



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Statement by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) on Executive Order 13953: Addressing the Threat to the Domestic Supply Chain From Reliance on Critical Minerals From Foreign Adversaries and Supporting the Domestic Mining and Processing Industries

October 22, 2020

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With nearly 7,000 members, SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at Tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members throughout the U.S., as well as in many nations around the world.

The SAA understands the need for the nation to have better and more reliable access to critical minerals, as well as the ability to process them into the products that our advanced economy requires. The current market concentration of rare earth and other vital materials in certain nations is dangerous from both a national security and economic security perspective. We believe that it is possible to address these problems while still ensuring—through the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Policy Act—that our irreplaceable cultural and natural resources are conserved for future generations. These goals are not mutually exclusive.

In addition, we are concerned that policymakers in the current administration could interpret this Executive Order as a license to limit, or even disregard, the processes established under the NHPA and NEPA that ensure that economic expansion is done in collaboration with the need to preserve our resources. These statutes also guarantee that the public has the right and ability to review and comment upon federally-sponsored projects before they are put into place, and in the move to make project delivery more efficient that we have seen in recent years, public comment has too often been curtailed. When this putative short-cut has been taken, the government has faced litigation, which has the deleterious effect of wasting money and creating massive judicial delays.

The SAA believes that it is not only possible to achieve mutually-beneficial equilibrium between the need for economic growth and being good stewards of our heritage assets, but that is an imperative.