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Mary Sherwin

Last year's Executive Orders recognize the value and encourage the use of Indigenous Knowledge by Federal Departments and Agencies

Museums and federal agencies stockpiled the remains of Indigenous people as their descendants protested. That's slowly changing.



[Ed ElbersHistory of the Owens Valley](#)

My great grandmother, Mary Sherwin, born in Round Valley 1858. Lived too be 106 yrs old, never spoke English. Was 6 yrs old when force marched to Fort Tejon by the U.S.Calvary.

Perhaps in the long scheme of things/history, the series of Executive Orders issued by President Biden last year will mark a major point in US-Tribal Nations (not government-to-government) relations.

Yet I am surprised how many persons are unaware of them, much less having read them. The order below is 46 pages.....yes 46 pages.....so what follows is just the opening. Hope it inspires you to read it all and that you may download the others.

They provide great guidance in preparing tribal press releases, testimony, legislation and internal planning. They ultimately provide the challenge to all “tribal nations and indigenous people” of the US to step forward to exercise their knowledge, sovereignty, self-determination, creativity and humanism.

If nothing else, they should be placed in your tribal library, posted on your website with tribal response or in tribal newsletters so the next generations may know the evolution of their ancestor’s legacy and the the challenges to them in this Century.

November 30, 2022

Memorandum for Heads of Federal Departments and Agencies

From: Arati Prabhaker, PhD.

Assistant to the President and Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy

Brenda Mallory
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

Re: Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge(1 and

I. Introduction

The Federal Government recognizes the valuable contribution of the Indigenous Knowledge/1 that Tribal Nations/2 and Indigenous Groups/3 have gained and passed down generation to generation and the critical importance of Federal departments and agencies’ (Agencies) consideration and inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge is guided by respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of Tribal Nations; the Nation-to-Nation relationship between the United States and Tribal Nations and the United States’ trust relationship; and the need for consent and honest engagement with the Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) issue this guidance to assist agencies in (1) understanding the Indigenous Knowledge; (2) growing and maintaining the mutually beneficial relationships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples needed to appropriately include Indigenous Knowledge, and (3) considering, including, and applying Indigenous Knowledge in Federal research, policies and decision making. This guidance also identifies promising practices—based on agency experience and Tribal and Indigenous input—for collaborating with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples, considering

and applying Indigenous Knowledge in implementing statutory and regulatory requirements, and respecting the decisions of Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples to engage or decline to participate in Federal processes, on their terms.

Since Indigenous Knowledge is often unique and specific to a Tribe or Indigenous People, and may exist in a variety of forms, Agencies often lack the expertise to appropriately consider and apply Indigenous Knowledge. As a result, consultation and collaboration with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples is critical to ensuring that Indigenous Knowledge is considered and applied in a manner that respects Tribal sovereignty and achieves mutually beneficial outcomes for Tribal and Indigenous communities.

This guidance builds on other recent Federal efforts related to Indigenous Knowledge. Through Executive Order 14072 on *Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies*, President Biden established a policy to support indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and cultural and subsistence practices in our Nation's forests.

Through Executive Order 14049 on the *White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities*, President Biden committed to promoting Indigenous learning through the use of traditional ecological knowledge. Through Executive Order 13990 on *Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science To Tackle the Climate Crisis*, President Biden reestablished the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area and its associated Federal Task Force and Tribal Advisory Council, and recognized the value of traditional knowledge and participation by Alaska Native Tribal governments in decisions affecting the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area.⁴

Similarly, in the proclamation establishing the Bears Ears National Monument, former President Obama recognized that traditional ecological knowledge “offers critical insight into the historic and scientific significance of the area,” and is itself a resource to be protected.⁵ The proclamation also established a first-of-its-kind commission of Tribal Leaders to provide guidance to the Federal Government to ensure that “management decisions affecting the monument reflect Tribal expertise and traditional and historical knowledge.” When President Biden confirmed and restored the Bears Ears National Monument, he reestablished the Bears Ears Commission and reaffirmed the critical importance of traditional knowledge for managing the monument.

