



## 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 23, 2016**

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony to the subcommittee concerning appropriations for cultural resources programs in FY2017, and would like to again thank the panel for its ongoing 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.

#### **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. We must reiterate, however, that the challenges facing NPS in maintaining the integrity of these resources, however, are growing due to 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 are just one example. With each passing 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 \$106 million for the program in FY2017, an increase of \$2.7 million over FY2016 enacted. Of the increase, \$2 million would be allocated to expand the Vanishing Treasures program, as part of the Cultural Resources Challenge. While SAA strongly supports Vanishing Treasures, we are compelled to point out that without adequate staffing and funding for the cultural resources program in general, any incremental gains in heritage protection will prove unsustainable over the long term. SAA thus respectfully requests a total increase of \$7.7 million for the Cultural Resource Stewardship component in FY2017, 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 mostly 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 of \$17.83 million for the NRP, including an increase of \$903,000 (as part of the Cultural Resources Challenge) to preserve and 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 \$20 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 well 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 we must again state that the President's proposed \$1.67 million for the program is simply inadequate. SAA urges that the National NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$2 million for FY2017, 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 FY2017 contains a substantial increase, most of it would go toward expanding the competitive grants program for communities to survey and nominate historic properties associated with the Civil Rights Movement to the National Register. Additional funds would be allotted to the Historically-Black Colleges and Universities. Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) would see an increase of \$2 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 proposed increases. The fact remains, however, that the proposed funding for both the states and tribes is simply insufficient 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 FY2017, along with the administration's request of \$3.0 million for Historically-Black Colleges and Universities, and the \$25.5 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 \$17.3 million, an increase of \$1.1 million over FY2016 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 \$28.5 million for FY2017 for the Heritage Resources program, a reduction of \$196,000 from FY2016 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, so the administration's proposed reduction doesn't make sense. In order to enable the program to continue to produce 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 \$80.38 million, an increase of \$7 million from FY2016 enacted. Nearly all of the increase will go, once again, 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.

As we noted last year, 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. Although a final agreement on damage mitigation is expected shortly, it has taken years to get to this point. We suspect the great reluctance on the part of the USFWS 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 \$82.38 million to Visitor Services, an increase of \$9 million from FY2016 enacted, with \$2 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.