

The Photographer's Guide to Capture NX™

Supplement One



by
Jason P. Odell, Ph.D.

The Photographer's Guide to Capture NX™ Supplement One

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Preface

When I sat down to write *The Photographer's Guide to Capture NX™*, my intention was to provide a functional guide that would supplement the Capture NX manual. Since the original eBook was released, I've had dozens of email suggestions for improvements and additions to the Guide. This supplement is intended to offer a few new bits of wisdom and includes some ideas that were omitted from the original book.

The goal of any photographer should be producing photographs that are pleasing to the photographer and his or her audience. The power of digital photography can be misleading. Many photographers, myself included, shot transparency film and had their processing done by an outside lab. If we wanted to change color palettes, we had to change emulsion types. For example, Fujichrome Velvia produced strongly saturated reds and very blocked-up shadows. If I were shooting portraits, I'd choose a different type of film. Before I switched to digital photography, I didn't really worry about "post-processing". I had a batch of slides, some were kept, others were discarded. Sure, I could enhance my images digitally by scanning the slides, but the primary image (the film) was the limiting factor to image quality.

Digital photography puts photographers in the position of having to be a jack of all trades. We can either allow our camera to process our images for us (JPEG workflow), or choose to become our own photo processing lab (RAW workflow). Most photographers I know understand that post-processing is a necessary component of quality digital images, but most of them don't want to spend hours in front of their computer trying to produce a quality product. Since when did a photographer also have to be a computer expert?

Hopefully, *The Photographer's Guide to Capture NX™* helps you with your processing workflow. When utilized properly, Capture NX™ can produce outstanding images in virtually no time at all.

-Jason P. Odell
Colorado Springs, Colorado 2007

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Improving Workflow with Settings Files

Creating and using settings presets is the single biggest time-saver I can think of when using Capture NX. Settings files can be applied to open files to build up the Edit List, or they can be applied to files in a batch operation from the File Browser window. To create a useful settings file, it is important to make sure that the order of the Edit Steps in the preset is correct.

The “Extras” folder that came with the full eBook contains several basic settings presets, including capture sharpening and Base Adjustments. In this section, we’ll take a closer look at how to build a workflow framework out of several settings files, starting with the ones I’ve provided.

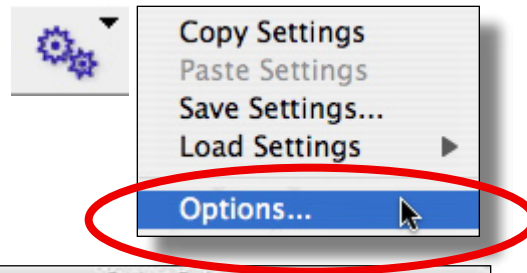
Open the file “badlands-landscape.nef” from the Sample Images folder that came with the book. If you purchased the downloadable eBook, you’ll need to download the images from the user’s area of my website, using the password information contained in the “readme” document that came with the book.

If you haven’t done so already, load the custom settings files into NX. From the Edit List, click the Batch Icon and choose “Options” from the pull-down menu. The Settings Options box opens.

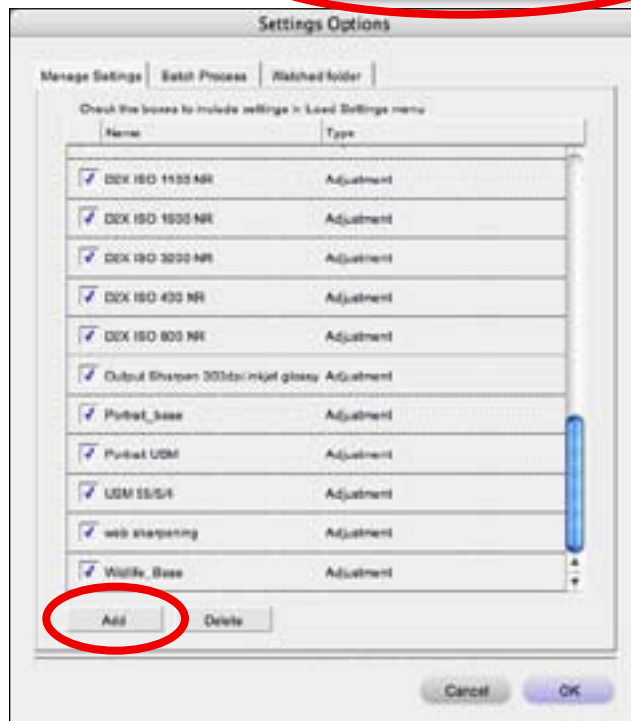
At the bottom of the Settings Options box, click “Add”. Then, navigate to the “Settings files” folder that came with the eBook, and select the Settings File(s) you wish to add, and click OK. If you are working from the eBook CD-ROM, you’ll need to copy the “Extras” folder to your computer first. Repeat the process for all the settings in the “Base_Adjustments”, “LCH_settings”, and “Capture_Sharpen” folders. The settings will be added to the list in the Settings Options dialog box. Checkmarks next to a settings file name mean that particular file will appear in the Batch contextual menu when you click “Load Settings”. Click OK to close the Settings Options Dialog box.

Loading Settings Presets

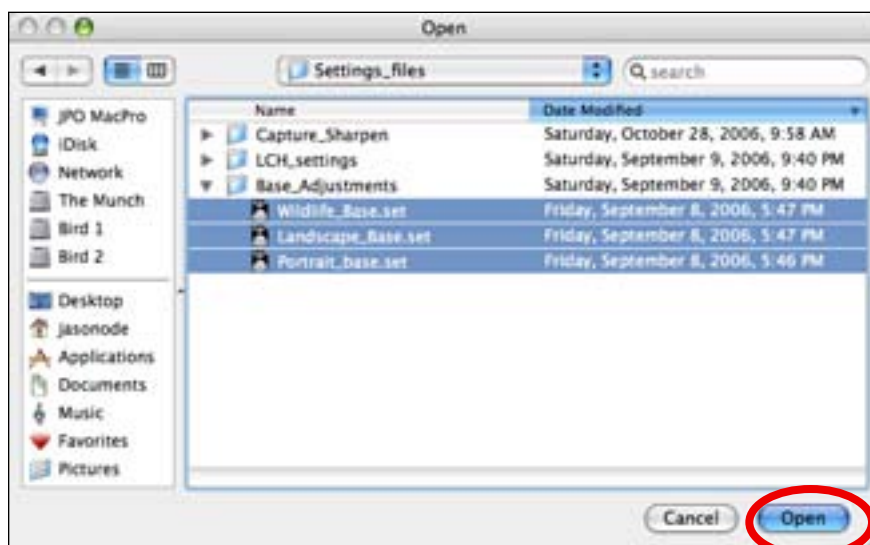
1. Click the Batch Icon from the Edit List and choose "Options".



2. Click "Add" from the Settings Options dialog box.



3. Choose the settings files you wish to add and click "Open". The names are added to the Settings Options list. Click OK when you are done.



