



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Statement of the Society for American Archaeology
for Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Committee on Appropriations**

May 26, 2022

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) once again appreciates this opportunity to present its recommendations for Fiscal Year 2023 cultural resources program appropriations for the Department of Interior and USDA Forest Service. I am Dr. Deborah Nichols, president of the Society.

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 5,500 members, the 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. The SAA has members throughout the United States, as well as in many nations around the world.

The members of the SAA thank the subcommittee for supporting an increase in funding for federal cultural resources programs in FY 2022. These federal and federally supported programs, created under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other key statutes and funded through annual appropriations, constitute the foundation of historic and cultural preservation activities in the United States. These activities comprise the principal means of preserving and protecting our nation's irreplaceable historic, archaeological, and cultural treasures. In addition to ensuring Americans can learn about and enjoy the artifacts and knowledge of America's history, funding federal archaeology programs facilitates economic growth and infrastructure project delivery.

Given the above, our testimony for FY 2023 emphasizes the message that we have expounded on over the past several years—in order for federally based historic preservation to work effectively, it must have the necessary staffing and resources. This year, several circumstances expand the need for funds.

Department of the Interior—Increased Archaeologist Staff: \$10 million

As we noted last year, federal archaeologists perform a huge number of important tasks, including reviews under Section 106 of the NHPA for federally funded projects, projects requiring a federal permit, or projects on federal lands; conducting surveys for historic and cultural resources under Section 110 of the NHPA; protection of archaeological sites and materials under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA); preservation and repatriation of highly sensitive cultural and spiritual tribal objects under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA); consultation with Indigenous and descendant communities on the effects of federal actions on their cultural resources; development of contracts and cooperative agreements between federal agencies and private firms or universities; technical assistance on archaeological matters; coordination and management of volunteers helping to preserve cultural sites; and curation of federal archaeological collections.

At present, the federal archaeological workforce, across many departments and agencies, lacks a sufficient number of people on staff (fewer than 1,400 in all) to carry out its current and future statutorily required responsibilities. The situation will become even more serious when you factor in the skyrocketing increase of projects authorized under the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Another concern must be addressed—climate change threatens archaeological sites. For instance, Jamestown, the first English settlement in North America, is experiencing flooding due to rising coastal water levels. The multiyear drought in the West has severely depleted many federally controlled reservoirs such as Lakes Mead and Powell. Lower water tables expose many previously submerged archaeological sites to the danger of erosion from the elements, as well as the threat of looting. ARPA, the NHPA, and NAGPRA require the protection and proper management of these sites and whatever objects they contain. The NPS, the Bureau of Reclamation, and other DOI agencies need more archaeologists to protect these vulnerable public cultural resources.

The SAA recognizes that correcting the situation will require a multiyear effort. It is critical that this begin sooner rather than later. We request an additional \$10 million in FY 2023 for Interior archaeologist positions.

National Park Service—National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs: \$36 million

When most people picture our national parks, they envision the parks' natural and recreational aspects. Though less visible, but equally vital to the public mission, we urge you to remember that the overwhelming majority of our nation's parks *also* contain historical and cultural sites, including sacred lands of deep meaning to Indigenous Americans and places that tell the story of America's development and more recent past. NPS National Recreation and Preservation Programs are vital for the technical assistance and other support they provide for resource protection within National Parks, to other federal agencies, and to state, tribal, and private sector stakeholders. These programs assist communities in preserving their significant historical and archaeological properties. The archaeological component identifies, documents, and inventories archaeological resources in parks; produces archaeological technical and programmatic publications; implements regulations for protecting archaeological resources; and assists other agencies through program development and training. The SAA appreciates the increase of \$2.4 million in the final FY 2022 bill. In order to keep up with the rising cost of inflation, and to ensure that these programs keep pace with the compliance workload increases brought by the GAOA and the infrastructure law, the SAA requests a total of \$36 million for FY 2023, an increase of \$1.6 million.

