



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

February 11, 2020

Mr. Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the recent destruction of several places of great cultural and historic importance to Native American tribes in order to facilitate the construction of the border wall. We demand that all further building activity in the affected areas cease until a complete re-working of this phase of the project has taken place.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 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.

In recent days, it has become apparent that the contractors who are working for the Department of Homeland Security in building the wall along the boundary of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument are proceeding with little or no concern for the archaeological and Native American cultural sites that lie in the path of the construction. Monument Hill, for example, is a place of great spiritual importance to several Native American tribes, and the burial place of Apache warriors. Nevertheless, builders are using explosives to level the ground.

In addition, construction is adversely affecting Quitobaquito Springs, the only naturally occurring source of fresh water for miles in any direction. The oasis remains enormously

important to the spiritual practices of the Tohono O'odham people, yet road expansion is threatening the physical integrity of the surface of the Springs, along with some burial places nearby. Use of the water for building materials is also diminishing the water table.

These actions were carried out under the authority of the REAL ID Act of 2005, which allows for the waiver of compliance with important federal preservation statutes in order to speed up construction of the wall. Some of those laws include the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Antiquities Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. SAA and other groups strongly opposed the REAL ID Act at the time, arguing that such a waiver would result in unnecessary damage to and destruction of irreplaceable natural and heritage resources. We are now seeing the results of that unwise decision by Congress.

This terrible situation cannot be allowed to continue. In order to prevent further desecration and permanent damage to our shared cultural past, all further construction in the Organ Pipe National Monument must immediately cease, and not resume until 1) comprehensive cultural and environmental resources evaluations have taken place, 2) a plan to mitigate the damage to the sites is carried out, and 3) all impacted Native American Tribes have been meaningfully consulted.

Sincerely,

Joe E. Watkins, Ph.D., RPA
President