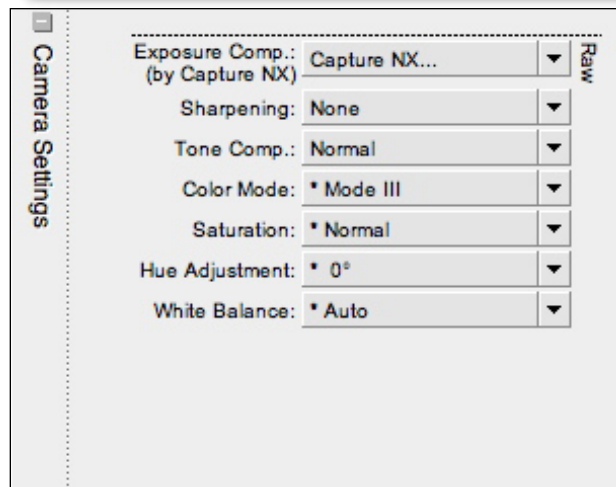
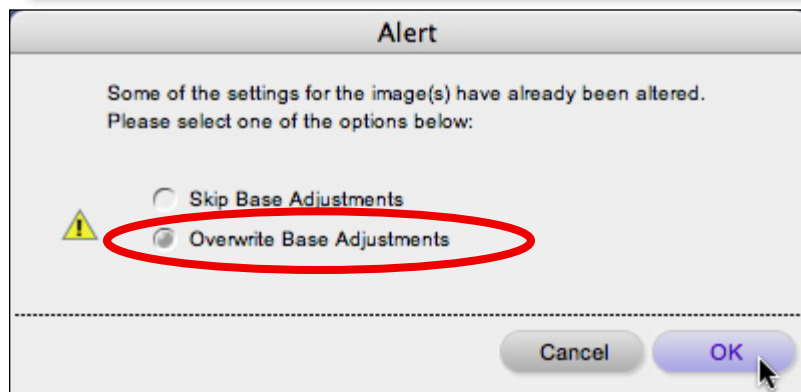
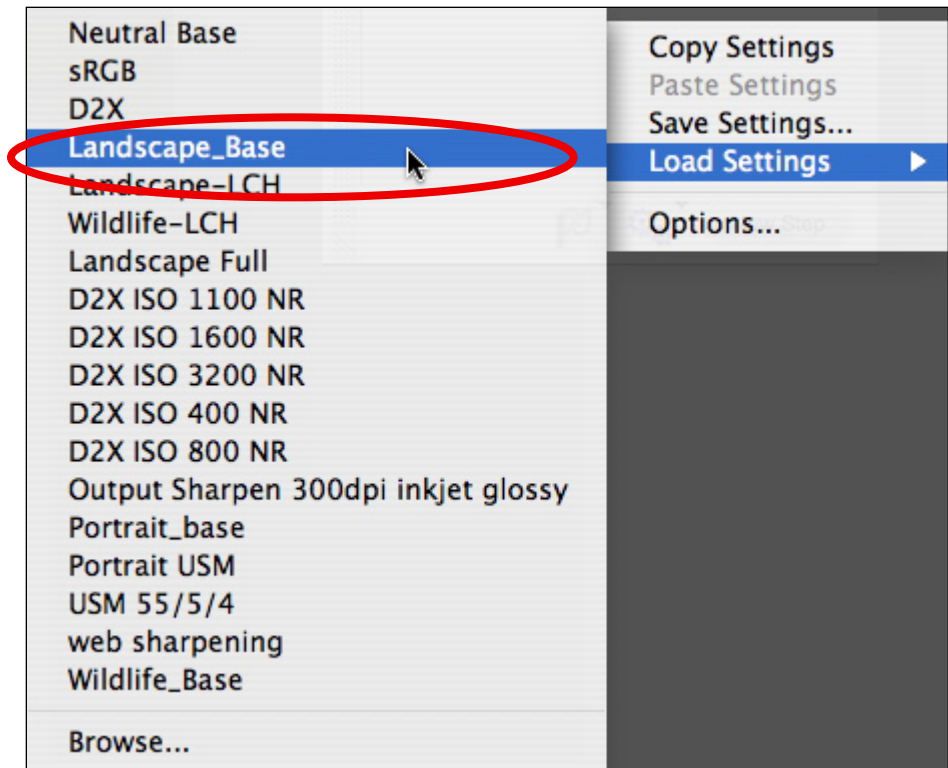
Applying Presets to an Image

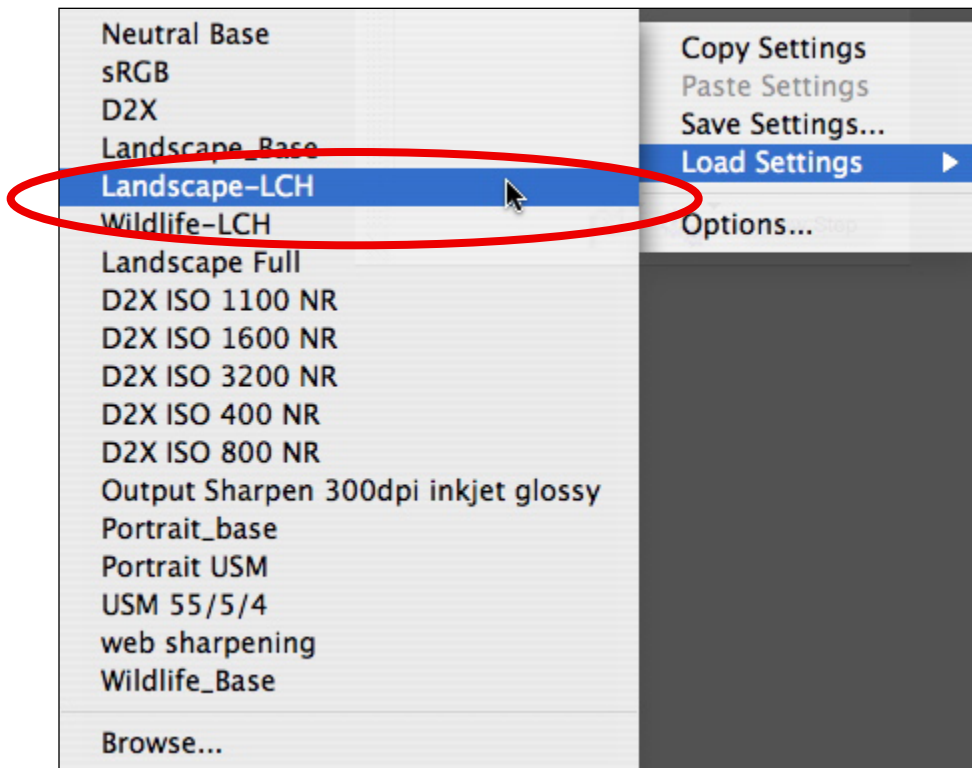
With the custom presets loaded, you're ready to work on the image. Since this is a landscape, we'll be using the landscape-specific presets. These settings files are based on the "Landscape Recipe" in the Guide.

1. Set the Base Adjustment defaults.
Click the Batch Icon in the Edit list and choose "Load Settings" to view the contextual menu. From the contextual list, select "Landscape-Base".

