

Caucasus Heritage Watch

Monitoring Report #8
July 2025

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CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

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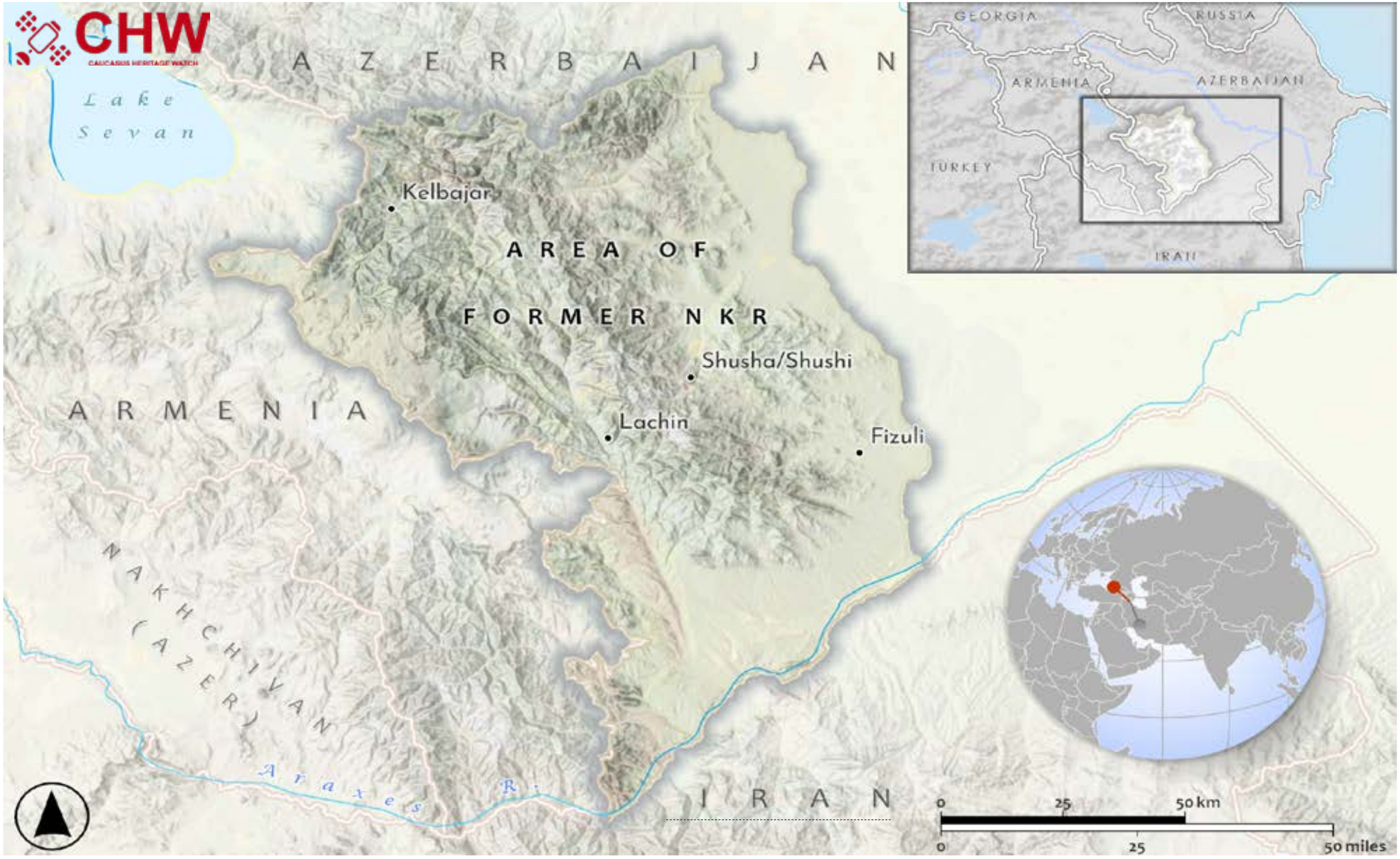
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WHERE WE **WORK**



- *Total Sites in Database: 2,105*
  Sites Currently Monitored: 518

- *Total Area of Region: approx. 12,100 km²*
  Area of Current Monitoring: approx. 7200 km²



FROM
CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

July 2025

Since the release of CHW's last Monitoring Report in June 2024, construction and development in the former Nagorno-Karabakh continue to threaten the region's cultural heritage. Extensive roadwork is linking new industrial, transportation, and infrastructural facilities even as large housing developments are clearing spaces for residential buildings. From hotels in Khojaly to a recreational complex in Shusha, from a water reservoir in Fuzuli to hydropower plants, resort and agro-industrial park in Lachin, construction is steadily reshaping a landscape replete with historic monuments. The high-profile opening ceremony of the Lachin International Airport in May 2025, attended by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, signals the refashioning of Karabakh into a transportation hub in the South Caucasus. The infrastructure upgrade encompasses 45 highways spanning a total distance of 3,382km. Meanwhile, large parts of Kankendi (former Stepanakert), including its historic districts, have been bulldozed. As heavy machinery terraforms the mountainous landscape to make way for a new Karabakh – now emptied of its Armenian population – the need to monitor the region's cultural heritage is more critical than ever.

Most concerning is the significant spike in the number of threatened sites in our Spring 2025 monitoring. During this most recent round of analysis, we have recorded the largest number of new threats (n=7) in any mission since CHW began monitoring the region's cultural heritage.

In this report, we present the findings from two satellite monitoring missions conducted in fall 2024 and spring 2025, the latter of which represents our largest mission to date in terms of the number of sites under examination. Since its inception, CHW has steadily expanded its inventory of cultural heritage under satellite surveillance by precisely geolocating sites on public inventories using Soviet topographic maps, archival and modern satellite imagery, and other visual sources. In the years immediately following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, our earliest monitoring missions encompassed between 265 and 280 historic sites. This figure rose to 489 in spring 2024 (see Report #7), our first monitoring mission following the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh. In our spring 2025 mission, we expanded our monitoring inventory yet further to include 518 cultural heritage sites.

In general, over the past 12 months CHW has documented a decline in the number of serious impacts to the cultural heritage sites under surveillance. We have observed no new cases of outright destruction since spring 2024, when we documented six cases, including the razing of St. Hovhannes Mkrtich church (Kanach Zham) in Shusha/Shushi. At the same time, we continue to see the same low, but consistent, level of damage to heritage sites that we have recorded since summer 2021.

Most concerning is the significant spike in the number of threatened sites in our Spring 2025 monitoring. During this most recent round of analysis, we have recorded the largest number of new threats (n=7) in any mission since CHW began monitoring the region's cultural heritage. CHW uses the "threat" category to describe instances where earthmoving activity encroaches onto the immediate vicinity of a historic site, potentially foreshadowing future damage or destruction, or threatening the site's structural integrity. The "threat" category is intended to draw attention to historic sites at heightened risk before it is too late. The new cases of threat concentrate in the Lachin region (4 out of 7 cases), where development has been particularly intense. But the new threats also occur elsewhere where roadwork and rapid development are underway, for instance in Vangli/Vank and Shusha/Shushi. It is important to note that two heritage sites identified as threatened in this monitoring round are linked to the history of the region's Azerbaijani community. CHW deplores abuses of all cultural heritage, no matter what community finds meaning in them. Even as we gladly note the recent decline in incidents of destruction over the last year, it is important to emphasize that satellite monitoring can only detect large-scale earthmoving and structural damage, and cannot assess small-scale acts of vandalism and desecration, or destructive acts of any magnitude in building interiors.

