



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Testimony of the Society for American Archaeology Before the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

March 18, 2015

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony to the subcommittee concerning appropriations for cultural resources programs in FY2016, 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.

DEPARTMENT-WIDE PROGRAMS—Cultural and Scientific Collections

The President's budget asks for \$2 million for this initiative in FY2016, an increase of \$1 million over FY2015 enacted. A 2009 OIG report entitled "Department of the Interior, Museum Collections: Accountability and Preservation" identified a number of serious, long-standing deficiencies in the Department's "accountability, management, oversight, and reporting for the more than 188 million objects, specimens, and archives" in its ownership. Interior subsequently launched a multi-year plan to correct the flaws.

This is a critical issue. The law requires the government to provide long-term management and protection of the cultural resources items found on federal land, so they can be made available for study and interpretation by tribal groups, scholars, students, and the general public. The improperly catalogued and stored materials in the Department's care could be lost forever, along with the information they contain, if they are not preserved and protected. Though some progress has been made in correcting the situation, the \$2 million requested in the FY2016 budget will go toward additional inventorying, assessment, housing and oversight of the extensive collections still to be remedied. The SAA urges the subcommittee to approve this funding request.

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, however, are great and growing. The crux of the issue is the long-term structural decline in NPS cultural resources staffing and funding. Attrition from

an aging workforce has led to an increasing number of vacant positions that are not being filled. In addition, funding levels for archaeological activities in many parks and regional centers have not seen a base increase in years. The archaeology program is simply being hollowed out. Given this situation, we fear that the NPS will be increasingly unable to deal with the new threats that our cultural resources will face in the years ahead. The impacts on sites and materials from climate change constitute one example. With each year that we delay in addressing these problems, our heritage suffers and the costs to remediating those effects increase, if they can be remediated at all.

The administration has proposed \$109.24 million for the program in FY2016, an increase of \$10.73 million over FY2015 enacted. Of the increase, \$5.5 million would be allocated to better preserve National Parks resources associated with the Civil Rights Movement. Another \$3 million (as part of the Cultural Resources Challenge) would go toward the creation of a baseline cultural resources inventory in the National Parks. The information to be gathered would include basic overviews and assessments, treatment plans, and emergency operations plans, all with an eye toward *“improved availability and accuracy of baseline information...better resource management and understanding”* and *“increased consideration of cultural resources in park management decisions.”* While SAA supports both of these initiatives and believes them to be worthwhile, regarding the baseline inventory we feel compelled to point out that without adequate staffing and funding for the cultural program, it will be difficult to assemble this additional information or use it to its full potential. SAA thus respectfully requests a total increase of \$15.73 million for the Cultural Resource Stewardship component in FY2016, with \$5 million dedicated toward addressing the staffing and base funding issues discussed above.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE—National Recreation and Preservation National Register 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.

As with the Cultural Resources Stewardship function, our primary concern for the National Register Programs (NRP) is that they have seen flat funding 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 a major problem in this function as well, often due to open positions going unfilled. While we support the President’s request for a \$219,000 increase in fixed costs, and a new \$703,000 over the \$16.83 million FY2015 enacted (as part of the Cultural Resources Challenge) over the to digitize the records of the National Register of Historic Places, the NRP need a larger down payment in order to begin to reverse years of decline. SAA supports an appropriation of \$18 million for the NRP.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE—NAGPRA Grants Program

The NAGPRA Grants Program serves a crucial 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.

