



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Testimony of Daniel H. Sandweiss, President of the Society for American Archaeology,
before the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

Regarding Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations

House Appropriations Committee

April 30, 2024

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is pleased to once again present its recommendations to the subcommittee regarding fiscal year 2025 (FY 2025) appropriations for the Department of the Interior's (DoI) cultural resources preservation programs. I am Dr. Daniel H. Sandweiss, president of the SAA.

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 understand the fiscal difficulties facing Congress. The lengthy delay in completing the FY 2024 spending legislation only added to the complications that appropriators had to face. Given these realities, we appreciate the fact that the final agreement maintained many accounts at level funding. Nevertheless, we must make two important points. First, the need for more federal archaeologists and funding to support cultural resources preservation is great and continues to increase, thanks in large part to the growth in workloads from the infrastructure bills of 2021 and 2022. Second, the recent revisions to the regulations implementing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) will create substantial new compliance burdens on agencies that are not adequately met by either existing appropriations or those called for in the administration's FY 2025 budget request.

The federal and federally funded historic and cultural preservation programs created under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other preservation statutes, and the activities that they support, comprise the principal means of preserving and protecting our nation's irreplaceable historic, archaeological, and cultural treasures. It is imperative that Congress supply federal agencies with the staff and the means necessary to effectively carry out these functions. This is especially true given that so many of the renewable energy infrastructure projects authorized by legislation in 2021 and 2022 have reached the permitting and construction phases.

As we stated in last year’s testimony, federal archaeologists perform a huge number of mission-critical tasks, and their numbers are inadequate given the scale of the mission, which is immense and growing. The following table shows the number of acres overseen by the top land-managing agencies versus the number of archaeologists each agency employs to carry out reviews under Section 106 of the NHPA for federal projects:

Agency	Acreage	Archaeologists	Acres / Archaeologist
BLM	244 million	217	1,124,424
USFS	191 million	462	413,420
USFWS	89 million	22	4,045,455
NPS	80 million	268	298,507
DoD	9 million*	305	29,508
Total	613 million	1,274	481,162

* Domestic acreage only

If the Section 106 process is to function effectively and federally sponsored undertakings are to be delivered in a timely manner, the NPS, BLM, and other agencies need still more archaeologists to satisfy the statutorily required program responsibilities.

National Park Service—National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs: \$50 million

NPS National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs provide vital technical assistance and other support for resource protection within National Parks and for other federal agencies. In particular, the archaeological program 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 greatly appreciates the administration’s budget request for \$44.1 million for FY 2024, of which \$3 million of the requested increase for FY 2024 would go to fund the new African American Burial Ground Network program and the balance to pay increases. The SAA believes, however, that more is needed and requests another \$6 million to fill vacant archaeologist positions within the NPS. The increase will also allow the NPS to continue to apply its National Archaeology Database information to the NAGPRA compliance efforts of the NPS and other agencies. As pointed out in the National Parks Conservation Association’s [report](#) of April 2024, the NPS will need \$250 million over the next five years “to help the National Park Service protect, restore, and archive our country’s diverse history.” The upcoming fiscal year would make for a good first installment in this effort.

National Park Service—HPF funding: \$225 million

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) 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. 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 remain the “front line” in the effort to preserve our cultural heritage, and just as federal archaeologists are dealing with substantial workload increases, so are SHPOs and THPOs, the latter of whom face an even more difficult situation, given the average funding per office. There are now 221 offices and the average THPO receives just \$104,000 per year. The increases for the HPF in the omnibus FY 2023 appropriations legislation were badly needed. Unfortunately, the president’s request for static SHPO and THPO funding levels is insufficient to handle the increased workload. The SAA recommends an overall amount of \$225 million for the HPF, of which \$70 million would go to SHPOs and \$34 million to THPOs.