The most significant political development affecting cultural heritage since our last report has been the intensification of peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In March 2025, both nations announced that they had reached a preliminary agreement on terms to normalize relations. Several key obstacles still impede final resolution, but reports suggest that Armenia has acceded to one of Azerbaijan's core demands: the mutual withdrawal, dismissal, or settlement of international legal claims between the parties. Most significantly, this would require that Armenia abandon the legal claims that it has presented at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the case Armenia v. Azerbaijan.

Armenia v. Azerbaijan represents an important, legally innovative front in the effort to prevent attacks on cultural heritage. Grounded in the 1966 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the suit sought to require that Azerbaijan protect Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh and prosecute abuses under the convention's protection of equal participation in cultural activities. The ICJ's 2021 Provisional Measures had required that Azerbaijan "take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts". While CHW's monitoring reports have since documented violations of this provisional order, the case nevertheless may have provided some deterrent against future cultural heritage destruction. Moreover, it established an important new global forum for investigating and adjudicating state-sponsored attacks on cultural heritage.

Even as the potential protections offered by the ICJ may ultimately recede, the threats facing Armenian cultural heritage in Karabakh will become more complex in the years ahead, as state-managed development projects not only alter the landscape but bring in an expanding resident population. As of May 2025, some 40-43,000 people have reportedly been relocated to various parts of Karabakh. Continuing preparations for resettlement may bring further bulldozing of Armenian villages, as occurred in early 2024 at the Armenian village of Dashalty/Karintak, as well as investment in the region's religious infrastructure through the building and restoration of mosques. At Dashalty/Karintak, a mosque was inaugurated "demonstrat[ing] the Azerbaijani state's commitment to preserving national and spiritual values and honoring its cultural and historical heritage." Such statements obscure more than they reveal; the state remains silent on the numerous cases of destruction and damage that CHW has documented since spring 2021 and refuses to acknowledge, much less live up to its obligation to protect and preserve the hundreds of historic Armenian churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and other sacred sites found across its newly gained territories.

The current conditions for preserving Armenian cultural heritage in Karabakh are not favorable. As development and resettlement accelerate while international legal oversight appears poised to diminish, CHW's monitoring work takes on heightened importance. Our continued production of rigorous satellite-based documentation will serve as a vital historical record, supporting future truth and reconciliation efforts both in potential legal proceedings and broader societal dialogue.

As the corpus of cultural heritage sites requiring satellite observation continues to grow, so too does the cost of keeping watch. Monitoring cultural heritage using commercial satellite imagery is extremely costly, and we are grateful to the institutional funders and individual donors who make our work possible. To respond effectively to this phase in the cultural heritage crisis in the former Nagorno-Karabakh, we need your help. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to CHW through Cornell University or the Aragats Foundation. As always, you can follow our activities on BlueSky @caucasushw.bsky.social, on Facebook, and our monitoring dashboard on our website.

Husik Ghulyan, Adam T. Smith, Lori Khatchadourian, and Ian Lindsay



OUR TEAM



LORI KHATCHADOURIAN

Associate Professor, Near Eastern Studies & Anthropology, Cornell University

Prof. Khatchadourian has been working in the South Caucasus since 1995, first in political development and since 2003 in archaeology. Her work has been supported by the NSF, NEH, and ACLS, among other granting organizations. She is the author of Imperial Matter.



IAN LINDSAY

Associate Professor, Anthropology Purdue University

Prof. Lindsay has been studying the history and prehistory of the South Caucasus since 2000, with support from the National Science Foundation and other agencies. His archaeological practice incorporates the use of GIS and terrestrial and aerial remote sensing techniques.



ADAM T. SMITH

Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences, Anthropology, Cornell University

Prof. Smith has been conducting archaeological research in the Caucasus since 1992. He is the co-founder of Project ArAGATS, the oldest international archaeological collaboration in the region. He is a former Guggenheim fellow and author of numerous works on the region.



HUSIK GHULYAN

Lead Researcher, CHW

Dr. Ghulyan is a Research Associate at the Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies. His current research studies the political geographies of modern & Soviet Armenia.



SALPI BOCCHIERIYAN

Monitoring Consultant, CHW

Ms. Bocchieriyan is an archaeologist at Death Valley National Park and has an MA in Archaeology from Cornell University with a thesis on mortuary practice in ancient Armenia. She has also worked in Greece, Turkey, and Romania.

OUR FUNDERS

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We are also deeply grateful to the individual donors and organizations that support CHW's work, including:

The Armenian General Benevolent Union
The Aragats Foundation
Cornell University
Purdue University

We are also supported by public donations to our efforts. You can join the public network supporting CHW by donating to us through The Aragats Foundation's CHW funding campaign. Click the link or scan the QR code at right to donate. If you are interested in exploring how you can help support our work, get in touch with us.

OUR PARTNERS

MONUMENT WATCH

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOGRAPHY, RA

RESEARCH ON ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE

CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

OUR **MISSION**

Caucasus Heritage Watch is a research initiative founded in 2020 to monitor and document endangered and damaged cultural heritage using high-resolution satellite imagery. We strive to reveal visual evidence regarding past and present cultural erasure using the latest technologies of earth observation. Our purpose is to encourage accountability, inform public policy, support truth and reconciliation, and remove cultural heritage from the front lines of regional conflicts.

OUR **GOALS**

- **Truth-telling**: Investigating and monitoring past and future damage to cultural heritage can contribute to the work of truth and reconciliation. In contexts of war and genocide, cultural aerospace can bear witness to the condition of cultural heritage sites. These facts provide proof to counter state denialism, falsification, and other abuses that place heritage sites at the center of political conflict. Social repair can only happen when societies come to terms with troubled pasts and difficult truths.

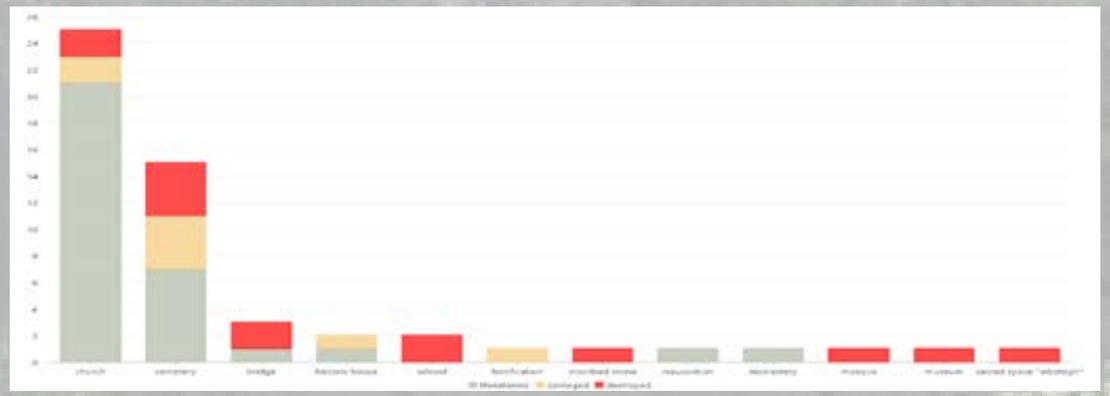
- **Deterrence**: There are few instruments for deterring the destruction of cultural heritage within a state's sovereign borders. Satellite-based monitoring has the potential to discourage or restrain state actors from intentional erasure both through the act of bearing witness, and by the dissemination of authoritative research to relevant national and international agencies and publics.

