



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington DC, DC 20250-0002

Dear Secretary Rollins,

The SAA is writing to express its concern with the impact that recent staff layoffs have had upon the U.S. Forest Service's and the Natural Resources Conservation Service's ability to protect the archaeological resources under its care.

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 more than 6,000 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.

The USFS' National Heritage Program carries out identification and preservation of cultural resources that are part of the 193 million acres that make up the nation's National Forest System. The Heritage Program's activities ensure that present and future generations of Americans can see, understand and appreciate the physical embodiments of the cultures of the peoples who have inhabited the landscapes of our national forests and grasslands over thousands of years. USFS and other archaeologists work to avoid and minimize harm to cultural resources which reduces any conflict between the federal government and other parties, which in turn expedites project delivery. The role of the archaeologist is to ensure that federal projects proceed while balancing the protection of our nation's heritage. They are a crucial component to the work of the USDA.

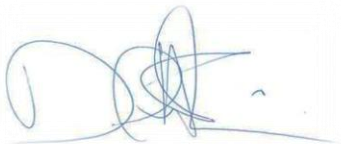
In order to accomplish this mission, which Congress delegated to the USFS and other Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies through the National Historic Preservation Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and other statutes, it is imperative that the USDA employ sufficient numbers of qualified staff persons, including archaeologists. Without adequate personnel levels, USFS and NRDC will be unable to efficiently identify and mitigate damage to historic properties impacted by federal undertakings, as required by the NHPA; manage such

resources for public enjoyment and education; and protect them from vandalism, theft, wildfires, and myriad other threats to the fabric of our shared cultural past. A shortage of staff will also prevent USDA from carrying out meaningful consultation with federally-recognized tribes to preserve and sustain traditional cultures and important tribal places on forest land.

As late as 2023 the USDA employed more than 450 archaeologists, with nearly 400 in the USFS. At that time, Forest Service archaeologists were already hard-pressed to carry out their responsibilities, given the sheer amount of land to cover and the multifaceted nature of the workload. Though specific numbers are uncertain, it is our understanding that more than 40 such archaeologists were dismissed from the Forest Service in recent days, and at least 12 from the NRCS. A sizable reduction in the number of available archaeologists will make a difficult situation even worse and will inevitably result in major delays to needed projects such as timber sales (which generate income and business) and fuel reductions (which reduce wildfire threat and make fires more manageable). **Reducing archaeologists delays project delivery and creates government inefficiency.** It will also result in irreversible damage to the national heritage that is treasured by citizens of all political persuasions.

We understand and appreciate the need to ensure that government actions are carried out efficiently, and that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. Nevertheless, the serious fiscal situation the nation finds itself in today is not the result of overspending on staff archaeologists, or inefficiency in carrying out their congressionally mandated duties. We strongly urge you to reconsider these personnel decisions and fill these newly open positions as quickly as possible. To do otherwise is to ensure greater inefficiency and uncertainty, higher costs, and the degradation of our irreplaceable cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Sandweiss', written over a light blue grid background.

Daniel H. Sandweiss, Ph.D., RPA
President