



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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I am Dr. Deborah Nichols, a Registered Professional Archaeologist and president of the Society for American Archaeology. We at the SAA greatly appreciate the Advisory Council holding these listening sessions on how best to achieve the President's goal of conserving at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 under the America the Beautiful initiative.

Everyone present in these listening sessions knows how important it is for the nation to preserve its natural resources. But it is equally important to preserve our shared cultural heritage. Without an understanding and appreciation of our past, our understanding of the present will be greatly diminished, and the society and culture that our children and grandchildren inherit will be much the less for it. To paraphrase an old adage—*if you don't know where you've been, you have no idea where you are, and even less where you're going*. As we work to conserve our natural resources and all of the benefits and essentials that come with them, we must also work to preserve our cultural resources. Our heritage and our natural world are inextricably linked.

For example, when we consider the massive challenge posed to us by climate change—something that our distant ancestors also had to face—there are few better resources to consult when devising solutions than the archaeological record. The clues that are contained in archaeological sites and materials can tell us how past generations handled the impact of a changing natural climate—and thus be of enormous help to us today.

The America the Beautiful initiative is therefore an ideal opportunity to address both natural *and* cultural resources preservation. However, the SAA sees two major challenges in accomplishing this goal.

First, cultural resources must be included in the planning and deliberation of the America the Beautiful initiative. This includes adding language about historic preservation, archaeological sites, and cultural resources to the initiative and any ensuing laws and regulations that support these ends. Inclusion of cultural resources must be presented in a manner that the public can understand and appreciate. Second, to save our past and inform our future, cultural resources must be identified, conserved, and interpreted, which, in turn, requires sufficient numbers of trained and experienced archaeologists. Currently, the Federal government has too few on staff to support the existing Federal Archeology Program. As of 2020, there were only about 300 more archaeologists working in the federal agencies (1371) than there were in 2000 (1068). Project backlogs are already extensive. Additional responsibilities are expected to skyrocket with passage of the Great American Outdoors Act and the Infrastructure

Investment and Jobs Act. Many more archaeologists at all experience levels will be needed very soon, especially if the America the Beautiful campaign is to be added to the mix. We are seeing a similar need in private sector archaeology. Cultural resources management firms are reporting that at present there are more than 450 unfilled master's and doctorate-level archaeology positions in the U.S., given the expanding need, and that if the current trend continues, by 2031 there will be a gap of more than 3500 workers. There must be adequate attention to the regulatory structure to ensure smooth project delivery that meets the intended preservation goals of the initiative.

To achieve the President's goals for America the Beautiful, and ensure the protection of our heritage for future generations, the U.S. needs more archaeologists. Other sectors of the preservation community are facing similar shortages of professionals. The SAA and other preservation groups are taking steps to address this in the private and government sectors. It will require, however, a multi-pronged approach by universities and colleges, businesses, and government to have a sufficient number of trained professionals to successfully implement all the new Acts, and to realize the opportunities that will make it possible for the U.S. and its people to appreciate, conserve, and manage our heritage.

In summary, to succeed at making America more beautiful, it is vital that policymakers understand that 1) cultural resources matter and must be addressed in this initiative, and 2) the necessary financial and human resources must be provided to preserve and protect our cultural heritage. Thank you.