National Park Service—Historic Preservation Fund (HPF): \$200 million

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) provides crucial support to State (SHPO) and Tribal (THPO) Historic Preservation Offices and matching grants to nonprofits and local governments to preserve and document historic resources. Your local communities rely on these grants to attract tourism, retain a unique sense of place, and promote economic development. The HPF (among other programs) plays a crucial role in the ability of states and local municipalities to comply with the preservation system established by the NHPA—particularly with regard to Section 106 consultations. SHPOs and THPOs constitute the “front line” in the effort to preserve our cultural heritage. Their workloads have grown and will continue to expand.

We need to shine a spotlight on an especially dire shortfall. THPO's are particularly hard-pressed because there are 210 offices, and the FY 2022 omnibus bill appropriated a totally insufficient average of just \$75,000 of annual funding per office. The HPF overall saw a record level of funding in the final FY 2022 bill, but SHPOs received only a \$2 million increase. THPOs fared even worse (\$1 million). These increases did not even account for the erosion of spending power due to inflation. We urge more resources for these offices to rectify this situation. The SAA strongly endorses the recommendations put

forward by the preservation community for a total of \$200 million for the HPF in FY 2023, of which \$65 million would go to SHPOs and \$34 million to THPOs.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—Cultural Resources Management: \$21.8 million

The BLM manages 245 million acres, which makes the agency the largest land manager in the United States. These lands contain an enormous number of known and as-yet-undiscovered cultural resources. To date, only 10% of BLM lands have been surveyed for cultural resources. As with the other programs mentioned here, the BLM needs resources so it can fulfill its statutory requirements to research, inventory, and protect the cultural resources under its control. In the FY 2022 final omnibus bill, the BLM Cultural Resources Management program received \$20 million, an increase of \$422,000. While appreciated, the many activities of BLM staff archaeologists require more funding so that this personnel may better continue their work to survey the lands they administer and identify the cultural resources therein, conserve archaeological sites and materials, and integrate cultural resources data through the National Cultural Resources Information Management System. In particular, new funding will enable the BLM to finally resolve the disruption and dysfunction that occurred in the cultural resources program under the last administration due to the relocation of many headquarters staff to offices in the West. That action resulted in the retirement or resignation of many staff members and was only reversed by Secretary of the Interior Haaland last year. The SAA requests an increase of \$1.8 million for BLM Cultural Resources Management.

Bureau of Land Management—National Landscape Conservation System: \$65.1 million

The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), first established in 2000 and authorized by Congress in 2009, contains more than 35 million acres of National Monuments, Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and other sensitive lands. They include an extensive and diverse array of the nation's archaeological and cultural resources. While the System received a much-needed increase of \$3.4 million in FY 2022, more needs to be done to provide the level of preservation management and sound stewardship of the lands in the system. Investigation, research, and preservation needs remain great. In order to provide adequate management of these lands and the cultural resources they contain, the SAA strongly supports an allocation of \$65.1 million for the program. This substantial increase would restore the NLCS to its record FY 2006 funding level, address the rise in inflation, and allow the BLM to bring to bear the resources necessary to carry out this essential mission.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants: \$2.3 million

We reiterate the importance of the NAGPRA Grants Program to restoring culturally affiliated human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to affiliated Native American tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations. It serves a key role by helping facilitate cooperation between tribes and museums to document covered items and realize their repatriation under the NAGPRA statute. The increase in the FY 2022 final bill, to a total of \$2.1 million, was helpful. Nevertheless, with increasing numbers of THPOs and increasing numbers of Federally Recognized Tribes, demand for these grants is also surging, and inflation must also be taken into account. Given these realities, and the fact that some repositories still have not completed their inventories, the SAA urges another increase. We respectfully request that the National NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$2.3 million for FY 2022, an increase of approximately \$200,000.

US Forest Service—Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness: \$115 million

Most of the work carried out by the USFS heritage activities involves Section 106 compliance on federal forest land. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will reportedly increase that workload by a factor of four. In order to address the situation, the USFS—apparently alone among federal agencies—began the process of hiring archaeologists to ensure that these new undertakings comply with historic preservation statutes. It will take at least the next four years to bring this effort to a successful conclusion. Therefore, we

recommend that \$115 million be allocated to the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness account, with \$6 million dedicated to making these new archaeological positions permanent.

The SAA greatly appreciates your time and consideration of these important issues. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.