

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

May 25, 2017

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) appreciates 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.

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 decline in NPS cultural resources staffing. As the President's budget request itself makes clear, this program has seen a nearly 20 percent decline in staffing since 2011.

Thus it is very troubling that the FY2018 budget calls for a steep reduction of \$13 million and 26 full-time employees (FTEs) in cultural resource base operations. These cuts would be devastating to NPS's ability to document and protect our irreplaceable cultural resources, from interpreting historic and prehistoric sites to digitizing museum collections. SAA urges, in the strongest possible terms, the rejection of this request and the maintenance of funding and staffing at present levels.

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.

Funding levels for the NRP cultural programs have been essentially flat for a number of years. This gradual, yet steady erosion of spending power has made 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. The President's proposed de facto cut of \$4.3 million and the elimination of five full-time employees will make an already-difficult situation untenable. The \$1.8 million cut in grant funding for the Japanese-American Confinement Sites is particularly troubling. SAA requests that Congress reject this proposal and maintain current funding and staffing levels for all of the NRP cultural programs.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND

The Historic Preservation Fund provides (HPF) crucial support to state and tribal historic preservation offices. Without the HPF, the preservation system established by the National Historic Preservation Act—particularly the Section 106 review process—simply would not function. In spite of this, appropriations have almost never equaled the HPF's authorized level. In FY2017, the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) and their counterparts in the states (SHPOs) received welcome increases in their funding, while the Save America's Treasures program was reinstated. The additional funding to both SHPOs and THPOs helps to facilitate efficient permitting of development projects, from infrastructure to energy. In addition, funding for competitive grants to preserve resources vital to the Civil Rights movement and for the survey and nomination of sites important to under-represented communities was increased. The President's proposed cut to the HPF of more than \$14 million, however, would paralyze the crucial work of THPOs, SHPOs, and those communities that are trying to preserve their cultural heritage while at the same time contributing to economic growth through infrastructure development. SAA requests that for FY2018 HPF and its individual accounts receive the same levels of funding as they did in the current fiscal year.

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 \$265 thousand over FY2017 levels. While we applaud that request, we believe that an increase of \$1 million would help ensure that the agency can meet its cultural resource obligations.

US FOREST SERVICE—Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness

The President’s budget calls for \$252.8 million for FY2018 for the Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness section, a reduction of \$8.3 million and 63 full-time employees from FY2017. This is totally unacceptable. 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. Like the BLM, heritage resource specialists in the USFS also play key roles in review and compliance for development projects on Forest land in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act. The budget request states that these reductions will allow the USFS to “focus on priority projects and activities...” In fact, these cuts will only greatly impinge on the USFS’s efforts to carry out its key cultural resources preservation responsibilities. SAA urges Congress to not to adopt these unwise cuts, and to maintain current levels of funding and staffing.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES (NEH)

We urge Congress to reject the Administration’s proposed elimination of funding for the NEH. Grants from the Endowment are important in helping to preserve the cultural heritage of the nation and the world. In just one example, the NEH is currently supporting projects that “conduct research and develop resources for the study, documentation, and presentation” of cultural items and sites at risk from “war, looting, natural disasters, economic development, poor management, and tourism...” This work is absolutely vital. SAA requests \$149.8 million for the NEH, the same as current levels.

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS

SAA recommends funding for National Heritage Areas (NHAs) to be maintained at the current level of \$19.8 million. Eliminating the program, as the administration’s short-sighted proposal would do, would undermine local communities’ efforts to preserve their cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

Protecting the archaeological and cultural resources of our nation is important. We must do what is necessary, in terms of adequate funding and staffing, to keep these irreplaceable assets from being eroded through simple neglect. 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 these agencies that we will be able to fulfill these mandates and merit the trust placed in them by the American people.