

ARARA Conservation and Preservation Committee Report for 2020-2021

The ARARA Conservation Committee last reported in May 2020.

ARARA distributed about 4500 backpack tags last year as part of our rock art damage reporting program. Early in 2021, the tags were redesigned by Greg Vettel at Linda Olson's request and another 5000 produced. Tags are available to any land management entity on request to distribute to rock art site visitors. The committee chair contacts the heads of cultural resource management for the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service regarding this program, as well as promoting it on Facebook pages about rock art.

Under the ARARA Visit with Respect program, site visitors are offered a large, durable tag that can be affixed to a backpack. The tag lists (with pictographic icons) do's and don'ts for visiting archaeological sites and asks site visitors to report any new damage observe by visiting the ARARA web site. The web site has a form to collect details and photos of the damage. A volunteer will then send the reports along to the appropriate state or federal land-management agency for further action. So far, we have not received any damage reports.

In the realm of federal rock art site management policy, we find ourselves under a much more rock art-friendly regime with the election of President Joe Biden and his appointment of Deb Haaland to his cabinet as head of the Department of the Interior. As a strong conservationist and member of the Pueblo of Laguna, Secretary Haaland has begun implementing policies that will help protect rock art sites on federal lands.

- In a significant advance for historic preservation in the US, the Biden administration has supported the American Council on Historic Preservation's call to halt the Oak Flats land exchange. This land exchange would have set a precedent for federal agencies to skirt preservation law by Congress passing bill requiring them to exchange federal lands for private even if the public lands contained significant historic resources. Historic preservation efforts dodged a fatal bullet on this one. ARARA submitted comments in support of the ACHP's decision. The Conservation Committee sent comments during various phases of the planning process asking that the proposed land exchange not go forward.
- Attempts are well underway to restore Bears Ears National Monument. President Biden is revisiting decisions made by the previous administration with an eye to restoring or expanding the monument boundaries approved by the Obama administration. Editorials in the New York Times and the Washington Post, among others, have expressed support restoration of the national monument.
- An attempt to remove or reduce the size of Areas of Environmental Concern (ACEC) within California desert lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management has been ended. The previously approved ACECs will remain in place.
- The BLM issued new rules around five public shooting ranges in Gila, Maricopa, Pima, Pinal and Yavapai counties in Arizona. Although from the standpoint of rock art protection, it

would be better not to have shooting ranges in this area, these rules should help protect nearby rock art sites.

- The BLM and interested parties, including ARARA finalized an agreement listing specific measures to protect rock art in western Wyoming during a bentonite mining operation.

The committee co-chair submitted comment letters on behalf of ARARA concerning:

- The Bighorn National Forest's Tensleep Canyon Climbing Plan scoping document, asking that the proposed climbing routes be surveyed for rock art sites and that a site preservation plan be developed before establishing or continuing to permit use of climbing routes in this archaeologically rich area.
- The Bureau of Land Management Price (Utah) Field Office San Rafael Swell Travel Management Plan scoping document, requesting adequate buffer zones be established between travel routes and archaeological sites vulnerable to damage from vehicle traffic and increase visitation. ARARA's comments further asked that archaeological surveys take place along all routes proposed for public use and that the surveys be conducted or staffed by archaeologists with training or expertise in recognizing and recording rock art.

On the state level ARARA Conservation Committee joined six other organizations and numerous individuals in signing onto a letter in July 2020 calling for an expanded National Register designation for Burro Flats in Ventura County, California. The proposed expansion would add 2835 acres to the existing 25-acre National Register designation. Expanding the boundaries would recognize the area's role as a traditional cultural property.

In April, Leigh Marymor discovered a book on offer via Academia.com containing the locations of rock art sites in Owens Valley, California. Linea Sundstrom filed a complaint with the company arguing that this post violated professional ethics and Academia.com's own terms of use; however, the effort failed because the disclosure of the site locations did not technically violate any laws.

Reports of damage to rock art sites in the US and Canada seem to have increased this year. Three contributing factors are: federal and state enforcement of law around archaeological site protection was hampered by closures due to the coronavirus pandemic; lawless protests on the part of some supporters of former president Donald Trump and the white supremacy movement moved into the realm of site vandalism; and visitation increased at public sites with rock art.

- In May 2020, federal agents indicted two Elko men for spray painting on rock art sites in Basin and Range National Monument in Nevada. They are awaiting trial.
- In late June 2020, a rock art preserve near Sarasota Springs, Utah, was damaged during wildfire suppression efforts. The driver of a vehicle tried to evade a road closure caused by a wildfire by driving off the highway across an archaeological preserve. His vehicle started a second fire by igniting dry vegetation. In fighting the second fire, a dozer line was cut within inches of known rock art panels, as well as disturbing nearby buried sites. The second fire burned over about half of the 197-acre Adelbert Doyle Smith Family Archaeological Preserve located on private land, including nearly all 240 rock art panels. The panels showed

no immediate damage; however, the long-term effects of the fire on the stability of the rock surfaces is not known.

- A site on a First Nations reserve in Canada suffered damage from spray paint in August 2020. Profanities with a racist message were spray painted directly on a pictograph panel. No arrests have been made.
- In October 2020, ARARA member Margaret Berrier helped document spray paint damage to the Three Rivers Site in New Mexico.
- In April 2021, rock art near Moab, Utah, was heavily damaged by graffiti, including obscenities and “white power.” BLM officials have offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the damage. One of the damaged panels had been chosen earlier for the state’s “Stop Archaeological Vandalism” campaign poster.
- In another incident in April, a Colorado man installed climbing bolts into a rock art panel near Moab. He owned up to his actions, saying that he mistook the rock art for modern graffiti.
- Thieves helped themselves to a pictograph from the Gila National Forest. That incident is currently under investigation.
- A vandalism case from 2019 in the Black Hills National Forest has been referred to the federal prosecutor.

No other arrests have been made in cases of vandalism to rock art listed in Conservation Committee reports from previous years.

In news that may affect rock art site preservation and conservation in many parts of the world, Australian and Indonesian researchers found that increased temperatures and weather extremes associated with global climate change greatly accelerate the rate at which salts build up on cave walls. This has led to rapid deterioration of the world’s oldest representational rock art, a painting of a wild pig made 45,500 years ago in Indonesia.

This year’s Conservation Award goes to the Archaeological Conservancy for the acquisition and creation of the Sunset Ranch Petroglyph Preserve in West Texas. Thanks to Leigh Marymor, Donna Yoder, and Mark Howe for serving as the award committee.

Thanks to Margaret Berrier, Mike Bies, Kelley Hays-Gilpin, Russell Kaldenberg, Jim Keyser, Larry Loendorf, Belinda Mollard, Greg Vettel, Elanie Moore, Linda Olson, Troy Scotter, Alice Tratebas, and Dave Whitley for helping the committee this year.

Respectfully submitted,

Linea Sundstrom, Co-Chair
Conservation and Preservation Committee
American Rock Art Research Association