2. If the warning dialog box appears, click "Overwrite Base Adjustments", and click OK.

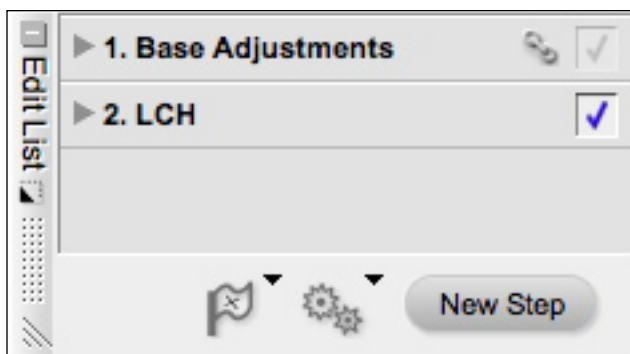
3. The Base Adjustments are now all applied to the image. Open the Camera Settings Tab to see what changed.





4. Next, apply global adjustments. Click Load Settings from the Batch tool in the Edit List, and choose “Landscape-LCH”. This preset gives a contrast boost and a saturation boost, similar to the “Velvia Settings” recipe. An LCH Editor Step should now be added to your Edit List.

At this point, you are free to add local adjustments if needed, and perform capture sharpening. It is a good idea to save your NEF once you’ve added the basic adjustments.

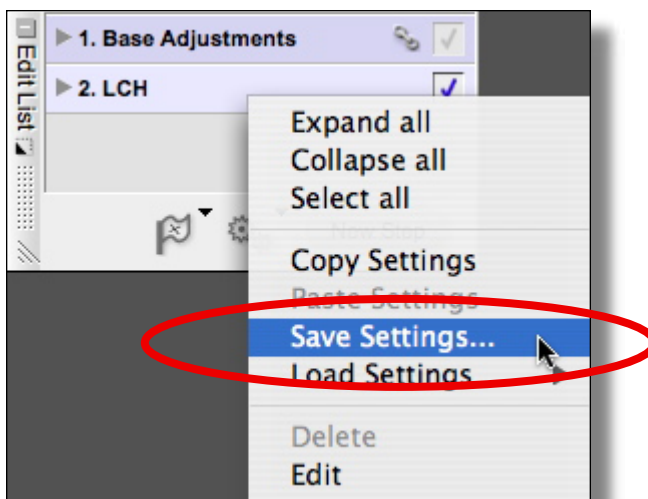
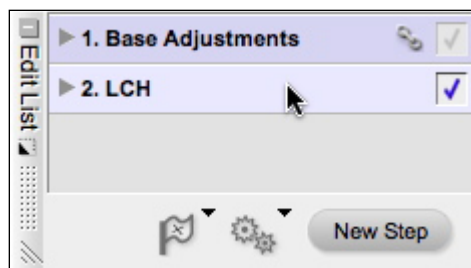


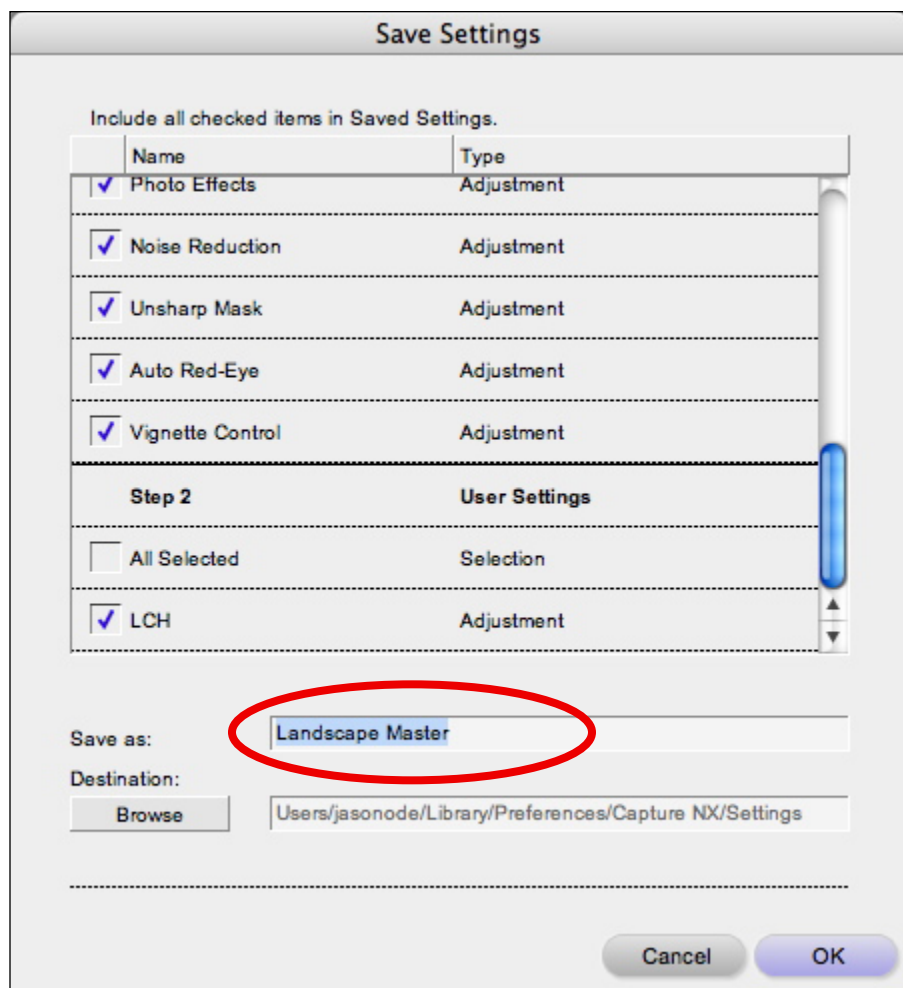
Combining Settings to Streamline Workflow

In the previous example, we set up our image for success by applying two specific presets; a Base Adjustments preset and an LCH step for global light and color. In my workflow, this gives me a very good starting point for most of my landscape images. Now, let's create a new settings preset for landscapes and put it to use in our workflow.

After you have applied the Landscape-Base and Landscape-LCH settings files to the image, you can make a combined settings file that applies BOTH steps at once.

1. Shift-click on the Base Adjustments and LCH step in the Edit List to select them.
2. Right-click on the Edit Steps and choose "Save Settings".





