardship land (land not acquired for or in connection with general PP&E) and heritage assets (for example, federal monuments and memorials and historically or culturally significant property). The majority of stewardship land was acquired by the government during the first century of the nation's existence.

Investments in stewardship land are reported on a non-financial basis. For example, measurement may be based on physical units, such as acres of land. National forests, parks, and historic sites are examples of stewardship land.

Additional detailed information concerning stewardship land, such as entity stewardship policies, physical units by major categories, and the condition of stewardship land, can be obtained from the financial statements of DOC, DOD, DOI, AOC, and USDA.

Heritage assets are government-owned assets that have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Historical or natural significance;
- Cultural, educational, or artistic importance; or
- Significant architectural characteristics.

Like stewardship land, heritage assets are also reported on a non-financial basis. Some stewardship land assets are also included in non-collectible heritage assets, and may be reported by the total units, such as the total number of National Parks reported by DOI. The public entrusts the government with these assets and holds it accountable for their preservation. Examples of heritage assets include the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights preserved by the National Archives. Also included are national monuments/structures such as the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the LOC. Many other sites such as battlefields, historic structures, and national historic landmarks are placed in this category, as well.

Heritage assets are classified into two categories: collection and non-collection. Collection type heritage assets include objects gathered and maintained for exhibition, for example, museum collections, art collections, and library collections. Non-collection type heritage assets include parks, memorials, monuments, and buildings. In some cases, heritage assets may serve two purposes: a heritage function and general government operations. In those cases, the heritage asset should be considered a multi-use heritage asset if the predominant use of the asset is in general government operations (e.g., the main Treasury building used as an office building). The cost of acquisition, improvement, reconstruction, or renovation of multi-use heritage assets should be capitalized as general PP&E and depreciated over its estimated useful life.

This discussion of the government's heritage assets is not exhaustive. Rather, it highlights significant heritage assets reported by federal entities. Please refer to the individual financial statements of the DOI, DOC, VA, DOT, State, DOD, USDA, as well as websites for the LOC (<https://loc.gov>), the Smithsonian Institution (<https://si.edu>), and the Architect of the Capitol (<https://aoc.gov>) for additional information on multi-use heritage assets, entity stewardship policies, and physical units by major categories.