A number of Agencies have also recognized the importance of Indigenous Knowledge for their work. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior and some of their individual bureaus and services, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation have issued agency-specific

⁴ See Appendix A (providing examples of Indigenous Knowledge application and collaboration between the Federal Government and tribes and indigenous peoples).

⁵ Presidential Proclamation 9558, Establishment of the Bears Ears National Monument, 82 Fed. Reg. 1139 (Jan. 5, 2017), [https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/05/proclamation-9558-establishment-of-the-bears-ears-national-monument](#), [https://www.govinfo.gov/constitutionality/2017-01-05/proclamation-9558-establishment-of-the-bears-ears-national-monument](#) (providing guidance on Indigenous Knowledge).

⁶ The Fourth National Climate Assessment, prepared by the U.S. Global Change Research Program, also included Indigenous Knowledge.

⁷ A number of

Agencies have also co-managed a variety of natural resources with Tribes, and Indigenous Knowledge has shaped those processes as well.⁸ Recent efforts have been taken at the highest levels of the Federal Government to highlight the importance of Indigenous Knowledge to inform Federal decision making, improve outcomes, and foster collaboration with Tribal Nations. However, efforts to include Indigenous Knowledge in Federal work and to collaborate with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples on Indigenous Knowledge have been uneven. This important work is too often dependent on the willingness, capacity, and Agency support of individual Federal employees.

To that end, and in response to the Biden-Harris Administration policies and initiatives referenced above, OSTP and CEQ issued a memorandum on November 15, 2021, recognizing Indigenous Knowledge as one of the many important bodies of knowledge that contributes to the scientific, technical, social, and economic advancements of the United States, and to our collective understanding of the natural world. OSTP and CEQ then convened an Interagency Working Group with representatives from more than 25 Federal departments and agencies.⁹ OSTP and CEQ also sought input from Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples through Tribal consultation and listening sessions,¹⁰ and engaged with more than a thousand individuals, organizations, and Tribal Nations.

This guidance builds upon that memorandum and is intended to promote and enable a Government-wide effort to improve the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge. It reaffirms that Agencies should recognize and, as appropriate, apply Indigenous Knowledge in decision making, research, and policies across the Federal Government. This guidance is founded on the understanding that multiple lines of evidence or ways of knowing can lead to better-informed decision making. Agencies should use this guidance to develop an approach to Indigenous Knowledge that is appropriate for the contexts and legal frameworks in which they operate, the Tribes and Indigenous Peoples with whom they partner, and the communities that they serve.

6 See Appendix B (providing a selection of Federal agency guidance documents on Indigenous Knowledge).

7 USGCRP, 2018. Tribes and Indigenous Peoples. In *Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment*. D. R. Reidmiller et al., eds. [hereafter “Fourth National Climate Assessment”], pp. 572–603, available at <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/15/> (explaining how indigenous peoples can also be affected uniquely and disproportionately by climate change); see also Bharat H. Desai et al., 2021. Role of Climate Change in Exacerbating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Women: A New Challenge for International Law, *Environmental Policy and Law* 51, p. 142, available at https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/report/role-of-climate-change-in-exacerbating-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-against-women-a-new-challenge-for-international-law/epl_2021_51-3_epl-51-3-epl210055_epl-51-epl210055.pdf;

8 See Appendix A (providing examples of Indigenous Knowledge application and collaboration between the Federal Government and tribes and indigenous peoples).

9 See Appendix D (providing a list of Federal departments and agencies that participated in the IWG).

10 See OSTP, CEQ (June 27, 2022). Press Release, Readout: OSTP and CEQ Initial Engagement on White House Indigenous Knowledge Effort, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/news-updates/2022/06/27/readout-ostp-and-ceq-initial-engagement-on-white-house-indigenous-knowledge-effort/> (providing a summary of consultation and engagement activities).

A MUST READ: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf>

Museums and federal agencies stockpiled the remains of Indigenous people as their descendants protested. That's slowly changing.

by [Lucy Birmingham](#) and [Frank X. Mullen](#) August 1, 2023M RENO NEWS & REVIEW



PHOTO/DAVID ROBERT: Rochanne Downs, who was on the team that created the Under One Sky exhibit, at the Nevada State Museum on July 14.

