



**Statement of the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers
Ira L. Matt, Executive Director
Fiscal Year 2027 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations
Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate
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Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, I would like to share the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers' (NATHPO)'s recommendations for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) appropriations. My name is Ira L. Matt and I serve as NATHPO's Executive Director of Indigenous Diplomacy and Federal Relations.

NATHPO appreciated the Subcommittee's inclusion of \$23.75 million in the Tribal line item of the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) in the FY26 full year continuing resolution. While this testimony is about recommendations for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) for FY27, I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to press for the prompt release the FY26 funding. The release of the FY25 funds were delayed for more than one hundred days placing many Tribal Nations in a financially precarious position. A similar delay this year would undermine important work already underway and increase the risk of harm to Tribal Nations' sacred places, burial sites, and other irreplaceable cultural resources.

For FY27, I strongly urge the Committee to provide \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. Although the Tribal line received a \$750,000 increase in FY26, that was the first increase since FY23 and it has not kept pace with either the growing THPO workload or the increasing number of THPOs. From FY23 to FY26, the number of funded THPOs grew from 211 to 235, while the average amount available per THPO declined from about \$108,000 to about \$101,000. At the same time, THPOs are being asked to respond to a growing volume of federal undertakings and other matters affecting Tribal places, histories, and rights. The issue before the Committee is not simply whether funding has increased, but whether Tribal Nations have the capacity to carry out this work effectively.

What is at stake? For Tribal Nations, the work of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers is a function of Tribal governance. THPOs help identify, protect, and document the places, burial sites, histories, Place Names, Indigenous Knowledge, and other cultural and historical information that Tribal Nations rely on to exercise sovereignty, support inherent decision-making authority, and protect their interests. This work supports Tribal governments in pursuing co-management, advancing land and water-related claims, protecting treaty and other reserved rights, seeking the return of ancestors and cultural items, and responding to federal undertakings that may affect places of religious and cultural importance. It also helps ensure that federal agencies have the information necessary to make better decisions in carrying out their own legal obligations and to avoid actions that cause lasting harm. This work carries significance not only for Tribal Nations today, but in fulfilling enduring responsibilities to our ancestors and to future generations. When THPO offices are underfunded, Tribal Nations have less capacity to support federal decision-making and to protect irreplaceable places and information before they are disturbed, damaged, or lost.

In addition to providing \$34 million for the Tribal line item for FY27 to strengthen Tribal Nations' capacity to carry out this essential governmental work, we urge the Committee to also support the below funding levels:

1. National Park Service, National NAGPRA Program:
 - a. Exclusively for NAGPRA Grants (\$12.4 million)
 - b. Program administration (\$1 million for Program Use)
2. Bureau of Indian Affairs – Create line items and support the following divisions:
 - a. Cultural Resource compliance at the 12 Regional BIA Offices (\$8 million);
 - b. Central Office cultural resource efforts throughout the bureau (\$800,000);
 - c. NAGPRA compliance work (\$1.5 million);
 - d. To fight ARPA crimes on Indian reservations (\$850,000);
 - e. Museum property and curation (\$400,000).
3. Smithsonian Institution: For repatriation activities, including Review Committee and repatriation office (\$3 million)
4. Bureau of Land Management: Tribal Liaison Program, NAGPRA compliance (\$3 million)

What are Tribal Historic Preservation Officers? THPOs are the designated representatives of federally recognized Tribal Nations that have chosen, pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), to assume all or part of the functions otherwise carried out by a State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on Tribal lands. For Tribal Nations, THPOs are not merely preservation staff. They are part of Tribal governments and play a direct role in advancing Tribal priorities and responsibilities in matters affecting Tribal lands, but also places of religious and cultural importance, burial sites, Indigenous Knowledge, and other cultural and historical information off Tribal lands. Their work is grounded in Tribal self-determination and in the values and priorities of each Tribal Nation. It often extends beyond federal compliance to include repatriation, protection of treaty and other reserved rights, and ensuring that federal agencies understand Tribal concerns early enough to reduce delays and avoid irreversible harm.

What is NATHPO? NATHPO is the only national nonprofit organization devoted to supporting Tribal historic preservation programs. We advocate for Tribal Nations and Tribal preservation leaders working to protect Native places, uphold Tribal sovereignty, and carry forward the histories, knowledge, and responsibilities that remain vital to Native peoples.

1. Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), administered by NPS – Tribal line item (\$34 million)

As of January 2026, there are 235 NPS-recognized THPO programs nationwide. The HPF Tribal line item is the only dedicated federal funding stream that supports those THPO offices and their capacity to carry out their responsibilities. We recommend \$34 million be appropriated in FY27. At that level, the average amount available per THPO would be approximately \$144,680; a necessary increase to operate a program that is increasingly expected to respond to a growing volume of federal undertakings, consultation demands, and related work.