3. In the Save Settings dialog, enter a name for your new settings file, and click OK.

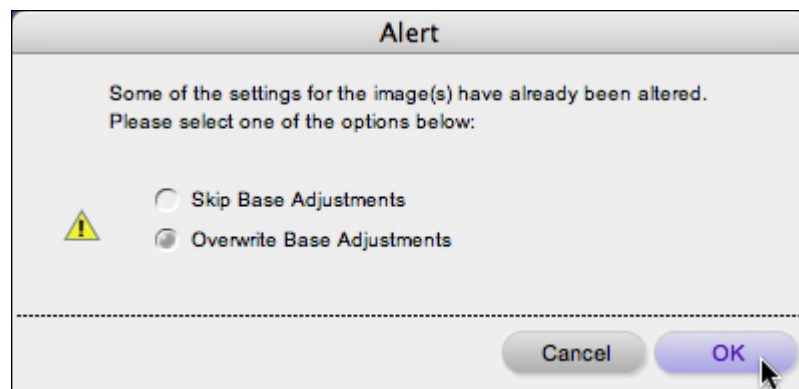
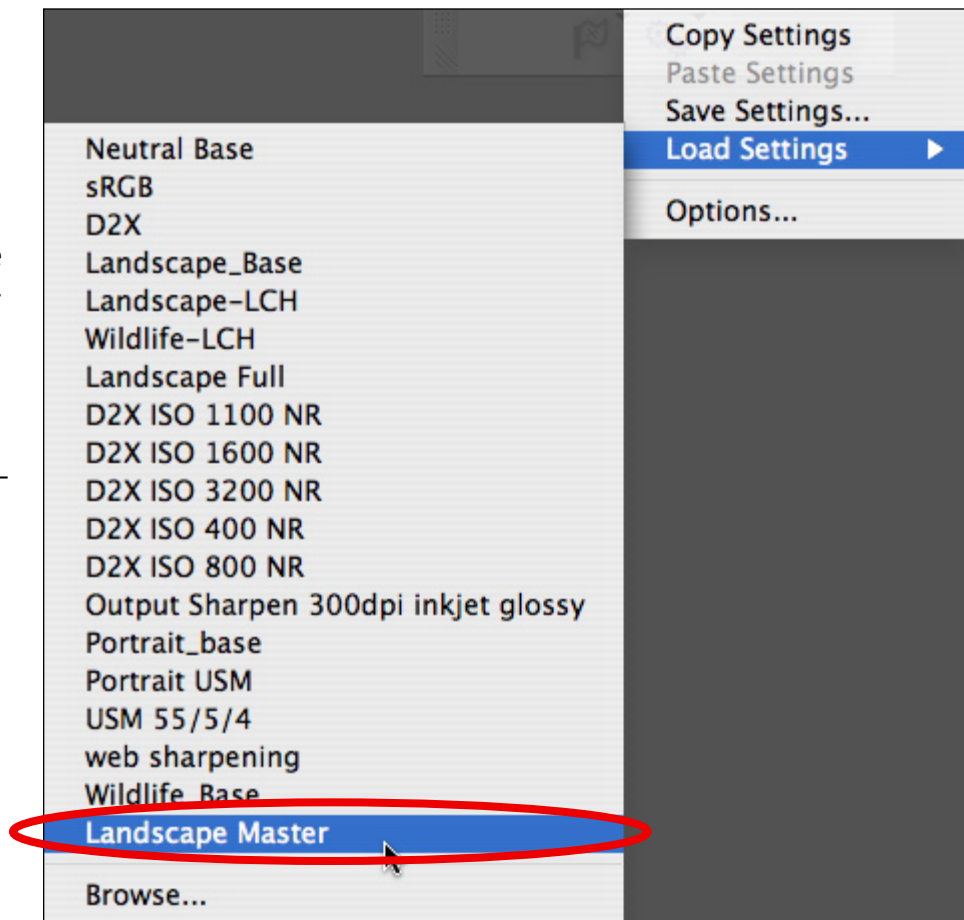
4. Your new settings file contains the Base Adjustments and LCH steps, and can be applied all at once.

Creating combination settings presets is a great way to speed up post-processing. Why spend time moving the LCH chroma sliders on each image, when you can use a preset and apply a consistent effect with a single click?

Streamlining Workflow I: Single Images

Once you've created a "Master" settings preset for the type of image you have, it is easy to get all the basic maneuvers done in one fell swoop. Here's how I process a landscape shot.

1. Open the file "badlands-landscape.nef" from the Sample Images folder.
2. Click the Batch Icon in the Edit List, and choose "Landscape Master" (or whatever you called your combined settings file from the previous example).
3. If the Base Adjustments Alert dialog appears, click "Overwrite Base Adjustments" and then click OK.
4. Perform any local adjustments as necessary. In this case, I added a color control point to increase the brightness of the trees in the foreground.
5. Apply capture sharpening using the preset appropriate to your camera. In this case, I used a D2X, so I chose the D2X preset. Again, you can overwrite

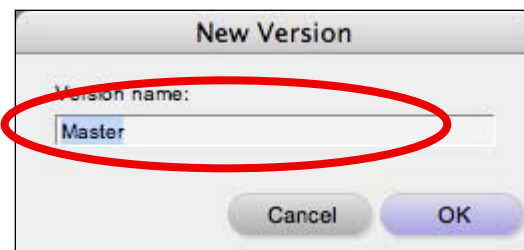
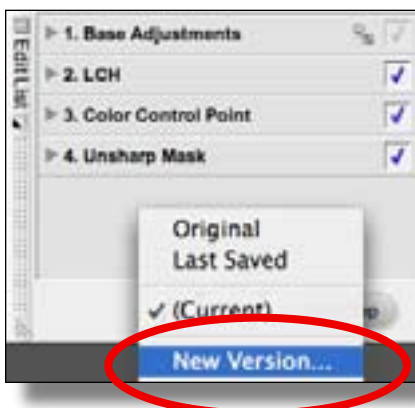
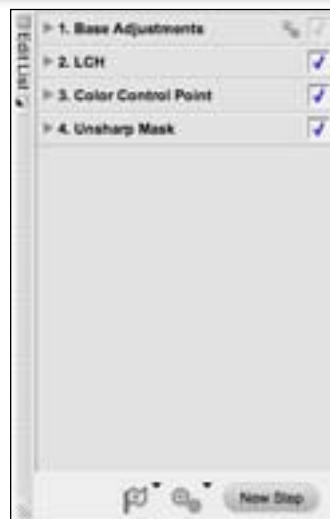
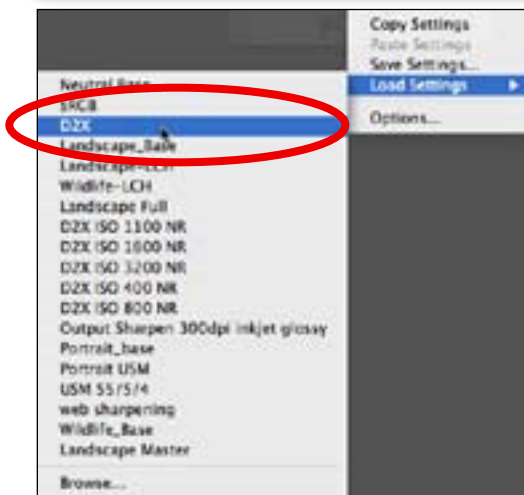