- **Accountability**: In contexts of conflict and genocide, abuses to cultural heritage are often clandestine, making it difficult to hold actors accountable. Satellite-based monitoring that reveals the destruction of cultural heritage can provide a forensic resource so that the public can hold responsible parties accountable for harms, including their own leaders.

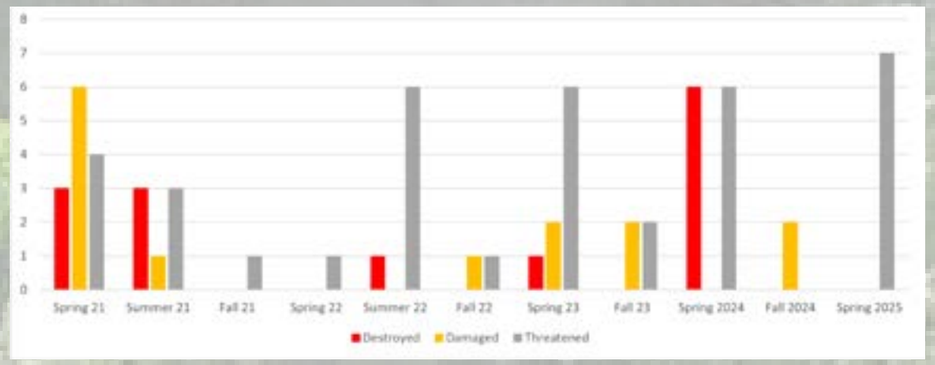
- **Innovation**: Caucasus Heritage Watch works to develop new techniques in the use of geospatial technologies for sustained, large-scale monitoring of cultural heritage at risk. As researchers, we seek to innovate new and transferrable methodologies that can amplify our practical impact and disseminate workflows that can empower partners in the region and assist researchers in other parts of the world.

CHW **DASHBOARD**

IMPACTS BY SITE TYPE



IMPACTS BY MISSION



CUMULATIVE IMPACTS OVER TIME



LIST OF **IMPACTED SITES**

Destroyed **Sites**

Site #	Name	Type	location (Az./Arm.)	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
HT.069-1	Mets T'agher Cemetery	cemetery	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Spring 2021	1	1
LN.004-0	Yusifbeyli Mosque	mosque	Yusifbeyli/Aygek	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.052-2	Ghazanchets'ots' Inscribed Stone	inscribed stone	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.342-0	Sghnakh Cemetery	cemetery	Siğnaq/Sghnakh	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.070-0	Makun Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Summer 2021	2	2
SH.241-1	Fine Arts Museum Sculpture Garden	museum	Shusha/Shushi	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.061-0	St. Sargis Church	church	Mokhrenes/Susanlyg	Summer 2022, Fall 2023	5,8	4,6
HT.072-0	Halevor Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Spring 2023	7	5
AN.038-0	Ghuze T'agh Cemetery	cemetery	near Garabulag/Aknaghbyur	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.022-0	Zar school	historic building	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.063-0	Chirag school	historic building	Chirag/Chragh	Spring 2024	10	7
MI.079-0	Kohak	sacred place	Chartar	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.053-0	S. Hovhannes Mkrtich/Kanach Zham	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.103-0	Ghazanchets'ots' Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2024	10	7

Damaged **Sites**

Site #	Name	Type	location (Az./Arm.)	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
SH.052-0	Ghazanchets'ots' S. Amenap'rkich	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.053-0	S. Hovhannes Mkrtich/Kanach Zham	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.054-0	Surb Meghrets'ots'	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1,8	1,6
SH.074-0	The Zhamharyan's house	historic building	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.093-0	Eastern Rampart	fortification	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.101-2	Northern Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.063-0	Geological Museum	museum	Shusha/Shushi	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.072-0	Halevor Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Fall 2022	6	4
LN.177-0	Cemetery	cemetery	near Hajisamly/Vazgenashen	Spring 2023, Fall 2023	7,8,12	5,6,8
MT.212-0	Cemetery	cemetery	near Gizil Kangarli/Nor Maragha	Spring 2023	7	5
SH.103-0	Ghazanchets'ots Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Fall 2023	8	6
SH.105-0	Yerevan Gates Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Fall 2023	8	6
LN.206-0	Tandzatap church	church	Garababa, Zangilan	Fall 2024	11	8
SH.005-0	Kanach Tala Cemetery	cemetery	Göytala/Kanach Tala	Fall 2024	11	8

Threatened **Sites**

Site #	Name	Type	location (Az./Arm.)	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
AN.226-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Madadkend/Madatashen	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.344-6	Vank'asar	church	Aghdam	Spring 2021	1	1
HT.074-0	Amenap'rkich Church	church	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Spring 2021	1	1
KR.022-0	Zar school	school	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.225-0	T'ukhnakal Mansion	historic building	Moshkhmhat	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.071-0	Tahis Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Summer 2021	2	2
MI.023-0	S. Astvatsatsin Church	church	Taghaverd/Taghavard	Summer 2021	2	2
KR.009-1	Mrchmants' Church	church	Marjimak/Mrchmants	Fall 2021	3	3
LN.055-1	Ughtamejk' Cemetery	cemetery	Eyvazli/Doghar	Spring 2022	4	4
HT.176-0	Mokhrenes Cemetery	cemetery	Mokhrenes/Susanlyg	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.016-0	Arakhish Church	church	Arikli/Arakhish	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.016-1	Arakhish Cemetery	cemetery	Arikli/Arakhish	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.017-0	Zorakhach' Church	church	Arikli/Arakhish	Summer 2022, Fall 2023	5,8	4,6
LN.187-0	Vakunis Church	church	Pichanis/Vakunis	Summer 2022	5	4
MT.161-0	S. Yeghishe of Mataghis	church	Sugovushan/Mataghis	Summer 2022	5	4
KR.008-0	The Church of Yeritsushen	church	Ghamishli/Eghegnut	Fall 2022	6	4
LN.156-0	St. Poghos-Petros Church	church	Shalva	Spring 2023	7	5
LN.176-0	Vazgenashen Church	church	Hajisamly/Vazgenashen	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.056-0	Amenap'rkich Church	church	Talish	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.213-0	Gavurgala Church	church	Boyahmadli/Nor Haykajur	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.452-0	Gyzyl Kangarli Historical Cemetery	cemetery	Gyzyl Kangarli/Nor Maragha	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.453-0	Mausoleum	mausoleum	near Gizil Kangarli/Nor Maragha	Spring 2023	7	5
AN.003-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Chanakhchi/Avetaranots	Fall 2023	8	6
HT.088-0	Kavak'avank' Church	church	Chiraguz/Irakus	Fall 2023	8	6
HT.039-0	Ptkat'aghi Vank'	church	Hunarli/Tsakuri	Spring 2024	10	7
HT.039-1	Ptkat'aghi Cemetery	cemetery	Hunarli/Tsakuri	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.018-0	S. Sargis	church	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.019-0	S. Grigor	church	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.240-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Dashalty/Karin Tak	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.257-0	K'arin Tak Cemetery	cemetery	Dashalty/Karin Tak	Spring 2024	10	7
MT.451-0	Papravend Historical Cemetery	cemetery	Papravend	Spring 2025	11	8
HT.096-0	Spitak Khach Monastery	monastery	Chinarly/Vank	Spring 2025	12	8
LN.107-0	St. Miriam Astvatsatsin	church	Hak/Minkend	Spring 2025	12	8
LN.114-0	Aghvesahaki Bridge	bridge	Hak/Minkend	Spring 2025	12	8
LN.115-0	Hak Bridge	bridge	Hak/Minkend	Spring 2025	12	8
LN.123-0	St. Stepanos Church	church	Hochants/Hochaz	Spring 2025	12	8
SH.097-0	Khan's Palace	historic building	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2025	12	8

