



Historic & Cultural Preservation

Preserving the history and traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives is necessary to preserving America's history as a whole. Federal funding to support the repatriation of sacred objects and ancestors, for the preservation of cultures, and for the protection of sacred and historical places continues to remain a paramount priority for tribes. The protection of Native cultures spans across complex statutory and regulatory aspects of the federal government. Success in navigating these complex structures has resulted in the repatriation of cultural items, guidance regarding tribal member possession of eagle feathers, and protection of and increased tribal access to sacred places for religious and spiritual purposes.

Key Recommendations

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

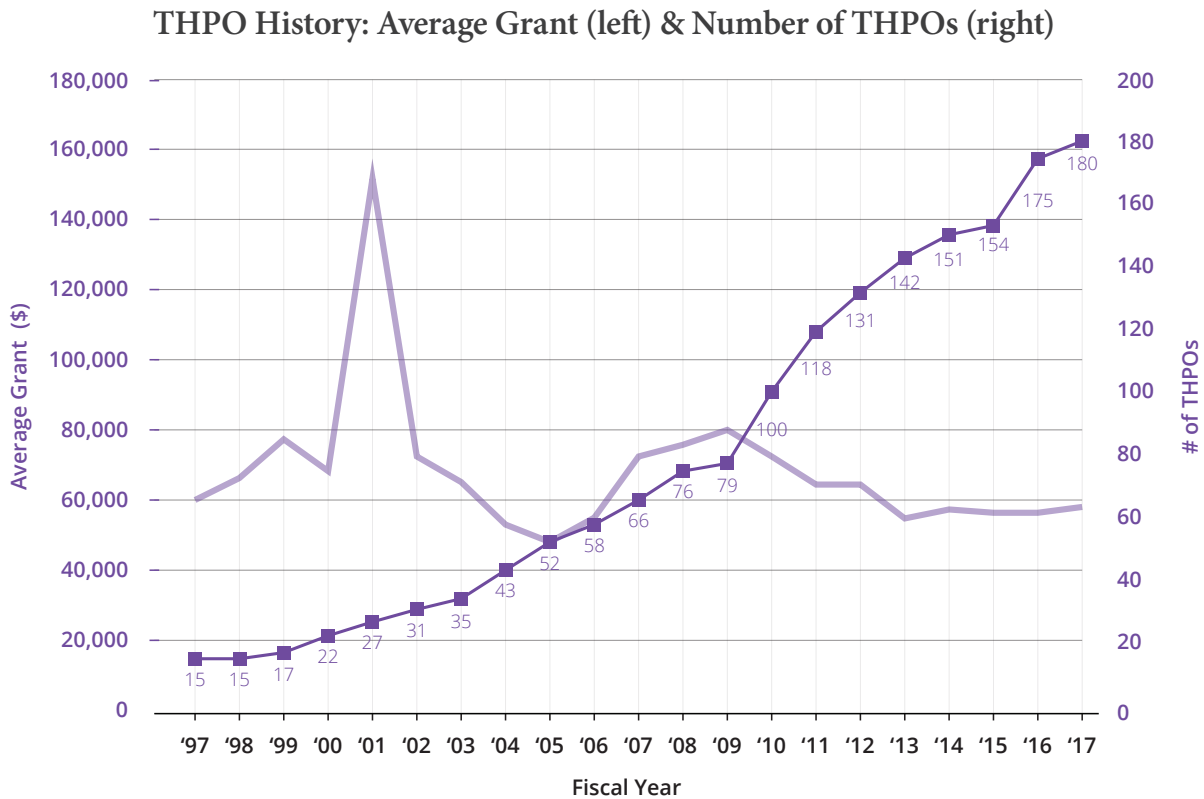
Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Program

- *Provide \$20 million for the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Program.*

Now in its twenty-third year of existence, the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) program has grown from 12 participating Indian tribes to more than 183 tribal programs today. Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) main responsibilities are to assist Federal agency compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The program is operated by the National Park Service and funded through the Historic Preservation Fund. THPOs provide essential technical and cultural expertise to the preservation and protection of a variety of tangible and intangible cultural resources of their respective tribes. They are active in recording oral histories, preserving and revitalizing Native languages, seeking the return of Native American ancestral and sacred objects, and developing mitigation plans for impacted cultural resources. THPOs also have a critical role in the government-to-government relationship expressed through the unique Section 106 consultation process of the NHPA, which is designed to ensure the longevity of tribal sacred places, objects, and ideas.

Authorizing \$20 million specifically for THPOs will ensure that grants from the Historic Preservation Fund keep pace with the cultural preservation needs of the country's 573 federally-recognized tribes. This amount would provide \$109,289.62 to each tribal historic preservation office. This represents a modest increase in funding that nevertheless falls short of the actual needs. As illustrated in the graph below, the average grant funds awarded have not kept pace with the increasing number of and need for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers.



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)

- ***Provide \$4 million for Section 10 of NAGPRA and create a line item for grants to fund work that would lead to cleared determinations of culturally-unidentifiable remains.***

The NAGPRA Section 10 program authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to award funds to tribes, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and museums to implement provisions of the Act, including the repatriation of cultural items and human remains. To date, a majority of Section 10 funds have consistently been used to cover NAGPRA administrative costs under the National Park Service. This practice has diverted critical funds from tribes and their statutory and cultural responsibilities to return cultural heritage and patrimony to their homelands in favor of government overhead. A tribal priority should be established under Section 10 to ensure that grant funding is awarded to tribes. Additionally, a separate line item should be created to fund work with culturally-unidentifiable remains to further support tribal repatriation efforts. Because ancestral remains or items are initially listed as culturally-unidentified, it often takes more resources to decipher inadequate or incomplete historic records to correctly determine the cultural affiliation of an ancestor or item and ensure it is returned to its proper home. The National Park Service should restore funding for grants and staff in the NAGPRA program.

- ***Provide a 10 percent increase for investigations into the failure of museums or other institutions to comply with NAGPRA, and create a line item for investigations of complaints brought by tribes against museums or other institutions.***

Museum compliance with NAGPRA has been an ongoing issue that has resulted in the delay of tribal repatriation efforts. Providing a 10 percent increase for these investigations and a tribal-specific line item will assist the Department of the Interior's efforts to respond in a timely manner. Such directives will further ensure the successful implementation of NAGPRA.