



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

February 19, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) writes to express its grave concern with the recent layoffs of Department of the Interior (DOI) archaeologists. Without enough staff to carry out the rapidly growing workload, historic and cultural resources in the United States will not receive the protection and interpretation required by federal law. The result will be an irretrievable loss of knowledge and the diminishment of our shared past.

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 in the private sector, at tribal agencies, museums, and government agencies. The SAA has members throughout the United States.

Federal archaeologists perform a huge number of important tasks. Agencies of the DOI employ archaeologists to carry out reviews under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) for federally funded projects, projects requiring a federal permit, or projects on federal lands; conduct surveys for historic and cultural resources under Section 110 of the NHPA; protect archaeological sites and materials; investigate instances of looting of sites under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act; preserve and—if necessary—repatriate highly sensitive cultural and spiritual tribal objects under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; consult with Indigenous and descendant communities on the effects of federal actions on their cultural resources; address cultural resources in National Environmental Policy Act documents; develop contracts and cooperative agreements between federal agencies and private firms or universities; provide technical assistance on archaeological matters with other federal personnel and outside stakeholders; coordinate and manage volunteers helping to

preserve cultural sites; and curate federal archaeological collections. The vast majority of this work is mandated by Congress through statute.

The scale of the work is immense. For example, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) archaeologists must oversee 244 million acres with approximately 217 staff members. The National Park Service (NPS) manages more than 80 million acres with fewer than 270 archaeologists. In other words, there are already too few archaeologists on hand to handle the workload, which is sure to expand with the president's push for greater energy and mineral activity on federal lands. Reducing this critical workforce will exacerbate an already-pressing problem.

If the Section 106 process is to function effectively, and federally sponsored undertakings are to be delivered in a timely manner, the NPS, BLM, and other DOI agencies need all the archaeologists they can find to satisfy their statutorily required and program responsibilities.

Thank you for your consideration of these important concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Sandweiss", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

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