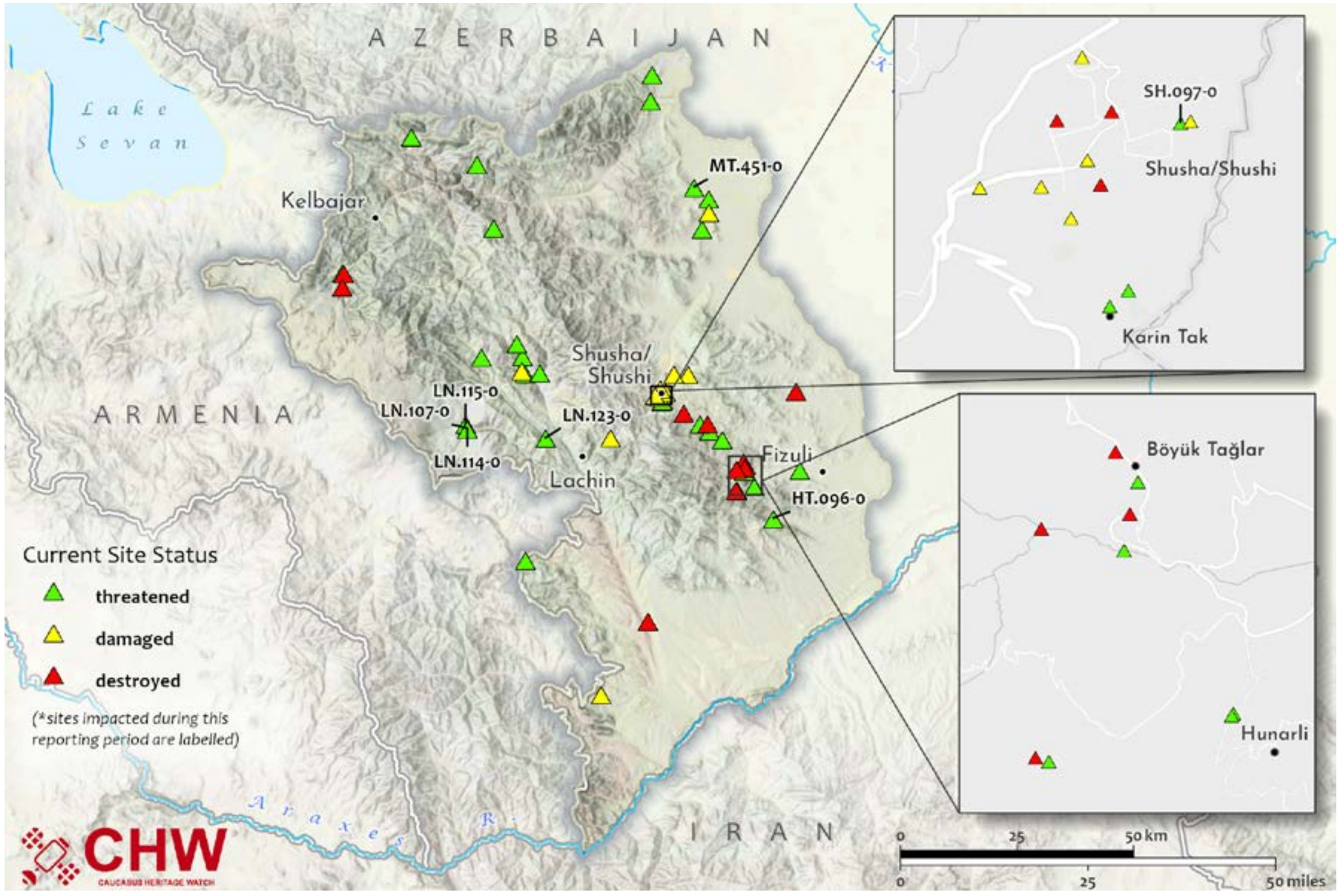
SUMMARY **ASSESSMENT**

An overall assessment of the current state of cultural heritage in Karabakh in July 2025 should lead with the good news. In two missions (Fall 2024 and Spring 2025) we have not recorded any new episodes of heritage destruction. This positive assessment does come with some caution as it was just in our last report (CHW Monitoring Report #7) that we documented an unparalleled spasm of destruction that led to the eradication of 6 heritage sites in just a matter of a few months in late 2023 and early 2024.

Nonetheless, CHW has observed continuing damage to heritage sites. The three impacted sites reported here include two historic Armenian cemeteries and a 19th century Armenian church. LN.177-0, a cemetery near Vazgenashen/Hajisamly, has been under sustained assault by bulldozers since spring 2023 when we first reported damage to the site. The roadwork in the area continues to eat away at the cemetery and without swift action there will soon be nothing left. SH.005-0 is similarly under attack by the apparatuses of road construction. The first cut into the cemetery was observed in 2023 and has continued to expand to where it has damaged approximately 16% of the burial ground.

The damage to LN.206-0, Tandzatap Church, is the most difficult to assess. Unlike other episodes of damage and destruction observed by CHW, we see little sign of wider transformations in the landscape: no road cuts or lot clearance are in evidence. As a result, we continue to observe the site in order to better understand the forces that led to the collapse of most of the southern wall between October 5, 2023, and April 30, 2024.

The most concerning finding for this report is the uptick in the number of threatened sites. Of note is not only the number of sites CHW deems at risk of impact from adjacent activities (n=7, the highest we have ever documented in a single mission), but also that the sites include both Armenian and Azerbaijani heritage. MT.451-0 (Papravend Historical Cemetery) and SH.097-0 (Khan's Palace) are both locations closely connected to the region's Azerbaijani community and the region's historic ties to Persia. That these sites are also at risk speaks to a wider callousness toward the region's past. Indeed, as development work pushes Karabakh at a breakneck pace into an imagined future, CHW remains deeply concerned about the region's past and the fragile remains of all of its historic communities.