Funding for the Grants Program has consistently fallen short of demand. As detailed in numerous 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 allotted resources. If grant funding—which has fallen in real dollar terms over the past several years—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. This is why the President’s proposed \$1.67 million for the program, a reduction of \$90,000 from the \$1.74 million FY2015 enacted, is a step in the wrong direction. SAA urges that the National NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$2 million for FY2016, in order to provide the assistance needed to carry out the applicable portions of the law.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND

The Historic Preservation Fund provides crucial support to state and tribal historic preservation offices and matching grants to states to catalog and preserve their historic resources. Without the HPF, the preservation system established by the National Historic Preservation Act—particularly with regards to its Section 106 review process—simply would not function. In spite of this, appropriations have seldom equaled the Fund’s authorized level. Though the President’s request for the HPF in FY2016 contains a substantial increase, nearly all of it would go toward a competitive grants program for communities to survey and nominate historic properties associated with the Civil Rights Movement to the National Register. Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) would see an increase of \$1 million (as another part of the Cultural Resource Challenge), while their counterparts in the states would be held to level funding once again. We strongly support the increase for the THPO’s, and believe that the Civil Rights competitive grant initiative is another worthy idea. The fact remains, however, that the proposed funding for both the states and tribes is simply not sufficient for them to carry out their historic preservation programs effectively. They must be given adequate support to meet their increasing regulatory workloads.

We are therefore calling for an appropriation of \$60 million for the states and \$15 million for the tribes in FY2016, along with the administration’s request of \$2.5 million for Historically-Black Colleges and Universities, and the \$30.5 million for the Civil Rights competitive grants program.

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. Given this, SAA strongly supports the President’s request of \$17.2 million, an increase of \$2 million over FY2015 enacted, to enable the agency to better inventory, protect, and stabilize sensitive sites from the negative effects brought about by natural events and illicit human activity.

US FOREST SERVICE—Heritage Resources

The President's budget calls for \$28.59 million for FY2016 for the Heritage Resources program, a reduction of \$196,000 from FY2015 enacted. 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. This is an exemplary program that has consistently exceeded expectations. For example, the number of heritage programs managed to standard surpassed its target level by 21.3% in FY2014. In this context, the administration's proposed reduction doesn't make much sense. In order to enable the program to continue to produce such good outcomes, SAA urges the subcommittee to reject the proposed cut.

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE—Cultural and Historic Resources

The cultural and historic resources program is part of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Refuge Visitor Services function. The President's request for Visitor Services in FY2016 is \$76.79 million, an increase of \$6.47 million from FY2015 enacted. Nearly all of the increase will go toward the Urban Wildlife Conservation program. The cultural resources (CR) program protects numerous culturally significant locations on USFWS land, including many places listed on the National Register. There are thousands of known archaeological sites under the agency's care, with many more remaining to be discovered. It also maintains a collection of millions of objects and artifacts housed in both federal and non-federal repositories.

The cultural resources professionals at the Service are very hard-working, dedicated, creative, and good at their jobs. The problem is that there are far too few of them, and they have inadequate resources to work with, in order to effectively carry out their mission. This has resulted in severe strains when it comes to agency compliance in many parts of the country. The effects of this strain are predictable. Too often the USFWS, in an effort to minimize its CR costs and personnel time, does its best to avoid its mandated role under the NHPA and other preservation statutes, especially in cases where there has been damage to protected sites and artifacts. For example, at the Eager Pond construction project in Amity Pueblo, Arizona, funded in part by the agency, extensive harm was done to cultural features, including human burials. Under Section 106 of the NHPA, the Service is responsible for mitigating this damage. Despite extensive consultation on the matter, however, the agency has resisted accepting responsibility, in contradiction of the plain language of the statute. Archaeologists and Native American tribes are understandably upset, particular since it took years to collect the human remains left on the surface. Damage to cultural features exposed to the elements continues. We suspect USFWS' recalcitrance to accept its legal responsibility is because it does not have the personnel or money needed to resolve the situation.

USFWS needs more cultural resources professionals. In order to start bringing the staffing and program funding levels up to par, we strongly urge the subcommittee to allocate a total of \$81.79 million to Visitor Services, an increase of \$11.47 million from FY2015 enacted, with \$5 million of the new monies assigned to the Cultural and Historic Resources program for new staff and Section 106 mitigation work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.