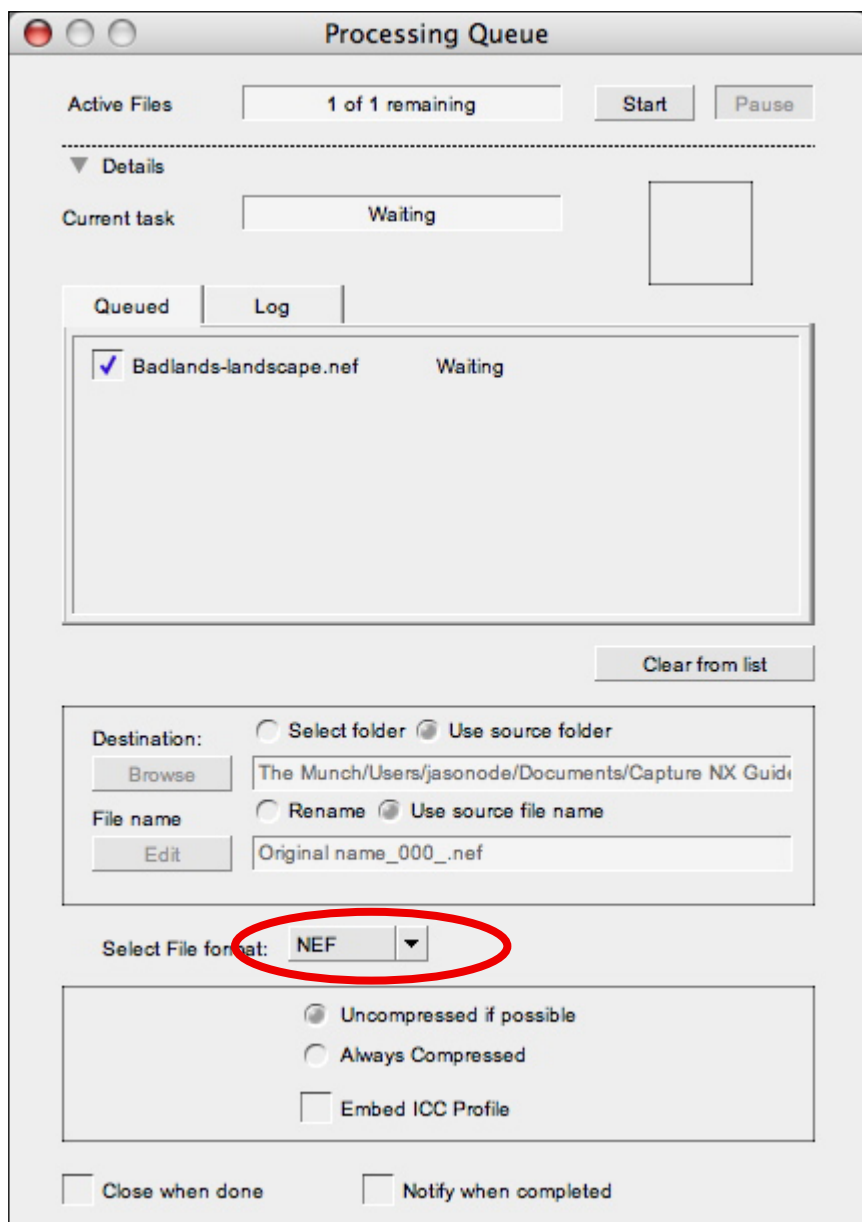


the Base Adjustments.
Remember, sharpen LAST!

6. I'll now create a new "Version" of the NEF. Click the Version icon in the Edit List, and select "New Version". Name this version "Master", and click OK.

7. Save your NEF. This becomes the master file that you can use for all other versions of your image.





“recipe” settings and you can make your final adjustments, like control points and sharpening as needed.

Note: I have even made a “master” settings file that includes capture sharpening as the last step. This way, I can apply everything I usually need to my images quickly and then decide later if they need local adjustments.

Correcting Fisheye Images

Capture NX has a built-in ability to “de-fish” images taken with the 10.5mm f/2.8 DX fisheye Nikkor lens. Images produced with this lens have a 180° angle of view, and exhibit pronounced distortions at the edges of the frame.

If you want to convert an image taken with the 10.5mm DX fisheye lens, the procedure is simple.

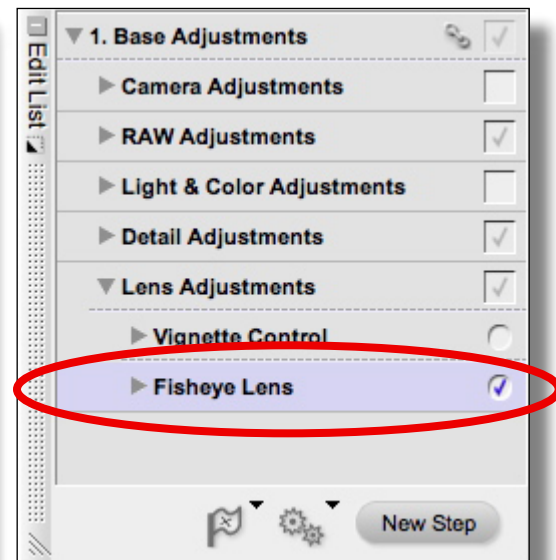
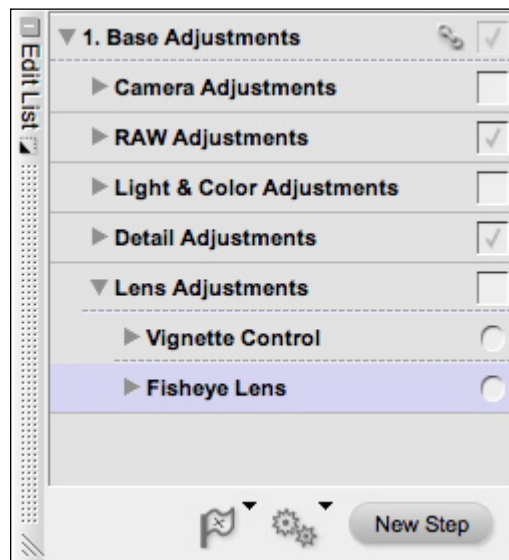


1. Open the image “fisheye.nef” from the Sample Images folder on the eBook CD, or download it from the users’ area of my website.

2. Expand the Base Adjustments tab, and click the triangle next to Lens Adjustments to open it.

3. Click the circle next to Fisheye Lens.

4. It is a good idea to make sure Auto Color Aberration control is also enabled, as fisheye lenses tend to produce a fair bit of color fringing.





The de-fished image. Note the reduced angle of view as compared to the original, at left.

Notes about de-fishing:

When you de-fish an image, the resulting image has two major changes. First, notice that the angle of view is greatly reduced. Second, there is pronounced softness in the corners of the de-fished image. The softness is the result of the distortion required to linearize the fisheye image.

In my opinion, de-fishing an image is something that is no match in quality for using a rectilinear wide-angle lens, but it is useful in a pinch if you don't have another super-wide lens handy.

Also note that the de-fish feature will not work with other fisheye Nikkor lenses.

