



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

October 10, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington DC, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Burgum and Secretary Rollins,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) writes to urge the administration—the Department of Interior (DOI) and Department of Agriculture (USDA) in particular—to take immediate and proactive measures during the shutdown to safeguard the historic and cultural resources contained within federal lands. These measures include classifying all departmental law enforcement and cultural resource protection staff as essential personnel to maintain monitoring of culturally sensitive and sacred sites.

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 more than 6,000 members, the SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working in the private sector, at tribal agencies, museums, and government agencies. The SAA has members throughout the United States who regularly work under federal permits and in partnership with land management agencies such as the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). As such, the SAA has direct knowledge of how interruptions in federal operations, and thus protections, affect the integrity of cultural landscapes and archaeological resources.

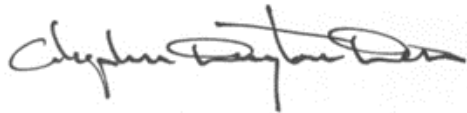
The shutdown has resulted in the partial or complete closure of National Parks, National Forests and other public lands. Many DOI and USFS employees are now furloughed, meaning that a vast amount of acreage is now without any kind of oversight or control by federal personnel. During previous shutdowns, federal lands and the historic buildings, artifacts, archeological sites, and landscapes they contained were left vulnerable to damage and theft from looters, offroad vehicles and vandals. During the 2019 partial shutdown, for example, there was substantial damage by vandals in Joshua Tree. That same year ancient petroglyphs in Big Bend were also vandalized.

The overall result was an irretrievable loss of knowledge and the diminishment of our shared past, a result that will be repeated if nothing is done to secure our public lands.

The risks imposed by the ongoing government shutdown to the cultural resources and historic properties entrusted to the on behalf of the American people are substantial. These irreplaceable cultural assets are part of our nation's collective heritage and deserve continuous protection. In addition to securing the public lands from illicit activity, we also urge your departments to communicate with partner institutions, researchers, Tribal Nations, and State Historic Preservation Offices about the protective measures taken to protect our shared resources through this government shutdown.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Christopher Dore", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Christopher D. Dore
President

CC:

House Appropriations Committee

House Natural Resources Committee

Senate Appropriations Committee

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee