



NEW MEXICO ARCHEOLOGICAL COUNCIL
P.O. Box 25691, Albuquerque, NM 87125

June 24, 2011

The Honorable Gary R. Herbert
Governor
Utah State Capitol Complex
350 North State Street, Suite 200
PO Box 142220
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2220

Dear Governor Herbert:

The New Mexico Archeological Council (NMAC) writes because we are very concerned over the potential effects of the recent termination of three senior staff members in the Antiquities Section of the Division of Utah State History. NMAC is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to maintain and promote the goals of professional archaeology in the State of New Mexico. These goals include promoting awareness of New Mexico's cultural resources among public agencies, corporations, and members of the public. The majority of our membership is comprised of professional archaeologists who are permitted to conduct archaeological studies on federal and state lands.

The Antiquities Section staff members represent many years of experience and successful advocacy for the protection of Utah's treasure of prehistoric and historic archaeological resources. They have also worked to enable school children and the general public to share in the knowledge gained from study of these resources.

These terminations have been officially justified as the result of needed budget reductions. However, these were evidently the only job cuts made in the State History Division, and the single replacement position that has been advertised essentially duplicates one of the jobs that was eliminated, but with no stated educational or experience requirements. Thus, it is hard to escape the conclusion that these terminations resulted from a policy decision to substantially downgrade the importance of archaeology in Utah's programs of state history.

We believe that this is a serious mistake that will negatively impact Utah's ability to preserve, study, and interpret the over 12000 years of history that is represented by the thousands of archaeological sites present in the state. One of the most important roles the Antiquities Section plays is to ensure that the probable effects of development projects on archaeological sites are adequately and professionally evaluated in advance of publicly funded or permitted construction. When this is not properly done, it risks not only the loss of important heritage sites, but may jeopardize the development itself. In other parts of the country, we have seen examples of projects that were cancelled after the expenditure of tens of millions of dollars because important sites (e.g., major Indian burial grounds) were not properly detected prior to the start of

construction. Without strong leadership from highly qualified and experienced staff, this essential function of the Antiquities Section may be jeopardized. The Antiquities Section serves the state best when its senior staff is sufficiently qualified and secure to be able to provide both the public and private sectors with accurate and unvarnished assessments of the nature and value of Utah's archaeological resources.

Archaeological sites on federal land or that are affected by federally licensed or funded developments are subject to the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act. Obviously, this act applies to a very large fraction of archaeological sites in Utah. The Antiquities Section plays a vital role in giving the state a voice in federal decisions that affect Utah's archaeological resources. The Section staff also works closely with Indian tribes and the state NAGPRA committee to ensure that human remains are treated with proper respect under the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and that tribal heritage concerns are taken into account in evaluations and decisions regarding archaeological sites. The loss of experienced leadership in the Antiquities Section will necessarily weaken the state's voice in these interactions.

Finally, the positions that were eliminated included the responsibility to help thousands of school children in the state understand and appreciate Utah's very long human history. Other responsibilities included working with volunteers, and with the statewide archaeological society. These activities help raise awareness of the value of archaeological sites and the need to protect them, and are central to the educational and public service missions of the Division of State History. We are quite concerned that these essential activities will be severely curtailed or become much less effective because of the loss of these positions.

We sincerely hope that as Governor, you will work to ensure that these important functions of the Antiquities Section can be effectively continued.

Sincerely,

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