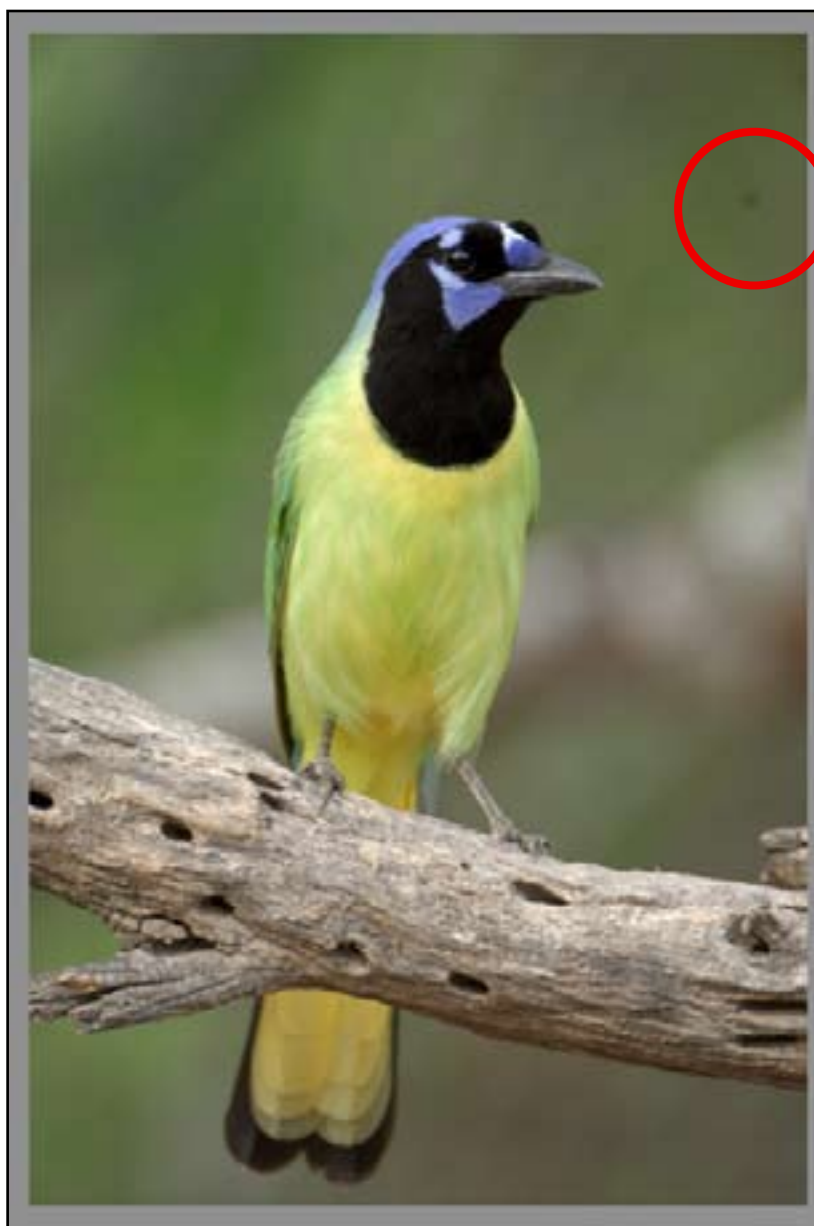
Removing Dust Spots from Backgrounds

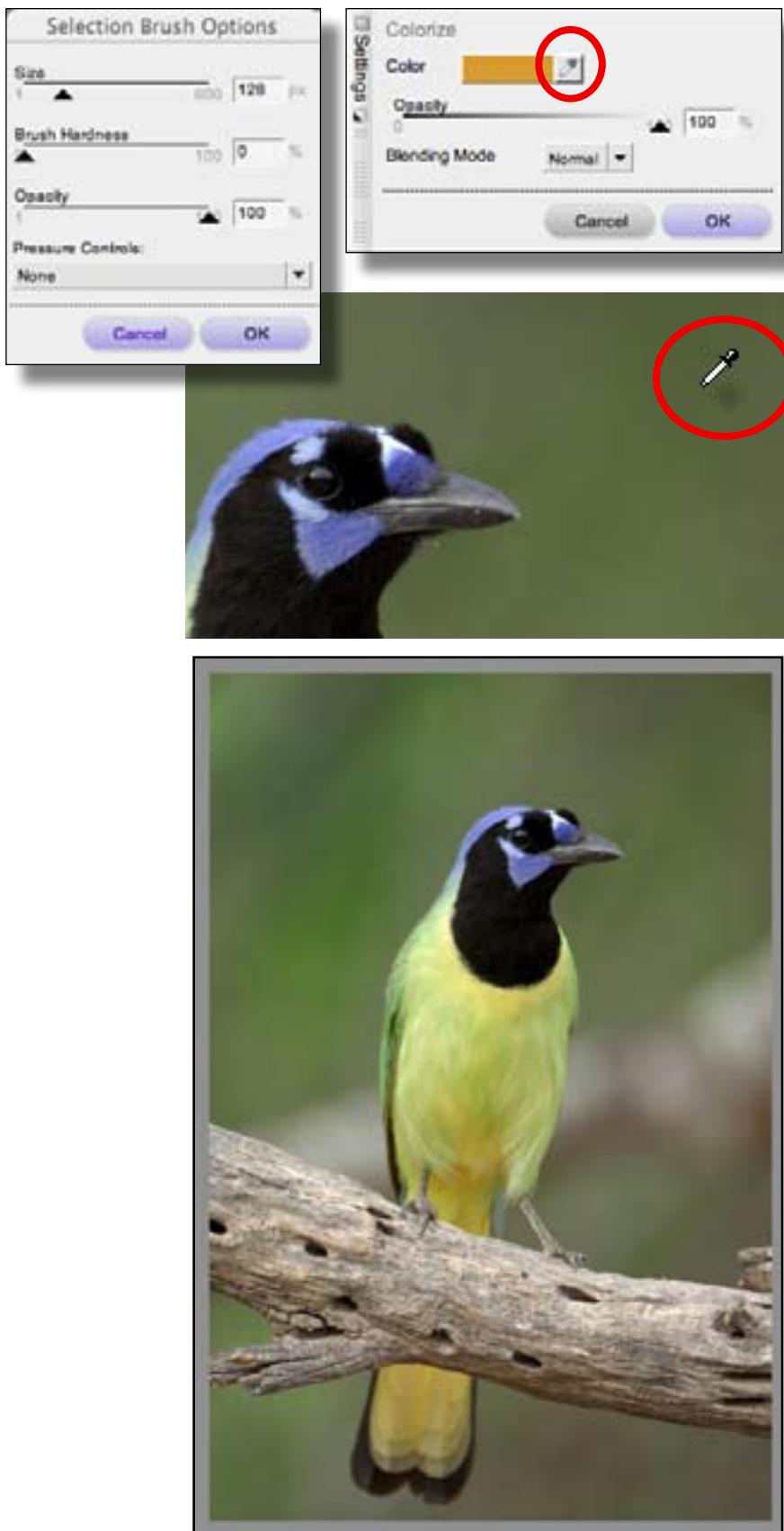
Sometimes, a speck of dust manages to find its way onto your sensor. Most of the time, dust specks are not visible on our images unless they are very large or you are shooting at a very small aperture. Although there is no clone tool in Capture NX (at least not as of this writing), you can get rid of minor spots on clean, smooth backgrounds such as skies using the colorize tool.

1. Open the image "dust.nef" from the Sample Images folder. Base Adjustments and global light/color adjustments have already been made. Always treat dust removal as a local adjustment.

2. Click the plus selection brush. A new colorize Edit Step will be added to the Edit List.

3. Double-click the selection brush tool to bring up the brush options dialog. Make sure the opacity is set to 100% and





the brush hardness is set to 0%, and click OK.

4. In the colorize options palette, click the eyedropper next to the color indicator. Place the eyedropper on the area of the background near the dust spot and click the mouse.

5. Using the (+) selection brush, paint over the dust spot. It is usually easiest to make the brush size the same as the dust speck, and click once on the image.