This funding is a practical investment in effective government-to-government process. It strengthens Tribal capacity to engage early, provide informed input, and help federal agencies avoid preventable conflict, delay, and irreversible harm to places of religious and cultural importance, burial sites, and other irreplaceable Tribal places and resources. It's important to understand that Tribal Nations are not seeking to stop projects, they need energy, infrastructure,

housing, and economic development, more so than most. The issue being raised is capacity and fairness. Tribes should not be asked to absorb the impacts and carry a growing federal workload without the resources necessary to protect Tribal interests and participate effectively, and to share in the benefits rather than only incur the costs.

Additional HPF programs administered by the National Park Service:

NATHPO appreciates the strong HPF funding levels the Committee has provided in recent years. We support the request of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that Congress provide a total FY27 HPF appropriation of \$250 million. Within that funding we recommend:

- \$70 million for State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs);
- \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs);
- \$28 million for competitive grants related to African American Civil Rights;
- \$7 million for the History of Equal Rights Grants program;
- \$13 million for grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities;
- \$40 million for Save America’s Treasures grants;
- \$17 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants;
- \$5 million for grants related to communities underrepresented on the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks;
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- \$11 million for the Semiquincentennial grant program to preserve historical sites commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America.

2. National Park Service, National NAGPRA Program

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) provides for the disposition of Native American cultural items¹ removed from Federal or Tribal lands, or in the possession or control of museums or federal agencies, to lineal descendants, Indian Tribes, or Native Hawaiian organizations based on descent or cultural or geographic affiliation. NAGPRA prohibits trafficking of Native American cultural items and created a grants program exclusively for Indian Tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, and public museums.

NAGPRA Grants Program:

In 2024, the National Park Service revised the regulations implementing NAGPRA. These revisions dramatically increased the burden on Indian Tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, and museums. We request that the NAGPRA grants program be funded at \$12.4 million to be used exclusively for NAGPRA Grants to Indian Tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, and museums.

Administration of National NAGPRA Program:

\$1 million, additionally, for NAGPRA program administration, including the publication of Federal Register notices, grant administration, civil penalty investigations, and Review Committee costs. We also request that you direct the Government Accountability Office to evaluate the effectiveness of the National NAGPRA Program’s implementation of civil penalty investigations.

¹ Cultural items include human remains, funerary or sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.

3. Bureau of Indian Affairs – Create line items and support the following divisions

The BIA has federally mandated responsibilities to work with Indian Tribes and comply with the NHPA, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NAGPRA, and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). Currently the BIA does not have any budget line items devoted to complying with these federal laws. Funds are not only needed for the BIA to comply with their internal development efforts, such as roads and forestry, but also to conduct project reviews of outside development projects, such as oil and gas development. ARPA crime on Indian reservations continues to be a major problem, as looters and traffickers continue to steal valuable cultural resources from Tribal and federal lands. Until recently, the BIA did not have any special agents or law enforcement forces to combat this uniquely destructive crime in Indian Country. There are now four agents nationwide and we urge the Committee to enable two additional agents in the lower 48 and two in Alaska.

NATHPO recommends the BIA create line items and support the following divisions:

- a. Cultural Resource compliance at the 12 Regional BIA Offices (\$8 million);
- b. Central Office cultural resource efforts throughout the bureau (\$800,000);
- c. NAGPRA compliance work (\$1.5 million);
- d. To fight ARPA crimes on Indian reservations (\$850,000);
- e. Museum property and curation (\$400,000).

4. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of Natural History Repatriation Programs

NATHPO requests that the Smithsonian Institution receive \$3 million specifically directed to expediting its repatriation activities.

5. Bureau of Land Management: Tribal Liaisons and Cultural Resources Management

The BLM oversees the largest, most diverse and scientifically important collection of historic and cultural resources on our nation's public lands, as well as the museum collections and data associated with them. We appreciate the Committee's commitment to ongoing oversight of the Department's reorganization. NATHPO and many other organizations are profoundly concerned with the impact of the reorganization and loss of staff within the Cultural Resources Division. The cultural resources program also supports NHPA Section 106 review of land-use proposals, Section 110 inventory and protection of cultural resources, compliance with NAGPRA, and consultation with Tribes and Alaska Native Governments. We are very appreciative of the Committee's continuing support for the agency to enhance its National Cultural Resources Information Management System (NCRIMS).

Additionally, responsive to recommendations in the 2010 GAO report on NAGPRA, BLM stated at that time that nine new positions and \$22 million were needed to improve compliance. Neither of these has happened, and now the 2024 NAGPRA regulations present further demands that BLM (and other agencies as well as Tribes) are not equipped to meet. It is incumbent upon this Committee to provide commensurate resources to assist with the critical and overdue task of bringing ancestors home. We recommend providing specific funding of \$3 million above enacted, specifically to continue building the vital Tribal Liaison Program, including the Headquarters agency lead and 12 State Office positions, and staffing related to NAGPRA compliance.

Thank you for considering our testimony.