



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

September 18, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Davis  
Vice-Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Vice-Chairwoman Davis, Chairman Merkley, and Ranking Member Murkowski,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) thanks you for providing vigorous funding levels for key cultural resources preservation programs in S. 2605, the Senate version of the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. While there are some areas that we believe need further attention in terms of additional resources in the years ahead, the allocations in S. 2605 will do more to protect our invaluable national heritage than those contained in the House measure (H.R. 4821).

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.

**BLM Cultural Resources:** The SAA advocated for increased funding levels for the BLM cultural resources management program, which needs more staff to do the Bureau's work of protecting, inventorying, and monitoring cultural resources. There are already tragic cases of looting because of the vast territory each BLM archaeologist is tasked with protecting. While the Senate bill only proposes level spending for FY 2024 (\$20.6 million), the enactment of H.R. 4821 would result in a disastrous cut. That is an outcome that the BLM—and the archaeological resources it protects—cannot afford.

**BLM National Conservation Lands:** The National Conservation Lands (NCL) program is a multimillion-acre system consisting of National Monuments, Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic

Rivers, and other sensitive areas that protects vital and irreplaceable natural and cultural resources, including thousands of archaeological sites. We thank the subcommittee for providing an increase of \$2 million over the FY 2023 spending level, to a total of \$63.59 million to better “conserve, protect, and restore these nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations.” The SAA believes that further increases are needed to secure the best possible stewardship of the cultural resources these lands contain, but the House bill’s cut of more than \$6 million (to \$55.4 million) would represent a step back toward the days (2008–2015) when the program was severely underfunded, to the detriment of the resources that the NCL system is meant to protect.

**NPS Cultural Resources:** NPS National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs (NRPC) provide vital technical assistance and other support for resource protection within National Parks and for other federal agencies, including for the proper care and management of archaeological resources under their control. These programs are trying to accomplish important initiatives that will improve the preservation and interpretation of the nation’s cultural resources, including establishing baseline information about archaeological sites, completing the Cultural Resources Inventory System, and digitizing the Archaeological Resources Protection Act permitting process. While we were disappointed that S. 2605 did not agree with the administration’s proposed request of \$44.1 million for this account, we recognize that the Appropriations Committee had to make difficult decisions on allocations. Enactment of the House bill’s position would result in a cut to the NRPC, an unacceptable outcome given the momentum that would be lost.

**Historic Preservation Fund (HPF):** The HPF is the mechanism that provides crucial support to State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and matching grants to nonprofits and local governments to preserve and document historic resources. Particularly with regard to Section 106 consultations, SHPOs and THPOs represent the “front line” in the effort to preserve our cultural heritage. Their workloads are only growing, especially with the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. We thank the Senate committee again for the badly needed increases to SHPO and THPO funding that were included in the FY 2023 omnibus legislation. Though we and others continue to believe that further increases are necessary, especially for THPOs, we accept and support the static funding levels of \$62.15 million and \$23 million for SHPOs and THPOs, respectively, in both S. 2605 and H.R. 4821. Just as important, however, is the inclusion in the final FY 2024 appropriations package of a provision extending the authorization of the HPF for another year. This will give Congress more time to act on legislation to reauthorize the HPF and will provide our members and others in the preservation community the certainty they need.

**Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Grants:** The SAA congratulates the committee for including \$3.4 million for the National NAGPRA Grants program, the same as in FY 2023. This funding will allow Native Americans and museums to continue their efforts to document and, if so desired, repatriate sacred objects and human remains covered under NAGPRA.

**Federal Archaeological Workforce:** As we have mentioned before, while there was an increase in the number of federal archaeologists over the past three fiscal years, the size of the federal archaeological workforce remains inadequate given the immensity of its mission, which includes (but is not limited to) carrying out reviews of federally funded projects, projects requiring a

federal permit, or projects on federal lands under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA); conducting surveys for historic and cultural resources under Section 110 of the NHPA; protection of archaeological sites and materials and investigating instances of looting of sites under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act; preservation and repatriation of highly sensitive cultural and spiritual tribal objects under NAGPRA; consultation with Indigenous and descendant communities on the effects of federal actions on their cultural resources; addressing cultural resources in National Environmental Policy Act reviews; and curation of federal archaeological collections.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Archaeologists</b>	<b>Archaeologist per acre</b>
BLM	244 million	217	1 archaeologist per 1.12 million acres
USFS	191 million	462	1 archaeologist per 413,420 acres
USFWS	89 million	22	1 archaeologist per 4.04 million acres
NPS	80 million	268	1 archaeologist per 298,507 acres
DOD	9 million*	305	1 archaeologist per 29,508 acres
<b>Total</b>	<b>613 million</b>	<b>1,274</b>	<b>1 archaeologist per 481,162 acres</b>

\* Domestic acreage only

More archaeologists are needed to satisfy the statutorily required and program responsibilities.

Of particular concern is the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) cultural resources program, which has only 22 people on staff to carry out its mission. As noted in the USFWS 2022 cultural resources program’s annual report:

*FWS cultural resource staff supported c. 1657 agency projects through completion of the Section 106 review process as called for by the NHPA. Many of these reviews included consultation with Native American Tribes, as well as other descendant communities. This is a major accomplishment when one considers the size of the cultural resources staff; a 2011 workload for cultural resources indicated that 20 additional FTE are required to keep pace with NHPA workloads. Despite this there were still 303 NHPA reviews were left uncompleted in FY 22; most because of a lack of staff. This resulted in 303 projects were not able to advance or advanced with risk and/or without complying with NHPA.*

The SAA will continue to work in the years ahead for an increase in the number of archaeologists employed by federal agencies.

We greatly appreciate your time and consideration and urge you to continue advocating as strongly as possible for the spending levels included in S. 2605 to be included in the final Interior appropriations bill. Our nation’s heritage is fragile, irreplaceable, and invaluable to future generations. Were the House position on these items to prevail, many archaeological sites and

historic treasures could be permanently lost and destroyed. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns at 202-559-5115 or [David\\_lindsay@saa.org](mailto:David_lindsay@saa.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Sandweiss", enclosed in a light blue rectangular border.

Daniel H. Sandweiss, Ph.D., RPA  
President