Largest Ever Undercover Operation Nabs Diggers, Dealers and Collectors Operating in Four Corners Region

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SALT LAKE CITY – An unprecedented two-year undercover operation led by agents from Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the FBI today began rounding up what prosecutors call a ring of archeological grave robbers who looted pristine sites in the Southwest, desecrated ancient American Indian burials and stole priceless artifacts, selling them to dealers and collectors who were associated with the network.

In the nation's largest investigation of archaeological and cultural artifact thefts, law officers from BLM, FBI, and U.S. Marshals, joined by local and state law enforcement partners, began arresting 23 individuals and executing a dozen search warrants in four states. The defendants, from Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado, were named in 12 indictments handed down by a Salt Lake City grand jury for multiple violations of federal law. Federal agents have identified more than 250 artifacts stolen by the ring, with an estimate value exceeding $335,000, including decorated Anasazi pottery, burial and ceremonial masks, a buffalo headdress, and ancient sandals known to be associated with Native American burials.

"Let this case serve notice to anyone who is considering breaking these laws and trampling our nation's cultural heritage that the BLM, the Department of Justice, and the federal government will track you down and bring you to justice," said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. "As these alleged criminals are prosecuted and as federal agents continue to hunt down wrong doers, BLM cultural resources staff will work to ensure the proper recovery, identification, repatriation, and storage of the artifacts that have been confiscated.

"Looters robbing tribal communities of their cultural patrimony is a major law enforcement issue for federal agencies enforcing historic preservation laws in Indian Country," said Interior Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk. "Today's action should give American Indians and Alaska Natives assurance that the Obama Administration is serious about preserving and protecting their cultural property."

The indictments were announced by Secretary Salazar; Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk; Deputy Attorney General David Ogden of the U.S. Department of Justice; Brett L. Tolman, U.S Attorney in Utah; and Timothy J. Fuhrman, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Salt Lake City Field Office. The ring is charged with multiple counts of violating the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act as well as theft of government property, depredation of government property, and theft of Indian tribal property.

The Four Corners region, rich in archaeological resources, contains priceless and sacred artifacts of vital importance to Southwest American Indian communities, as well as of cultural and historical

interest to scientists and academic scholars. The looting of the archeological sites also means the permanent loss of significant amounts of archeological, cultural and historical information because the artifacts cannot now be identified in their in-situ context.

“These archaeological treasures are precious and protecting them preserves a rich history and heritage,” said Deputy Attorney General Ogden. “That is why the Justice Department will use all of its tools to vigorously enforce the laws designed to safeguard the cultural heritage of Native Americans. Recommitting resources and focus to criminal justice in Indian Country is of paramount importance to the Justice Department.”

Ogden said the Department of justice is conducting a training initiative with the Interior Department for federal prosecutors and law enforcement personnel on looting, vandalism, and illegal trafficking of cultural heritage, and the Department plans to reach out to Indian Country leaders in the near future to engage in consultation on these issues.

“These treasures are the heritage of all Americans, and some of the objects are sacred to American Indians,” said U.S. Attorney Tolman. “Those who loot or damage public and American Indian resources for their own personal use or gain take something from all of us. Those engaged in this kind of conduct will be prosecuted,” Tolman said.

“The FBI has taken this matter seriously and spent a significant amount of personnel and financial resources in exposing this network of individuals illegally trafficking in these items,” Said FBI Special Agent in Charge Fuhrman. “The FBI remains committed to devoting all necessary resources to address this problem.”

A list of defendants is included as an attachment to this press release. The defendants were scheduled to appear before U.S. Magistrate Judge Samuel Alba at the Grand County Courthouse in Moab later today. Defendants charged in federal indictments are presumed innocent unless or until proven guilty in court.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act prohibits the unauthorized excavation and removal of archaeological resources on federal lands as well as the unlawful sale, purchase, or exchange of such resources. Under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, any Native American human remains, funerary objects, objects of cultural patrimony and sacred objects must be repatriated to Indian tribes.

The BLM will consult with tribes to determine cultural affiliation and to facilitate repatriation of the stolen artifacts. For objects not subject to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the BLM will work with museums to stabilize, identify, and preserve them under the provisions of Archaeological Resources Protection Act and make them available for scientific research and public education.

U.S. Department of Justice

Brett L. Tolman

United States Attorney District of Utah

Defendants in ARPA/NAGPRA cases

1. Loran St. Clair, Age 47, Monticello, UT
2. Rulon Kody Sommerville, Age 47, Monticello, UT
3. Kevin W. Shumway, Age 55, Blanding, UT
4. Sharon Evette Shumway, Age 41, Blanding, UT
5. David A. Lacy, Age 55, Blanding, UT
6. Aubry Patterson, Age 55, Blanding, UT
7. Dale J. Lyman, Age 73, Blanding, UT
8. Jeanne Redd, Age 59, Blanding, UT
9. James D. Redd, Age 60, Blanding, UT 10. Raymond J. Lyman, Age 70, Blanding, UT 11. Vern Crites, Age 74, Durango, CO
12. Marie Crites, Age 68, Durango, CO
13. Steven Shrader, Durango, CO
14. Tammy Shumway, Age 39, Blanding, UT
15. Joseph Smith, Age 31, Blanding, UT
16. Meredith Smith, Age 34, Blanding, UT
17. Harold Lyman, Age 78, Blanding, UT
18. Reese Laws, Age 27, Blanding, UT
19. Nick Laws, Age 30, Blanding, UT
20. Brandon Laws, Age 38, Blanding, UT
21. Tad Kreth, Age 30, Blanding, UT
22. Brent Bullock, Age 61, Moab, UT
23. Richard Bourret