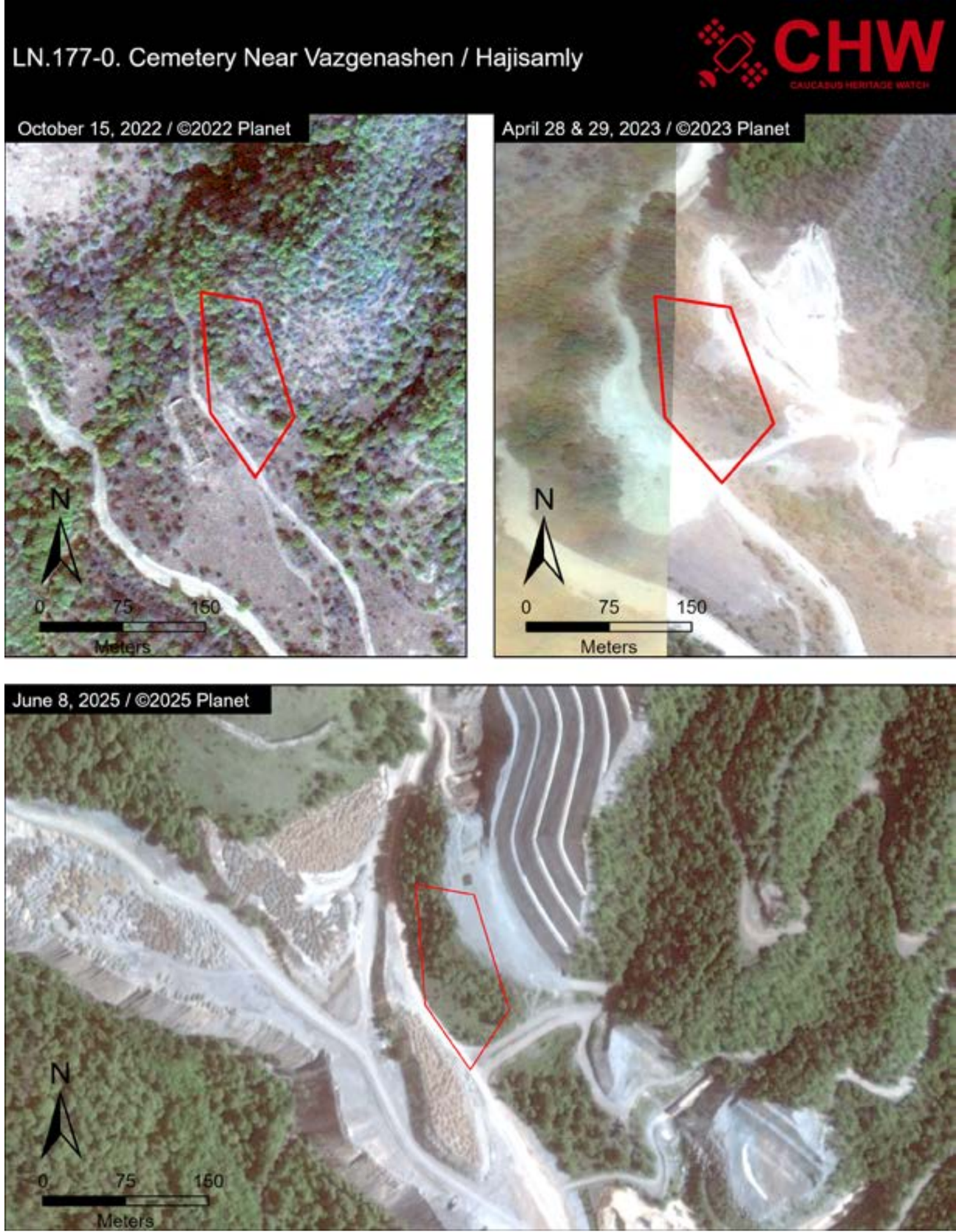
Damaged Heritage

LN.177-0	Cemetery near Vazgenashen / Hajisamly
Date	14th-16th centuries
Baseline Image	2022-10-15 / ©2022 Planet
Monitoring Images	2023-04-28/29 & 2025-06-08 / ©2023 & 2025 Planet
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	This 14th-16th century cemetery is reported to contain carved cross stones (khachkars), including one inscribed in Armenian dating to the 14th century. Our initial report on damage to the site in June 2023 noted encroachment into the territory of the cemetery on the southern and northeastern edges. Since that time, a significant area of the cemetery has been damaged by continued earth moving activity along the eastern margin (compare images at right). A 2011 plan (shown below) compiled by the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh shows the outline of the burial ground's preservation zone. Most of the khachkars in this cemetery are embedded in the ground, so it is not possible from satellite imagery to determine how many have been destroyed.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on May 18, 2023. We continue to follow the incursions into the territory of the cemetery by road construction.
Image Credit	Below left image courtesy of Zohrab Yrkoyan. Below center and right, images from Ministry of Culture of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, courtesy of Monument Watch.









Damaged Heritage

LN.206-0	Tandzatap Church
Location	Garababa/Zangilan
Date	19th century
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2024-04-30 / ©2024 MAXAR 2024-06-19 / Google Earth-Airbus 2025-06-12 / ©2025 Planet.
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	There is little information about the construction history of the Tandzatap church but Monument Watch assigns it to the second half of the 19th century based on stylistic features and historical analysis. Satellite imagery shows that between October 5, 2023, and April 30, 2024, the church sustained major damage. Most of the roof collapsed, as did the southern wall which featured an embedded stone engraved with a cross. Photographs taken in the mid-1990s indicate that the entryway in the southern wall was already damaged by that time (below left). Also, the stone facing around the windows was no longer present. The church remained in damaged but stable condition for decades until the collapse documented by CHW. The engraved cross (below, right), is to the left of the large hole where the door once stood.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert and accompanying story map on November 18, 2024.
Image Credit	Photographs courtesy of Research on Armenian Architecture.



