



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN SEEKS NEW NATIONAL STRATEGY TO PROTECT ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES AND INDIAN REMAINS

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today announced that he has directed Interior officials to develop "better and stronger" policies to govern the protection and treatment of sacred objects and human remains on Federal lands.

Lujan told Interior bureau heads that the new policies should be based on four areas of special emphasis:

- * Public education and participation
- * Cooperation in fighting archeological looters
- * More interagency information exchange
- * Increased site inventories and collections curation.

"America's archeological heritage, the sites from her historical and prehistoric past, needs more protection," Lujan said. "Like rare and endangered species, many archeological sites are threatened with extinction.

"Looting, modern development and even careful archeological research have the effect of reducing the number of sites from bygone times, which once lost, can never be restored. We must make the most of the sites we have left, protecting and preserving them so that future generations of Americans will be enriched by the unique information that they hold."

Public education and participation will be the key to the effectiveness of the new regulations, Lujan said, "because it builds a sense of awareness, stewardship and pride in our priceless archeological resources which supports the many actions necessary to protect them."

Lujan said he has also directed the National Park Service to develop a new policy statement and revise an existing Department guideline to ensure a more sensitive treatment of archeological human remains and associated objects.

"This is a subject of much concern to many Americans and especially to American Indians. Unfortunately, for many years Indian graves were often desecrated and the human remains and objects within them treated disrespectfully," he said.

(more)

Lujan said he was pleased to note that in recent months many archaeologists, anthropologists, Federal land managers, and museum curators have become more sensitive to the cultural and religious concerns of American Indians about the remains and burial objects.

The new policy will affirm the right of Tribes and other American Indian groups to determine the treatment these remains should receive, Lujan said.

As part of his campaign to increase public awareness of these issues, Lujan has presented the Interior Department's Public Service Award to Anthony G. "Tony" Hillerman, distinguished author of mystery and adventure stories set on Indian Reservations in the Southwest. "Hillerman's books increase our understanding of Indian cultures," Lujan said, "and graphically illustrate the tragedy of archeological looting."

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for the protection of hundred of thousands of archeological sites on public lands throughout the Nation. He is also responsible for providing advice, technical information, and regulations for archeological preservation efforts by Federal and other public agencies throughout the country.

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