



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Testimony of the Society for American Archaeology on the Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee**

February 9, 2022

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is thankful for the opportunity to present the following testimony on the implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). We would like to take this opportunity to bring to the subcommittee's attention an important issue related to the GAOA—and other statutes—that will have a major impact on heritage resources preservation in the coming years.

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 thousands of 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.

Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) to protect the nation's irreplaceable historic and cultural resources. For example, the NHPA and its Section 106 regulations require federal agencies to consider and consult on impacts of their actions and undertakings on historic properties—those included or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of the review is to determine whether the project will harm historically significant resources. The U.S. states and territories in the United States—along with many federally recognized tribes—have State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). Section 106 requires federal agencies to consult with SHPOs/THPOs, as appropriate, on the effects of undertakings to historic properties.

Unfortunately, the fact is that there are not enough cultural resources professionals in either the public or private sector, including archaeologists, to carry out the compliance tasks needed to protect heritage resources. There are a number of reasons for this. The high cost of education, and the resulting debt burdens, is deterring many recent anthropology graduates from entering or remaining in the field for which they have trained. Another is the fact that federal hiring of full-time cultural resources employees has lagged well behind the growing size of agency missions. At present, there are approximately just 130 more federal archaeologists today than there were in

2004, in spite of the fact that the compliance workload has increased considerably. The situation in the private sector is equally problematic. According to one estimate, cultural resources management firms, which provide most of the information and recommendations necessary for the consultation process between federal agencies and SHPOs/THPOs, are experiencing a substantial national deficit of archaeologists with the needed education and training to manage and direct Section 106 investigations.

While funding has been set aside in the GAOA for federal land management agencies to hire additional cultural resources staff to respond to GAOA needs, including high-level project management, there is another problem. The delay in finalizing the FY 2022 appropriations legislation has made it impossible to hire sufficient cultural resources staff to meet compliance needs until mid-summer 2022, at best. As a result, GAOA and other project compliance will suffer.

As a result of continually underfunding cultural resources programs with respect to FTEs, agencies are increasingly unable to effectively meet GAOA and Section 106 mandates in a timely manner. The recent passage of the new infrastructure bill will place even greater pressure on the already-overburdened cultural resources sector, both public and private.

This is a brief overview of the stark reality facing our national historic and cultural preservation system. While the SAA and other groups will have more to say about this subject in the weeks and months ahead, we urge the subcommittee to begin considering possible remedies for the aspects of the situation that it can address; namely, to advance legislation that authorizes greater funding and staff to federal cultural resources programs.