



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Testimony of Dr. Jeffrey Altschul
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Before the House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
On the Department of Interior's FY2014 Budget Request**

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The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) welcomes this opportunity to submit testimony to the subcommittee and would like to thank the panel for its support of the research, interpretation, and protection of American's archaeological heritage.

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.

SAA recognizes the extraordinary fiscal challenges facing the nation. It is imperative that every federal dollar be spent wisely. The federal government must also, however, carry out its responsibilities in the proper stewardship of the cultural resources under its purview. Inadequate funding or outright cuts for heritage programs will put cultural resources at risk, and place further strain on the regulatory framework under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), with the predictable outcome of slowing federal projects, permits, and licenses. Cuts will thus produce a net negative economic outcome.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE—Park Base Operations, Cultural Resource Stewardship

NPS cultural resource stewardship activities within Base Operations provide the research, training, and management activities necessary to preserve and protect some of the nation's most important archaeological, historic, and cultural resources, both on site and in museum collections. The challenges facing NPS in maintaining the integrity of these resources are great. The impacts on sites and materials from climate change, for example, are being felt now. With each year that we delay in addressing their effects, our heritage suffers and the costs to remediating those effects increase, if they can be remediated at all. Adding to the difficulty is a long-standing, structural decline in NPS cultural resources staffing. The regional support centers have not had a base increase in funding for twenty years. Many archaeologist positions in the centers and individual parks are vacant. The Western Archaeological and Conservation Center, for one, has not had an archaeologist on staff for more than a decade. The NPS archaeological workforce is, in short, gradually being hollowed out.

It is very troubling that the FY2014 budget calls for a reduction of \$1 million and nine full-time employees (FTEs) in cultural resource base operations while devoting, in the same sub-activity, more than \$2 million to the increase of Geographic Information System support to the parks. We believe this initiative, though important, is premature given the larger situation. SAA requests that the GIS effort be delayed, and its \$2.1 million be used to fill vacant archaeologist positions and offset the proposed reduction of FTEs in the cultural resource stewardship portion of Park Base Operations.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE—National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs

NPS National Register Programs are vital for the technical assistance and other support they provide for resource protection within parks, to other federal agencies, and to state, tribal, and private sector stakeholders. These programs assist communities in preserving their significant historical and archaeological properties. The archaeological component works to identify, document, and inventory 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.

Our primary concern is that funding levels for the National Register Programs (NRP) have been flat for a number of years. The resulting erosion of spending power makes it increasingly difficult for these offices to protect historic resources in the national parks and elsewhere. Staffing is major problem in this function as well, often due to open positions going unfilled. The Northeast and National Capital Regions are at critical levels for archaeological personnel. While we appreciate the President's proposed increase of \$146,000 for FY2014, it is simply not adequate given the scale of the tasks facing the NRP. SAA supports an appropriation of \$18 million for the NRP as a first step in reversing the spending and staffing decline.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND

The Historic Preservation Fund provides support to state and tribal historic preservation offices and provides matching grants to states to catalog and preserve historic resources. The HPF is a crucial part of the effort to preserve and protect the nation's cultural heritage, yet appropriations have almost always been a small fraction of the Fund's authorized level. In keeping with this unfortunate tradition, the President's request for level funding for the states and tribes is not sufficient to ensure the maximal effectiveness of their historic preservation programs. These programs must be provided with adequate funding to meet their increasing regulatory workloads under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Funding for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs), in particular, has not kept pace with the number of new THPOs added each year. With the addition of each new THPO, and allowing for inflation, less and less funding is actually reaching individual offices. In FY2010, 100 THPOs received an average grant of \$72,500. In FY2012, 131 THPOs received an average grant of \$63,934.

SAA supports an appropriation of \$50 million for the states and \$10 million for the tribes, increases of 6.6% and 11.3%, respectively. SAA also supports the administration's request of \$3 million for communities currently under-represented on the National Register to survey and nominate their historic properties.