Bureau of Land Management—Cultural Resources Management: \$30 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, many of which are in remote locations, while others are in areas with high visitation rates. Patrolling, inventorying, and monitoring of cultural heritage sites is essential to their protection. The 217 archaeologists on staff, along with the small number of other cultural resources specialists and law enforcement officers, are simply not enough to accomplish the mission when each archaeologist is responsible for over 1 million acres. The reduction of more than \$800,000 in the final FY 2024 spending package is exacerbating the problem, particularly in light of recent salary increases. On top of that, complying with the new NAGPRA regulations is going to place a substantial new demands on BLM personnel that existing funding and staff levels cannot possibly meet. The administration’s request for an additional \$250,000 and a new full-time employee is completely inadequate. In order to bring BLM’s cultural resources personnel and funding up to sufficient levels, we request an increase of \$10.78 million, \$5 million of which should be dedicated toward NAGPRA regulatory work.

Bureau of Land Management—National Conservation Lands: \$65.8 million

The National Conservation Lands (NCL), first established in 2000 and authorized by Congress in 2009, contains more than 37 million acres that are home to an extensive and diverse array of the nation’s archaeological and cultural resources. The FY 2023 omnibus appropriations bill contained \$61.5 million for the NCL. Unfortunately, the FY 2024 budget agreement reduced that amount by \$2.46 million. In order to secure the gains made to stewardship of these lands and the cultural resources they contain, we support the administration’s request of \$65.8 million for FY 2025, an increase of \$6.67 million.

Forest Service Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness: \$55 million

USFS heritage activities focus on Section 106 compliance on federal forest land, a task it is struggling to carry out, given the enormous increase in workload thanks to the passage of the infrastructure bills. While the USFS hired new archaeologists in FY 2023 to deal with the situation, most National Forests still remain understaffed. This situation will be exacerbated by the fact that many of the projects authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act and other measures are now ready to proceed. The \$10 million reduction in the FY 2024 budget for the Recreation,

Heritage and Wilderness account makes this reality even worse. In order to fulfill its preservation obligations and comply with the new NAGPRA regulations, we recommend the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness account be allocated \$55 million.

Fish and Wildlife Service Historic Preservation: increase of \$4 million

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is tasked with identifying and caring for the historic properties located within the lands and waters under its management. This includes nearly 17,000 recorded archaeological and paleontological sites, as well as millions of objects under its control in museums and collections facilities. As we noted above, there are only 22 archaeologists on staff in the USFWS. This number is wholly inadequate if the Service is to carry out its congressionally mandated historic preservation responsibilities. Increasing the number of archaeologists will help clear the way for other projects in the refuges to move forward but also builds relationships with local communities, including many Indigenous peoples. As with other agencies, the work necessary for compliance with the new NAGPRA regulations will place an additional burden on the already-overworked archaeological staff. Though the USFWS historic preservation program does not receive a line item allocation, we recommend that the subcommittee specify an increase of \$4 million for the program in FY 2025. This new funding will allow the USFWS to increase its archaeological staff to 40 and enable the Service to comply with its new NAGPRA responsibilities.

Department of Defense (DoD) Legacy Resource Management Program: \$1.5 million

The Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program is partnering with the National Preservation Institute (NPI) to carry out survey projects under Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. These projects identify and evaluate historic properties under the DoD's stewardship. About 51% of the Department's land holdings remain to be surveyed, and this initiative will make a significant contribution toward reducing that number. While the DoD has allocated \$13.5 million over five years to the Legacy Resource Management Program, and the NPI will support the effort with \$1.25 million this year, the SAA believes that Congress could strengthen and accelerate the effort with another \$1.5 million.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants: \$12 million

Compliance with the new NAGPRA rule will require a great deal of time and money from covered institutions. Consultation between tribes and museum and curation facilities, and the disposition of remains and cultural objects, is an intensive and often expensive process but one that must be done correctly to ensure that objects are returned to the correct lineal descendants, Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations, if that is the desired outcome of stakeholders. The NAGPRA Grants Program serves an invaluable role in facilitating these activities, but it will require far greater resources than are currently available in order to meet the increased demand expected to be created by the revised regulations. The SAA requests that the NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$12 million in FY 2025.

Cummulatively, these appropriations fund the bedrock of the protection and ongoing identification of archaeological sites in America. Preserving this fragile knowledge is crucial for today and for tomorrow. The SAA greatly appreciates your time and consideration of these important issues. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.