



January 9, 2008

Mr. Mike Stevenson, Chairman
Museum of New Mexico Board of Regents
Museum of New Mexico Foundation
116 Lincoln Avenue
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Re: Proposed deaccession of archaeological materials recovered from LA 1051, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Dear Mr. Stevenson:

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) has heard that on January 16, 2008 the Board of the New Mexico Museum will consider deaccessioning archaeological materials recovered from LA 1051, a prehistoric village site recently excavated in Santa Fe, and turning these materials over to Tesuque Pueblo.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and the interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,200 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world. We are writing to protest the proposed deaccession and to offer for your consideration reasons why we think this is bad public policy.

At issue is not the disposition of Native American human remains and associated grave goods. These remains are protected under New Mexico state law (NMSA 1978 18-6-11.2) and may be repatriated to culturally related descendants. What we are concerned about is the permanent loss of non-burial related archaeological materials that were recovered through scientific investigation at the public's expense pursuant to state law. The people of New Mexico paid for this work and have a right to expect that the collections held by the Museum of New Mexico will be maintained for the public benefit. Disposing of these materials in response to a claim by a tribe, or any other party, is contrary to the larger public interest in preserving our collective history and culture. This principle of historic preservation is enshrined in both state and federal law.

The precedent that deaccessioning these materials will create could lead to future loss of archaeological collections held by the Museum of New Mexico and enable such losses elsewhere across the country. New Mexico has an extraordinarily rich archaeological heritage and the museum collections that have resulted from more than a century of archaeological work have extraordinary informational and educational value. These resources are worth protecting and maintaining so that future generations may explore the wonders of the past.

In our opinion, there is a greater public benefit in protecting and maintaining these archaeological materials within the Museum than in disposing of them in response to tribal claims or the claims of other special interest groups. We ask the Board to consider this greater good when making its decision about this very important, precedent setting, matter of public policy.

Sincerely,

Dean R. Snow,
President