

Protecting Cultural Resources at the Nevada Test Site

Introduction

Cultural resources are abundant on the Nevada Test Site (NTS), indicating Native Americans occupied the region for more than 10,000 years. Historic artifacts of more recent origin are also present, reflecting use by miners, ranchers, and settlers who traveled through the area. The U.S. Department of Energy National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office (NNSA/NSO) is committed to protecting these resources because they provide valuable evidence about the past human occupation of the NTS and are of great cultural and religious significance for native Paiute and Shoshone peoples.



Tippipah Springs is one of several natural springs on the Nevada Test Site containing campsites once used by nomadic Indians.

Types of sites

Various archeological sites are identified on the Nevada Test Site. Most were left by the ancestors of the present-day Paiutes and Shoshones. These sites include rock shelters, brush houses, fire pits for cooking, and artifacts on ground surfaces. The most frequently discovered artifacts include stone tools, spear and arrow points, pieces of pottery, and other durable materials.

In addition, rock art such as petroglyphs and pictographs remain in areas of the NTS that contain important Indian historic data, including Captain Jack Cave, Big George Cave, and Ammonia Tanks.

NTS Historic Preservation Program

Before the initiation of land-disturbing or building and structure modifications at the NTS, archeologists conduct surveys or evaluations to identify important cultural and historical resources, evaluate the cultural and historical significance, and assess possible impacts. Native American representatives also conduct cultural assessments of proposed land disturbances to identify resources that may be of religious or cultural significance to American Indians.

Why protect cultural resources?

NNSA/NSO is required by federal laws and regulations to take into account the effect of NTS activities and programs on cultural and historical resources that may be of significance to American Indians. NNSA/NSO is required to preserve the historical, cultural, and scientific values these resources represent.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, establishes as federal policy the protection of prehistoric properties and requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their activities on cultural and historical resources, including those of importance to American Indians.

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 makes it government policy to protect and preserve the inherent rights of American Indians to exercise their traditional religions by allowing access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through traditional ceremonial activities.



The Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 requires federal agencies to minimize the loss of archeological data by modifying projects or conducting data recovery programs.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 provides for federal agency protection of Native American graves and establishes processes for the identification and repatriation of Native American human remains, funerary objects, cultural patrimony, and sacred objects in federal custody to American Indian tribes.

Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites, directs federal agencies to accommodate access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners and to avoid adversely affecting the physical integrity of such sacred sites.

Worker requirements

Part of the responsibility for protecting and preserving the cultural and historic resources at the NTS resides with NTS workers. To fulfill this responsibility, NNSA/NSO and its contractors observe the following cultural resources protective measures:

- If workers encounter artifacts, they must leave them in place, undisturbed.
- Work activities are allowed only in areas marked or approved for land disturbance.
- Motor vehicles are driven only on existing approved roads.
- If an archeological site is found, workers must stop all activities that might damage the site and contact the NNSA/NSO authorities.
- If workers encounter human remains, or what they think may be human remains, they must stop work immediately and contact NNSA/NSO authorities.
- Damage to archeological or historic sites can result in expensive and disruptive work delays. Vandalism or unlawful collection of artifacts is cause for disciplinary action, ranging from reprimand to dismissal, as well as civil and criminal penalties.

Penalties

The Archeological Resources Protection Act makes it a crime to excavate or remove artifacts from federal land without a permit. **Penalties include fines up to \$20,000 and a possible two-year prison term for first time offenders and up to \$100,000 and as long as five years in jail for repeat offenders.** Civil penalties may also be assessed to recover the costs of restoring cultural resources to their former condition.

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