6. Complete your workflow by sharpening and saving.

Notes about dust:

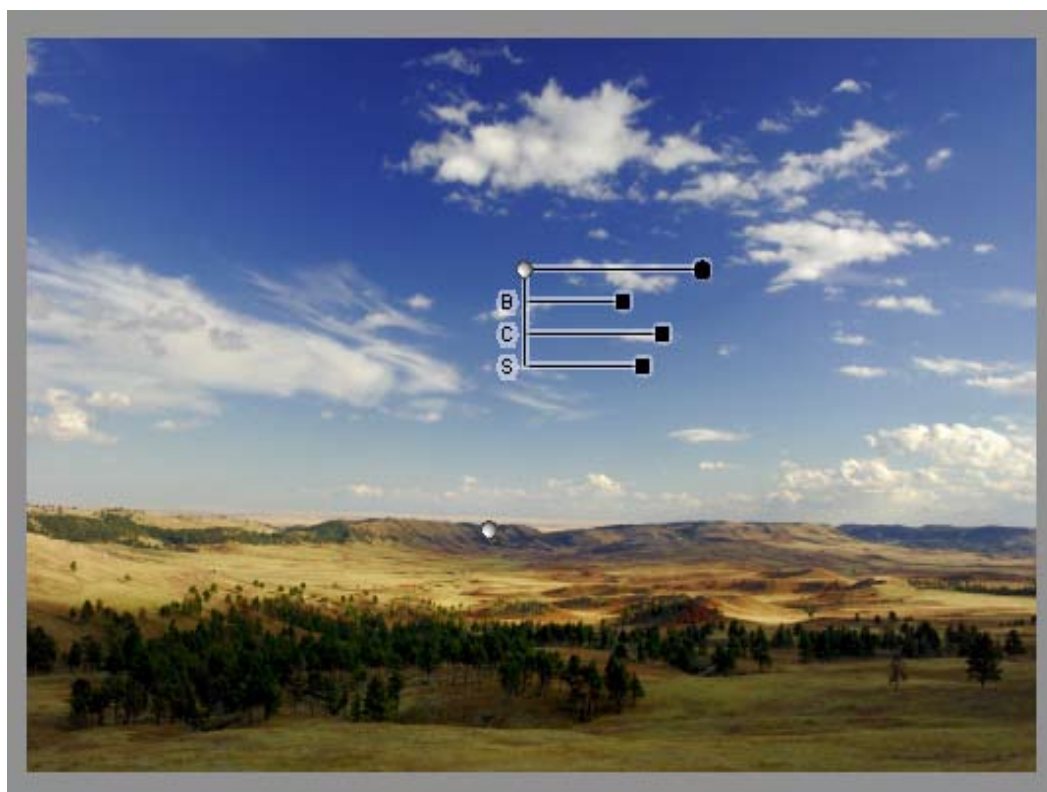
The best solution for removing dust is to keep your camera's sensor clean. I use the dust removal tools available at [Copper Hill Images](#). Not only do they work, but they are also affordable. If your images have a serious dust problem, the clone tool in Photoshop is the post-processing method of choice.

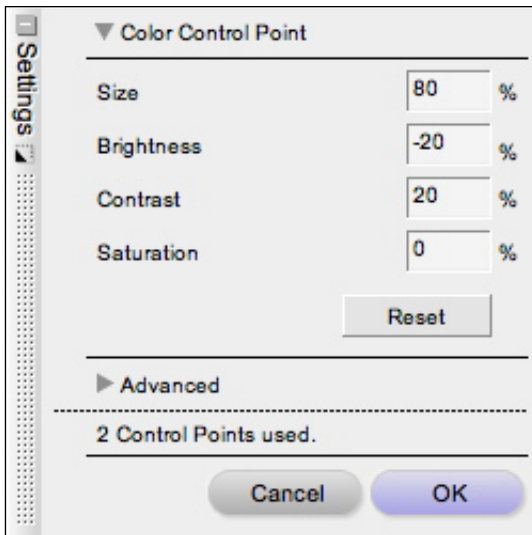
Creating a “Polarizer” Effect on Skies

The one filter I always try to bring with me on a shoot is a circular polarizer. Polarizing filters are excellent at producing contrast in skies, reducing haze from landscapes, and also reduce the glare from foliage and water. While removing glare is not feasible in post-processing, you can use Color Control Points to quickly add a “polarizing” effect to skies.

1. Open the file “badlands-landscape.nef” from the Sample Images folder.

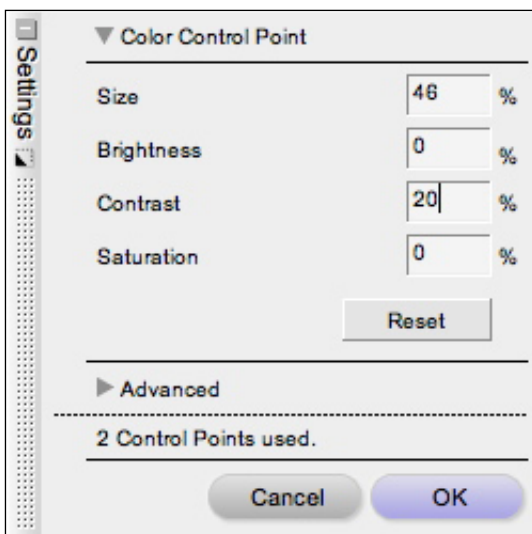
2. Place a color control point on the sky in the middle of the image. Increase the control point radius by moving the control slider. Then, set the brightness to -20% by moving the slider to the left. Increase the contrast to +20% by moving the slider to the right.





3. Place a second control point on the hills just below the horizon line. Increase the radius of this point to cover the lower half of the image. Increase the contrast slider by moving it to the right slightly. A value of +20 is usually enough.

4. Finish off the image with sharpening as needed.



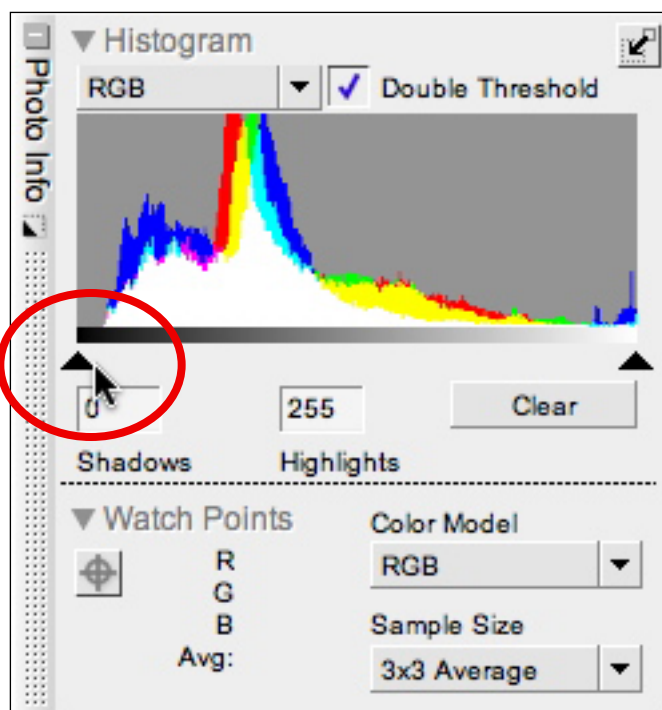
Setting White and Black Control Points

Capture NX offers several ways of setting the overall white and black points in an image. I usually use either Levels/Curves or the LCH editor to set the overall white and black points. However, the white, black and neutral control points does offer an alternative that deserves a brief explanation.