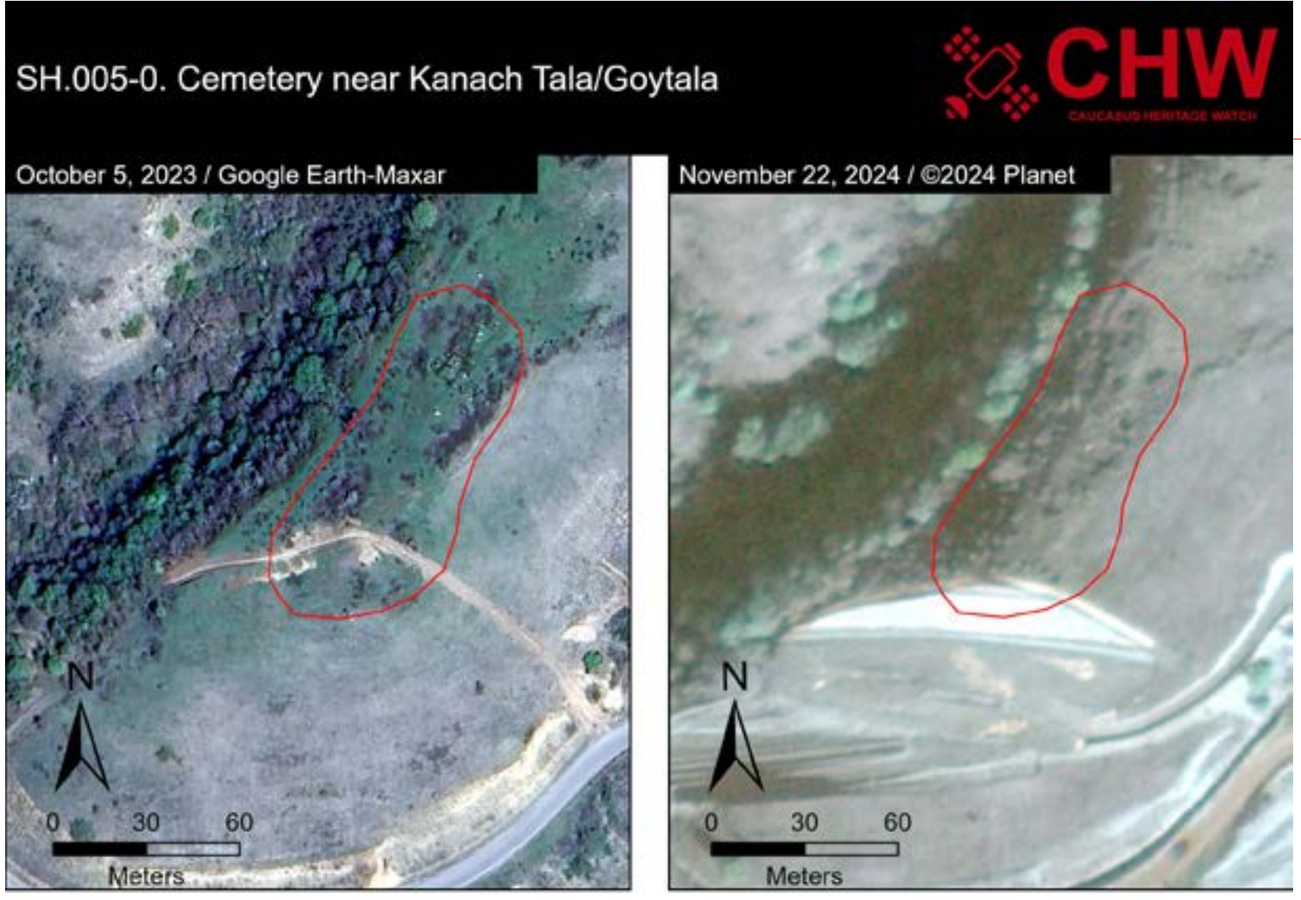




Damaged Heritage

SH.005-0	Cemetery near Kanach Tala/Goytala
Location	Kanach Tala/Goytala
Date	19th-20th centuries
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / ©2023 Planet
Monitoring Image	2024-11-22 / ©2024 Planet & 2025-05-10 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	There is very little information about this cemetery, dated to the 19th and 20th centuries. The extent of the cemetery is marked on a 1952 1:25,000 topographic map of the region (see below). The more recent tombs are clearly visible in modern satellite imagery (at right, top left) in the northern sector of the cemetery. The older tombs are reported to have been embedded in the ground surface and thus are not visible in satellite imagery. Impact to the cemetery is first visible in an October 5, 2023 image (at right, top left) that shows the initial earthwork for what would subsequently emerge in later imagery as a terrace intended to stabilize the slope above a new roadway. As of the most recent imagery (at right, bottom), the terrace construction has impacted approximately 16% of the recorded territory of the cemetery.
Map Credit	1:25K scale topographic map of the Soviet General Staff (Sheet J-38-10-B-b, 1952).







Threatened Heritage

HT.096-0	Spitak Khach Monastery
Location	Vank/Chinarly
Date	12th-18th centuries
Baseline Image	2024-10-25 / ©2024 Planet
Monitoring Image	2025-04-07 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	According to Monument Watch, the founding date of the monastery is unknown, but the oldest preserved inscription, located under the khachkar of the northern arch, is dated to 1333. Additional inscriptions testify to regular renovations of the structure over the centuries. A guest house was built just southeast of the monastery in 1735. A number of gravestones are found in the area surrounding the church with inscriptions dating to the 15th, 16th, and 18th centuries. Southwest of the church, a khachkar with an inscription dating to 1346 (below, right) is embedded in a pillar with a gable roof. Satellite imagery from April 2025 (at right, bottom) shows rectilinear disturbances (A) to the territory immediately north of Spitak Khach. It is unclear from the available imagery what these disturbances represent.
Alerts	None
Image Credit	Photos courtesy of Monument Watch.









Threatened Heritage

LN.107-0 & LN.114-0	St. Mariam Astvatsatsin & Aghvesahaki Bridge
Location	Hak/Minkend
Dates	St. Mariam Astvatsatsin: 15th-16th century; Aghvesahaki Bridge: likely 18th century.
Baseline Image	2024-05-01 / ©2024 Planet
Monitoring Image	2025-06-09 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	St. Mariam Astvatsatsin (A in the satellite imagery at right) is an unusual structure as it does not have the typical form of ecclesiastical architecture. It consists of two adjacent rooms built of local undressed stone held together with lime mortar. Entrances on the south wall suggest a possible early use as a caravanserai before the structure was consecrated for religious ceremonies. A 1419 inscription on the southern wall of the eastern room names the cells "Tiramayr Astvatsatsin" and "Surb [St.] Grigor". There are a number of tombstones and khachkars (cross stones) in the vicinity of the church including one dating to 1413. The adjacent single-span Aghvesahaki Bridge (B in the satellite imagery), located just south of the church, was built of local rough-hewn basalt and lime mortar. The facing of the arch was finished with two arcs of polished stone. The bridge has no construction record but Monument Watch suggests it dates to the 18th century based on architectural details. Satellite imagery from June 9, 2025 indicates a concerning new road construction project cutting just 33m from St. Mariam Astvatsatsin. This work has already been extensive enough to build up sizeable berms in the area.
Image Credit	Photos below by Zohrab Yrkoyan courtesy of Monument Watch.









Threatened Heritage

LN.115-0	Hak Bridge
Date	Early 20th century
Baseline Image	2024-06-03 / ©2024 Planet
Monitoring Images	2025-06-09 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	This asymmetric double-span bridge on the southern side of the village of Hak was built in the early 20th century according to Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA; Karapetyan 2009: 138). The eastern span is narrower than the western and the two arches differ in construction. The eastern arch was built with two rows of polished basalt identical to the arch of the nearby Aghvesahaki Bridge (LN.114-0, see above) dating to the 18th century. The western section of the bridge also has a double-rowed arc, but composed of unpolished stones. Satellite imagery from June 9, 2025 shows extensive work being conducted to widen the roadbeds both north and south of the bridge. It is unclear at present if this work will circumvent the historic bridge or lead to its ruin, as CHW has documented in the cases of other historic bridges in the region.
Image Credit	Image below courtesy of Monument Watch.
References Cited	Karapetyan, S. 2009. *The Bridges of Artsakh*. Yerevan: Research on Armenian Architecture.







Threatened Heritage

LN.123-0	St. Stepanos Church
Location	Hochants/Hochaz
Date	Late 17th century
Baseline Image	2024-10-29 / ©2024 Planet
Monitoring Images	2025-05-31 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	The construction date of the church is not known but Monument Watch assigns it to the second half of the 17th century based on its architectural features. It is a single-nave, vaulted church built of unworked stones and lime mortar. It has an altar in the apse to the east and the only entryway is in the southwest wall. A baptismal font was built into the northern wall as were several khachkars (cross stones). The church underwent a significant renovation in 2019. Satellite imagery from May 31, 2025 (at right, bottom) shows a concerning new road cut directly across from the historic church. The road terminates in a depot where a construction vehicle is visible.
Image Credit	Photo below left from late 1990s: S. Karapetyan 2001, courtesy of Monument Watch; photo below right following 2019 restoration: Zohrab Yrkoyan, courtesy of Monument Watch.
References Cited	Karapetyan, S. 2001. *Armenian Cultural Monuments in the Region of Karabakh*. Yerevan: Research on Armenian Architecture.









