



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF TRIBAL HISTORIC
PRESERVATION OFFICERS**

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October 17, 2023

Kandace Hollenbach
President, Southeastern Archaeological Conference
Professor, Department of Anthropology
University of Tennessee
502 Strong Hall
Knoxville, TN 37996

Dear Dr. Hollenbach,

The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) strongly supports the Southeastern Archaeological Conference (SEAC) image policy that requires authors to consult with descendant communities if they want to include images of burial items in articles in SEAC's journal. Our members urge SEAC members to vote to maintain this policy at the upcoming SEAC annual meeting.

NATHPO is the only national organization devoted to supporting Tribal historic preservation programs. Founded in 1998, NATHPO is a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership association of Tribal government officials who implement federal and Tribal preservation laws. NATHPO empowers Tribal preservation leaders protecting culturally important places that perpetuate Native identity, resilience, and cultural endurance. Connections to cultural heritage sustain the health and vitality of Native peoples.

The image policy was put in place after a 2020 issue of Southeastern Archaeology, SEAC's journal, was published with a cover photograph of a Tribal Nation's funerary objects. NATHPO appreciates that after concerns were raised, SEAC reached out to Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs). The THPOs who responded made it clear that they supported a policy that ended the publication of photographs and required authors to demonstrate that they had reached out to geographically affiliated Tribal Nations for support of use of non-photographic images.

SEAC's "History of the Image Policy" document highlights concerns that were raised about placing an additional burden on THPOs. NATHPO appreciates the recognition of the heavy workload and modest federal financial support for THPOs. The document also noted concerns that the cost of making line drawings could be burdensome for graduate students.

Concerns about "burdens" should never be used to justify continuing a practice that is offensive and harmful to Tribal Nations who have experienced a history of having their cultural objects treated as curiosities for study by Western, colonial academics and scientists. As a society, when faced with "burdens," we advocate for the resources needed to lessen those burdens. We should never use the existence of financial obstacles to permit anachronistic and cruel behavior to continue.

NATHPO would be remiss if it failed to note that the existing SEAC policy is consistent with the World Archaeological Congress' Vermillion Accord on Human Remains and its Code of Ethics. The Vermillion Accord, which was adopted in 1989, calls on archaeologists to respect the mortal remains of the dead irrespective of origin, race, religion, nationality, custom, and tradition. The code, which was adopted in 1990, calls on archaeologists to obtain the informed consent of representatives authorized by the indigenous peoples and to make sure that work is presented with deference and respect to the

PROTECTING NATIVE PLACES

identified indigenous peoples. It is difficult to imagine SEAC members voting to eliminate a policy that is consistent with the Vermillion Accord and the Code of Ethics.

Western academics have an unfortunate history of failing to treat Tribal Nations with respect. SEAC's image policy takes a step in the right direction and NATHPO believes it should be maintained. We would also urge the members of SEAC to work with us to strengthen the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, so that Tribal Nations have the resources needed to reclaim the remains of ancestors and cultural items that were stolen from them or obtained using questionable means.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valerie J. Grussing". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "V" at the beginning.

Valerie J. Grussing, PhD
Executive Director