The biggest difference between using a control point to set white or black point in the image and setting the black/white point in Levels and Curves is that you can change the intensity of the effect when you use a control point.

1. Open the image "wagon.nef" from the Sample Images folder.

2. Expand the Photo Info window to reveal the image histogram. Click the Double Threshold checkbox.





3. Drag the triangle on the left of the histogram to the right until you can see a few black pixels appear in the image. You may need to zoom in on the image to see the black pixels.

4. Click the black control point eyedropper, and place a control point on the black pixels.

5. You can repeat the process for the white point control point if you desire, only this time, drag the triangle on the right side of the histogram to the left until you see a white pixel appear.

6. Deselect the Double Threshold checkbox.

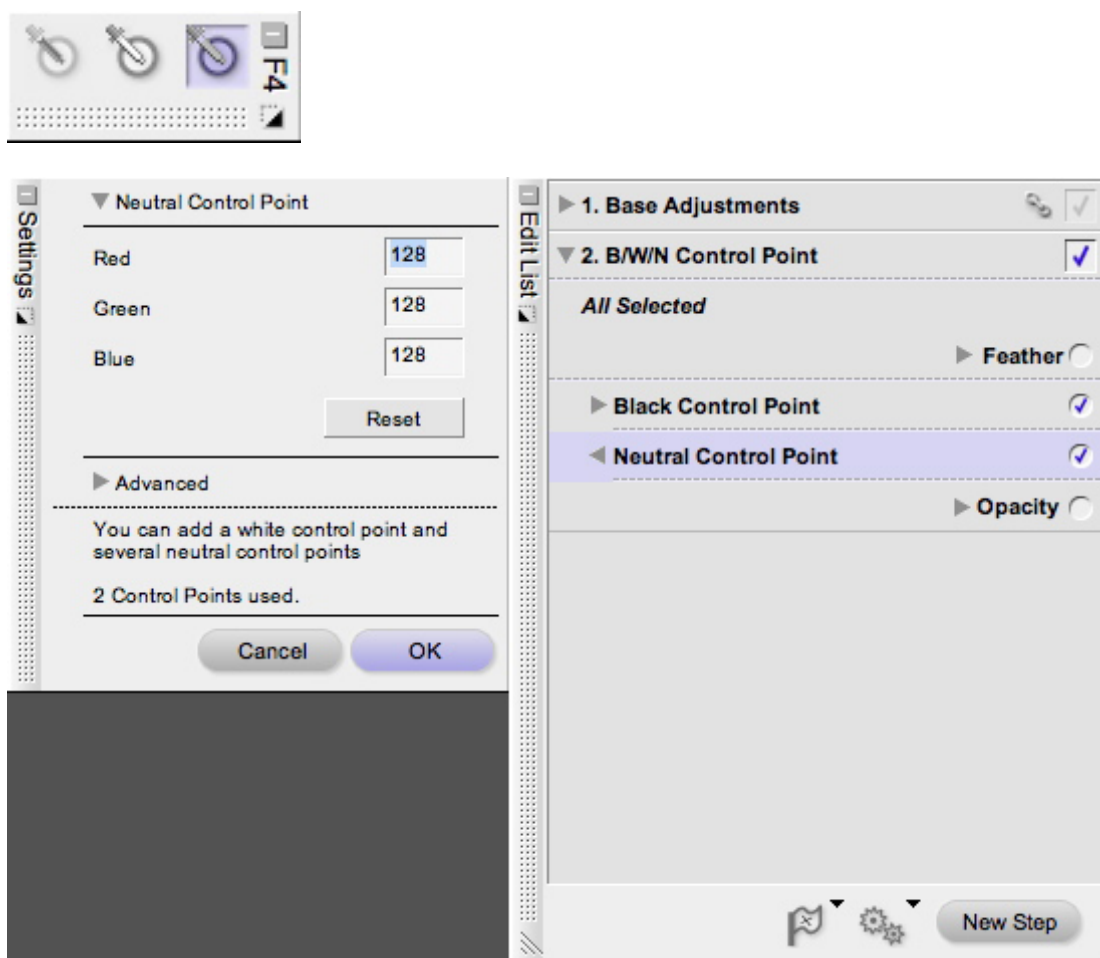
7. You can adjust the intensity of the white and black points by dragging the sliders in the control point. The black and white point sliders will not affect color cast because they operate in the luminosity channel.

Neutral Control Points

If your image has areas of neutral gray in it, you can use one or more neutral control points to remove unwanted color casts. I personally try to set my neutral area with the white balance control, but this is another option that can be used for fine-tuning color casts. Neutral control points are also very useful on JPEG images where you cannot control white balance manually.

1. Click the neutral control point eyedropper to select it.
2. Click on the image in an area that you wish to render as neutral gray. A B/W/N Control Point is added to the Edit list.
3. Repeat on other areas of the image, if desired.
4. The neutral control point has three sliders (R, G, B), which you can use to modify color casts.

Important Note: Unlike white balance settings, which you can copy and





paste between images, control points are “plastic”. If you paste a control point from one image onto another image, it will use the image data from the new image to calculate the change to the image. Therefore, a well-placed neutral point on one image can create a real mess if it is copied and placed on a second image!

Improving Capture NX Performance

The most common question I am asked about Capture NX is “how come Capture NX runs slowly on my computer?”

Before I offer a few tips on improving the performance of Capture NX, it is important to keep in mind a few important differences between Capture NX and other editing programs. First of all, in contrast with other RAW converters, Capture NX reads and applies *all* the in-camera settings embedded in your NEF, including things like Color Mode. Other software products only read the sensor data and the white balance information, meaning they have less data to process. Second, Capture NX allows you to make local changes to your image while still in RAW mode, which is much more taxing to a computer system than working on an RGB bitmap image. For a comparison, try opening a JPEG file in Capture NX and see how much faster it runs! Lastly, Capture NX does not use “sidecar” files to store changes to NEFs. If you change a parameter in a NEF, Capture NX will not only write those changes into the NEF file, but also generate a new embedded JPEG preview that reflects the updated file.

That being said, here are some ways to improve the way Capture NX runs.

1. Install more RAM. 2GB of RAM is the point where you will start to see a major improvement in performance. If you have less than 1GB of RAM, consider this option first.
2. Use a second hard drive to store NX temp files. Your computer can only transfer so much data at any given time to a single hard drive. Utilizing a second hard drive for your cache files mitigates this potential performance bottleneck.

Capture NX uses two cache systems. The Temporary Data directory is used to store information about the image you are currently editing, improving application performance. The thumbnail cache is used by the File Browser to speed up the display of image thumbnails.

Open the Capture NX preferences dialog and set the directory for Temp files and Cache files to a folder on a separate hard drive by clicking the “Browse” button.

3. Remember that “minimum” system requirements are just that-- a *minimum*. Having the minimum system just means that Capture NX will run, not that it will run well.