NAGPRA GRANTS PROGRAM

The NAGPRA Grants Program serves a critical purpose. The funding it provides is often the only resource available to Indian tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, and museums to facilitate repatriation of culturally affiliated human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony under the NAGPRA statute.

Unfortunately, funding for the Grants Program does not meet demand. As detailed in the reports by the National NAGPRA Program and NAGPRA Review Committee to Congress, the total number of grant proposals received by the program has always well exceeded the program's resources. If grant funding is not increased, the collaboration and consultation between tribes, museums and scientific groups that the statute has helped foster on this important and sensitive matter will falter. The budget's proposed \$1.74 million for the program, the same amount as in FY2012, is inadequate. SAA urges that the National NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$2 million for FY2014, in order to provide the assistance needed to carry out the applicable portions of the law.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT—Cultural Resources Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers the nation's largest public land area. Less than ten percent of the agency's land, however, has been evaluated for archaeological and other heritage resources. BLM cultural heritage staff archaeologists do an outstanding job, yet they face a huge backlog of inventories, stabilization projects, interpretive projects, and collections management projects. Just as important, these personnel are key components of the federal regulatory framework. Without adequate expert staff and appropriate resources, development projects such as pipelines, transmission lines, mines, and solar and wind farms will at best be delayed, and at worst be subject to litigation from stakeholders who believe that cultural resources were inadequately addressed. SAA recognizes that the administration's budget includes a modest increase of \$225 thousand over FY2012 levels. While we applaud that request, we believe that an increase of \$1 million would help ensure that the agency can meet all its cultural resource obligations.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT—National Landscape Conservation System

The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) contains an extensive and diverse array of the nation's archaeological and cultural resources. Nevertheless, as with so many other programs, the funding needed to implement proper stewardship is lacking. The NLCS contains places and landscapes that are visited by large numbers of people. While we are encouraged to see so many visitors enjoying the outdoors in their public lands, the traffic places nearby archaeological resources in jeopardy, unless adequate protections are implemented. SAA strongly supports the \$6 million increase for the NLCS contained in the FY2014 budget request. This additional funding will enable BLM to bring more personnel and effective management strategies online, to ensure that the natural and cultural resources in the NLCS will be preserved.

US FOREST SERVICE—Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness

The President's budget calls for \$260.7 million for FY2014 for the Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness section, a reduction of \$22.1 million from FY2012. This would include a funding level of \$31.2 million Heritage Resources, with a cut of \$2.6 million. It also requests a reduction of 60 FTEs.

The mission of USFS Heritage Resources is to provide stewardship and preservation of the cultural resources located within and upon Forest Service land. It does this through both direct management and key investments in public-private partnerships such as the Passport in Time program. The budget request seems to be anticipating savings from the recently-adopted Managed to Standard measure, which is a performance metric intended to provide an evaluation of known cultural sites in order to enable more efficient management activities. It is possible that the new Standard will result in a more cost-effective stewardship environment. Nevertheless, to reduce funding when the new National Land Management Planning Rule is still in the early stages of implementation, and the USFS is in the process of developing a more comprehensive approach to tribal consultation and preservation of tribal sacred sites, would seem to be premature. Further, just as with other agencies, USFS cultural heritage staff personnel play a crucial role in the implementation of the public lands regulatory process. The administration's proposed reductions will hamper the effectiveness of the agency's work at an important time. SAA urges the subcommittee not to adopt the cuts.

CONCLUSION

SAA believes that protecting the archaeological heritage of our nation is important. We must do what is necessary to keep archaeological resources from being eroded through simple neglect. We also need to ensure that our country's regulatory process is not impeded due to lack of qualified personnel. The programs mentioned above provide jobs, encourage recreation, and improve education. Congress has mandated that federal agencies must address these issues. It is only through the continued support of this subcommittee that agencies will be able to fulfill these mandates and merit the trust placed in them by the American people.