



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Testimony of the Society for American Archaeology
on the Historic Preservation Enhancement Act of 2022
Before Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources**

April 28, 2022

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is pleased to present the following testimony on H.R. 6589, the Historic Preservation Enhancement Act of 2022. We strongly support the legislation, and urge its swift adoption by the full House Committee on Natural Resources as quickly as possible.

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.

H.R. 6589 would provide permanent authorization to the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), as well as double its annual authorized deposit limit from offshore oil and gas royalties to \$300 million. The bill would also help State and Tribal Preservation Offices plan for current and future operations by making certain amounts of HPF money available for expenditure without further congressional appropriations.

The HPF provides crucial support to State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and matching grants to nonprofits, historic houses, and local governments who catalog and preserve historic resources. It is these preservation offices and their staffs that review federal and federally sponsored undertakings, including infrastructure projects, to ensure that impacts they may have on important historic and cultural resources—if any—will be mitigated. The mitigation work itself is usually carried out by private-sector experts in their fields. These badly needed infrastructure projects and improvements are completed more smoothly, and protect irreplaceable heritage resources, when these preservation offices are fully staffed.

Further, local communities also rely on HPF grants for historic preservation projects as a means of promoting tourism and economic development. In short, the HPF is not only essential for preserving our priceless cultural heritage but also facilitates project delivery, job creation, and economic development.

Yet even though the past two years have seen a substantial increase in funding allocations to the HPF, federal undertakings are skyrocketing. The recently enacted Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, for example, is resulting in spending increases of approximately 21% on federal undertakings in each state. Colorado will see an increase of more than \$124 million in FY 22. Idaho will receive an increase of nearly \$66 million.

The State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) received an increase of \$2 million in FY 22, to \$57.675 million, but that increase barely keeps pace with inflation, much less enabling them to expand their operations to effectively address the growth in their workloads. The situation facing Tribal Historic

Preservation Offices (THPO)—which received a meager \$1 million increase in FY 22, to \$16 million—is even more dire. Because there are so many more THPOs than SHPOs, and because the tribal offices have always received substantially less in annual appropriations than their SHPO counterparts, both as a group and individually, they have had to do a great deal more with much less. In fact, the average annual THPO allocation from the HPF is a mere \$75,000 per year. Maintaining comprehensive and meaningful government-to-government consultations with federal agencies to review federal undertakings will be grievously harmed with such paltry resources.

Without a sizable increase in funding for the HPF, the preservation structure established by the National Historic Preservation Act—particularly with regard to the Section 106 system—will not function. Projects will be delayed, and job creation and economic development will be stymied. Above all, the protection and interpretation of the nation’s historic and cultural resources will be diminished, to the great detriment of present and future generations of Americans. This is why passage of H.R. 6589 is so essential. It will provide the SHPO and THPO offices—through the HPF—with the robust resources they need to carry out their important missions.

The SAA supports the Historic Preservation Enhancement Act, and requests its speedy markup and passage by the House Committee on Natural Resources.