

# Managing the Past for the Future

Roger G. Kennedy

**T**he past is not dead; it is in constant use by those of us in the present. We use it to tell stories, to validate actions, to bring to memory past events and people important to us. One of the best ways we come to understand the past is through the scientific investigation of archeological sites, collections, and data. But, in order to seek the counsel of the past through our nation's archeological sites, we must ensure that they are protected and managed effectively.

Although we cannot predict all the problems of coming generations, one thing is certain. In the future, we shall have fewer archeological sites. The remains of the past deteriorate naturally, are pushed aside by modern development, and are wrenched from the ground by those who would use them for private gain.

Those of us concerned about the preservation of archeological resources must be committed to their long-term protection and management. In the future, changes to our understanding of the past and improvements in how we investigate it will enable us to extract

additional information from the archeological record. It is likely that we will be able to learn more, not less, about the past, but only if the sites, collections, and data are preserved for study.

The magnitude of this endeavor is apparent when one considers that only a fraction of the 650 million acres under the Federal government's jurisdiction has been inventoried for archeological sites. The challenge is further increased by the hundreds of thousands of reports and millions of artifacts and bits of data that must be cared for and curated to ensure that these valuable pieces of the past are not destroyed.

Effective management integrates the multiple interests in the archeological record. Sites must be protected even as valuable information about them is made available to the public. Archeologists and managers must reach out and work with the descendants of those whose cultural history they investigate, protect, and manage.

Management decisions that affect archeological resources should be made with awareness that these remains are unique and nonrenewable. Decisions that might deny them to future generations must be taken very seriously. To this end, I encourage managers and others, within existing programs and projects, to redouble their efforts to inventory and evaluate their archeological holdings. The more we know, the better we can plan and preserve.

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## A National Strategy for Federal Archeology

Archeological remains allow us to appreciate the superb wood-working skills of the Makah Indians over 800 years ago, the sprawling trade systems at mid-continent during centuries long past, and the Old World ties of Chinese miners in the northern Rockies of the 1880s. The National Strategy for Federal Archeology preserves the voice of the past through a plan encompassing all the areas below (the next section in this issue details initiatives in all of these categories). The Secretary of the Interior issued the strategy in 1991.

**Public Education and Participation.** Federal and other public agencies should provide more and better public education about and opportunities for the public to participate in archeology—archeology week celebrations, open houses, tours, volunteer programs, films. Federal and other public agencies that conduct archeological investigations or manage archeological sites should include public participation and education activities throughout their projects and programs.

**Public Use of the Archeological Paleoenvironmental Record.** Federal and other public agencies should provide for public use of the archeological record of thousands of years of human adaptation to changing environments. This identifies the conditions in which people have lived and the changes made in society, technology, and human habits in response to changing climate and natural

resources, and can help us understand and shape our present responses to changing environments.

**Fight Looting and Preserve the Archeological Record in Place.** Federal and other public agencies should focus attention on archeological site preservation in place, provide increased law enforcement personnel trained in archeological protection, and use the strengthened Archaeological Resources Protection Act to prosecute looters.

**Interagency Cooperation in Information Exchange.** Federal and other public agencies must work to improve archeological information exchange at the national, state, and local levels.

**Site Inventories.** Federal agencies need to find the means to undertake archeological inventories of the public lands, and should encourage tribes, states, local governments, private organizations, and individuals to inventory and provide information about the distribution and characteristics of the archeological resources in this country.

**Curation of Collections and Records.** Federal agencies must systematically preserve the artifacts, other excavated remains, and related records from archeological sites on the public lands they manage or control, and encourage other private and public organizations and individuals to do the same.