Threatened Heritage

MT.451-0	Papravend Historical Cemetery
Location	Papravend
Date	
Baseline Image	2023-11-03 / ©2023 Planet
Monitoring Images	2025-05-09 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	This cemetery appears on the list of heritage sites of the Republic of Azerbaijan (inventory No. 5750) as an archaeological monument dating to the medieval era. The cemetery consists of two components--a large field of tombs east of the north-south road (B on the map below) and a smaller area of burials to the west (A on the map below and within the red rectangle in the images at right). In CHW's Special Report #2, "Between the Wars", we concluded that the site had suffered major damage between 2011 and 2020, during the administration of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, when there was evidence that tombstones had been knocked over and at least one mausoleum in the eastern area destroyed. In CHW's current monitoring mission, we observe a new threat to the western extent of the cemetery. Earth moving equipment appears to have scraped the territory near the west side of the cemetery (see May 2025 image at right, bottom).
Image Credit	1:50K scale map of the Soviet General Staff (Sheet K-38-142-G, 1989).







Threatened Heritage

SH.097-0	Khan's Palace
Location	Shusha/Shushi
Date	18th century
Baseline Image	2023-11-03 / ©2023 Planet
Monitoring Images	2024-10-31 / ©2024 Planet & 2025-04-20 / ©2025 Planet
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	This two-story structure, today in ruins, was the residence of the Shusha Khans. Formerly, it consisted of two buildings with walls made of whitewashed stone. The entrance, located on the north side, was an arched gate with a surmounting inscription. Stone columns in the courtyard were decorated with wooden sculptures of snakes. The palace remained largely intact into the late Soviet era, as shown by KH-9 Hexagon reconnaissance imagery (not shown). Google Earth imagery suggests that a portion of the structure may have remained extant through 2004. But by August 2013 the entire structure had been reduced to a few standing segments of walls, part of a wider process of heritage mining during the administration of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic documented in CHW's Special Report #2 "Between the Wars". CHW is concerned by the extensive earthmoving and construction in the area surrounding the palace. It is possible that this work heralds an impending effort at restoring the structure. But for the moment, current evidence only indicates a worrying amount of potentially destabilizing activity in the area.
Image Credit	Image below from the site certificate created by the Ministry of Education and Science of the former Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and provided to CHW by Monument Watch.





WHAT WE **DO**

Monitoring

Our inventory of cultural heritage sites in the former Nagorno-Karabakh includes over 2000 sites spread across an area of roughly 12,000 square kilometers. At any particular moment, we have hundreds of discrete locations under satellite surveillance, including churches and mosques, cemeteries and fields of carved stones, bridges, and other cultural properties that tell the dynamic story of centuries of life in the region. The locations that we monitor change as conditions on the ground change. Our site inventory is the result of extensive consultations with our partners, who are fundamental to what we do.

Because the CHW team is composed of researchers with a long history of working in Armenia, thus far our partners are Yerevan-based. We welcome new partnerships with specialists in Azerbaijan who support our mission and wish to assist in this work.

At present, our monitoring is focused on the hundreds of Armenian historical monuments that now fall under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. As our historical investigation of cultural erasure in the Azerbaijani province of Nakhchivan clearly demonstrates, Armenian monuments are currently at the most risk. This assessment is bolstered by explicit threats against cultural heritage sites issued by Azerbaijani officials, from the President and Minister of Culture to the Chairman of the Union of Architects. Nevertheless, we also monitor numerous heritage sites tied to the historic presence of Azerbaijani communities in the region.

There are some kinds of threats to cultural heritage that CHW is not well-equipped to address. Satellite imagery provides evidence of damage or destruction, but it cannot detect acts of desecration or directly combat heritage appropriation. Since the 2020 ceasefire, representatives of Azerbaijan's government have embarked on an extensive campaign to claim Armenian heritage sites as either non-existent or as "Caucasian Albanian". Both represent fraudulent historical claims unsupported by international research. The vast majority of experts in the region's art, architecture, and archaeology have all rejected Azerbaijan's revisionist claims as patently false. Nevertheless, the Caucasian Albanian propaganda has sparked some iconoclastic efforts to erase Armenian imagery and inscriptions from buildings and monuments. We are aware of these threats and track them via social media, but as these subtle but significant forms of erasure are not visible from our satellite imagery, we will have to rely on partners to document such abuses.



Archival Research

CHW recognizes that the cultural heritage of the South Caucasus and neighboring Turkey has already been targets of multiple waves of damage and destruction in recent history. We have conducted forensic research projects to document aspects of past episodes of abuse to cultural heritage using a wide range of source materials. In September 2022, CHW released our first special report, detailing the results of our forensic investigation into the fate of Armenian cultural heritage sites in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan (Arm. Nakhichevan). That research revealed the complete destruction of 108 medieval and early modern Armenian monasteries, churches, and cemeteries between 1997 and 2011. This figure represents 98 percent of the Armenian cultural heritage sites we were able to locate and assess for the investigation. These findings provide, for the first time, conclusive forensic evidence that silent and systematic cultural erasure has been a feature of Azerbaijan's domestic ethnic policy.

The findings from this special investigation are available in two formats. Our Special Report, *Silent Erasure: A Satellite Investigation of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan* can be found in the Reports page of our website in both abridged (2.2 MB) and full (29 MB) versions. We have also produced an online platform that presents the visual evidence for each destroyed site in an interactive format called ArcGIS StoryMaps. The StoryMaps provide historical information about every site, photographs, geolocation, and a side-by-side comparison of satellite imagery demonstrating the monument as it stood, and its disappearance.

In April 2023, CHW released our second special report focused on the treatment of Azerbaijani heritage sites in Nagorno-Karabakh during the years of Armenian control between the first and second Nagorno-Karabakh wars. CHW's research revealed that the treatment of mosques, mausolea, and historic cemeteries under Armenian control varied widely and changed over time, reflecting the complexities of the disputed region's shifting political, geopolitical, and economic realities. Armenian authorities of NKR failed to prevent both widespread looting and several instances of targeted destruction. At the same time, the forensic evidence we presented showed no attempt to systematically erase the material traces of Azerbaijani history and cultural life.

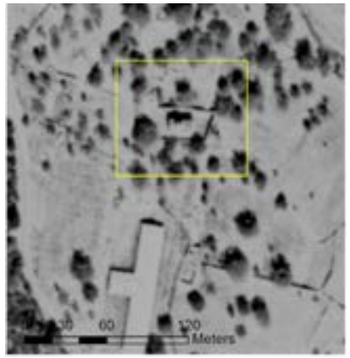
The findings from our second special investigation are also available in two formats. Our Special Report, *Between the Wars: A Satellite Investigation of the Treatment of Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage in the Unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1994-2020* can be found in the Reports page of our website in both abridged (15 MB) and full (68 MB) versions. We have also produced an ArcGIS StoryMap online platform that presents the visual evidence for our assessments of each site.

HOW WE **WORK**

Satellite Tasking

CHW documents changes in the built environment of cultural landscapes using high resolution satellite imagery. In order to monitor the condition of currently endangered sites, we task satellites to capture images throughout the year, providing a regularly updated stream of information on the physical integrity of cultural heritage in the region. We request imagery based on our analysis of potential risks. Each site is examined by comparing recent captures to prior imagery in the CHW database.

Evidence for damage or destruction is passed from individual monitors to the team for group evaluation. If full agreement is reached, the site is flagged as either destroyed, damaged, or threatened. Consultations are held with our partners as the team works toward a strategic response. When CHW and its partners conclude that public scrutiny might blunt further intentional or accidental damage to a site or other sites in the vicinity, we use social media to broadcast the threat and to help focus the attention of relevant organizations, analysts, journalists and authorities. A GIS-powered dashboard on our website provides a summary of our current understanding of damaged and destroyed sites, as well as those that may be at elevated risk due to changes on the landscape. And at regular intervals during the year, we produce summary reports that document in greater detail evidence for impacts on cultural heritage, including findings of damage and threats beyond those reported on social media.



Archival Analysis

Methodologically, our archival work entails in-depth research using a wide range of sources, including Soviet maps, scholarly publications in all of the regional languages, state lists, repositories of declassified Cold War-era satellite imagery (e.g. KH-9 Hexagon), more recent satellite platforms like GoogleEarth, as well as archival and current photography. These sources make it possible to create a more complete documentary record of the condition of sites in the region than is currently available.

Making Our Findings Public

Our goal is not to simply document heritage destruction but to deter it; it is therefore important for our observations to be broadly disseminated. We have chosen BlueSky (@caucasushw.bsky.social), X (@CaucasusHW) and Facebook as platforms for broadcasting impact notices and threat alerts. These are meant to complement our regular reports by providing more timely assessments. Before we post, our threat alerts and damage assessments go through a series of protocols that require careful thought, consultation, and evaluation. If a CHW monitor detects damage or an immediate potential threat, the full CHW team is notified. If the other team members verify the situation of concern, our next step is to consider what steps to take. A decision to push the issue to social media is taken only when CHW believes public scrutiny might ameliorate the situation and/or spur public bodies to action, including journalists, multinational organizations, and civil society activists. If concerns emerge that publicity might make a situation worse, we reserve the observation for the next report. If we determine that public attention is merited, we then consult with our partner stakeholders, experts in the archaeology and architecture of the region, to seek their input on both our monitoring observation and publication plan. We then prepare the impact imagery from our archive and compose the written assessment for our report and/or social media.

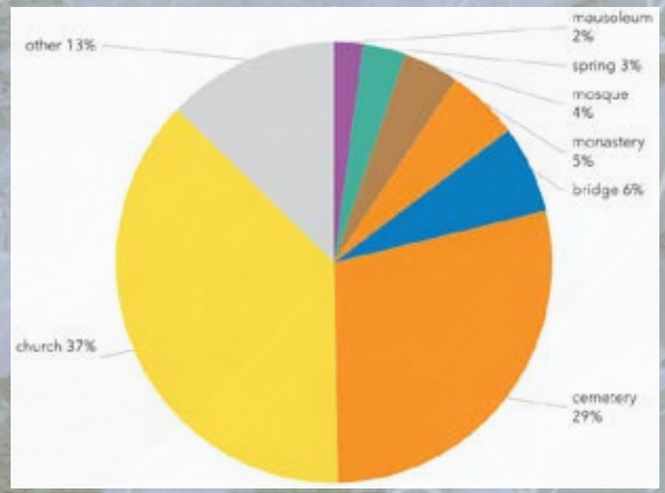
WHY WE **DO THIS**

There are a number of reasons why we founded CHW. None of them are about partisanship in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We value the heritage of all communities. But we deplore and condemn heritage erasure and other deliberate abuses of tangible heritage. We seek to not only prevent destruction where we can but also clearly and soberly place responsibility where it belongs.

It might be naive to suggest that we can forestall heritage erasure once initiated; but by documenting events in something close to real time, we change the traditional form of narrating cultural erasure. Forensic accounts of cultural erasure are typically elegies of loss, where accountability is clouded by distortions of the historical record by those in power. By doing the forensic work in real time, we are sounding an alarm rather than writing an elegy. And where possible, we are assigning culpability directly rather than diffusely. Where we are unsure, we will say so. Where the images clearly demonstrate, we will say so. Where we simply don't know, we will say so.

Past damage to cultural heritage does not justify or excuse current or future attacks. CHW does not condone assaults on cultural heritage past or present by either party in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. And we strongly reject the immoral logic of "what about-ism" that seeks to justify damage today by pointing to episodes of destruction in the past. Our goal is to break the cycle of endless recrimination by recognizing past destruction but also keeping a watchful eye on the present. Only through regular, publicly visible surveillance can we hope to clearly establish accountability and ultimately take the region's heritage off of the front lines of the conflict.

SITES CURRENTLY MONITORED BY TYPE



CHW issued a social media alert on November 18, 2024 on the damage to Tandzatap Church.

Hyperallergic ran a story about the concerning findings of CHW's Monitoring Report #7. The Organization for World Peace posted a story on heritage and the return of Azerbaijani refugees, citing CHW's research. Climate Home News used eyewitness reporting and CHW's observations to examine the impact of rapid development on heritage sites. ACLED released a report on the Destruction of Armenian Heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh that made extensive use of CHW's data.

International news media continue to utilize CHW's findings to bring attention to cultural heritage concerns in Karabakh, including a report from the NRC, RFE/RL, and Christianity Today.

In addition, CHW co-directors Lori Khatchadourian and Adam T. Smith participated in a Stage Talk on Bellingcat's Discord server that touched on the myriad technological, political, and ethical challenges surrounding satellite monitoring of heritage at risk.

In May 2025, co-director Ian Lindsay presented CHW's methods and findings in Athens, Greece, at the Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology (CAA) conference.

CHW continued our outreach to policymakers in order to help provide government agencies with up to date information on the status of at-risk cultural heritage in Azerbaijan. On September 19, 2024, Adam T. Smith appeared at a hearing of the US Congress's Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission focused on Human Rights in Azerbaijan Since the Fall of Nagorno-Karabakh. In spring 2025, Husik Ghulyan testified before the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom in a session on Religious Freedom Conditions in Azerbaijan.

As a public-facing heritage monitoring organization, we welcome media inquiries. Please contact us at chw@cornell.edu.

IMAGE CREDITS

Except where noted at right and in the text, images are from SkySat captures of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The CHW logo and website were designed by Garen Harboyan & CodOptix.

Page	Scene	Source
Cover	LN.206-0 Tandzatap church June 19, 2024.	Google-Earth-Airbus
3	Photo of Tandzatap church, south facade.	Credit: photo from the Department of Preservation of Monuments of the un-recognized NKR. Courtesy of Monument Watch.
5-6 & 15-16	Regional Maps.	©CHW 2025.
9-10	1:25,000 topographic map of 1955 Glavnoe Upravlennie Geodesii J-38-22-A-a.	Courtesy: Eastview Cartographic.
11-12	Aghvesahaki Bridge (see p. 25)	Credit: Zohrab Yrkoyan courtesy of Monument Watch.
7, 8, 13-14	Satellite Imagery.	SkySat. October 2021 ©Planet.
35-36	Satellite Imagery.	August 26, 2003 QuickBird 2 / Maxar- East-view Geospatial.
38	Satellite Imagery.	SkySat July 2021 ©Planet.

Land Acknowledgements:

Cornell University is located on the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:no' (the Cayuga Nation). The Gayogohó:no' are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign nations with a historic and contemporary presence on this land. The confederacy precedes the establishment of Cornell University, New York state and the United States of America. We acknowledge the painful history of Gayogohó:no' dispossession, and honor the ongoing connection of Gayogohó:no' people, past and present, to these lands and waters.

We acknowledge Purdue University is located on the traditional homelands of the Woodland People. We honor and appreciate these indigenous caretakers, which include the Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi), Lenape (Delaware), Myaamia (Miami), and Shawnee People.

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