A wall map in Rochanne Downs' office depicts the ancestral homelands of the Paiute, Shoshone and Washoe people—a once-vast domain on the western side of the Great Basin now reduced to 28 scattered reservations and colonies across Nevada.

For millennia, Downs' ancestors lived, died and were laid to rest in caves and other hidden places across the basins and ranges of the Silver State. Tradition says their spirits are on a trek along the “dusty trail”—the Milky Way—to the next world. In the course of 200 years, uncounted thousands of those journeys were interrupted when their remains and things buried with them were dug up and carted off to museums or universities. The finds were displayed as curiosities or studied like mammoth bones or Neanderthal fossils. For decades, researchers measured Native American skulls to support racist theories of white superiority.

The connection between the dead Natives and their living descendants was casually ignored.

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“Some of our ancestors (bones) were used as note pads,” said Downs, a member of the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, who now works to return Native American remains to Nevada tribes. An amateur archeologist drew a site map of a dig on one of the skulls Downs helped to repatriate.

Bones in museums have been painted with catalogue numbers and treated with toxic substances. Until recently, remains had the same status as rock samples in a geology class.

“These are humans,” Downs said. “They are people who had families. They are *our* people.”

After decades of legal battles and culture clashes, laws—and attitudes—are shifting. Native Americans' concerns are being taken seriously; archeologists are working with the descendants of the people they have been studying. Human remains and objects from graves are being returned to tribes, but slowly.

A 1990 federal law requires agencies and institutions to return them. But as of this year, only

about half of the more than 200,000 human remains stored at museums and other repositories in the U.S. and in Nevada have been repatriated.

[Revised government regulations expected to be finalized later this year](#) are aimed at accelerating the process. In addition, Indigenous people are telling their own stories and beginning to have a say in how their history and culture are presented to the public.

The University of Nevada, Reno, last year hired Downs to oversee UNR's compliance with the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA); she serves as a bridge between the university and Nevada's tribes. As the former cultural resources director for the Fallon Tribe, she has been involved in repatriation efforts since the law was passed. Those battles, she said, are far from over, but she sees a lot of positive movement in Nevada.

"It's really great that the university wants to do the right thing," said Downs, noting that UNR President Brian Sandoval has made repatriation of remains and artifacts housed at the institution a priority of his administration. She and others at the university's Office of Indigenous Relations are working with anthropologists to complete a full review of the institution's collections related to Native Americans.

"(There are) over 2,500 boxes that we'll go through," she said.

The contents of many are from donors who gave their collections to UNR. There also are recordings of Indigenous people made decades ago and other items that shed light on the lives and lifeways of the original people of the Great Basin.

"Oral traditions are the backbone of our history, and sharing and accessing these recordings is another way our elders have been able to share our traditions, history, songs, language and cultural knowledge," Downs said. "They are another important mechanism to share our elders' knowledge with our current and future generations."

Once an ancestor's remains are repatriated, the tribe involved determines where and how they will be reinterred. In most cases, she said, remains aren't returned to their original burial place. That site could be unknown, Downs said, or could be unsafe, or subject to looting, or it may have been obliterated by construction.

"I want make sure that everything is safe, that the ancestors are safe," said Downs. "We've relocated (repatriated remains) to a private location so they'll be housed solely by themselves."

It's a complicated process, she explained, and long impeded by some government agencies, museums and universities that refused to comply with the law.

Only half of remains returned

ProPublica, a national investigative news organization, this year reported that three decades after NAGPRA was signed by President George H.W. Bush, the remains of more than 110,000 Native American, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Natives' ancestors are still gathering dust in museums, universities and federal agencies. The sets of remains include major parts of skeletons, skulls and fragments of bone.

“The repositories covet our ancestors’ bones. I think it’s improved some, but that (attitude) still needs to be addressed.” *Diane L. Teeman, an archeologist and grad student in anthropology at UNR*

The Nevada State Museum, which has returned about 300 sets of remains to tribes over the last 20 years, [still has 259 sets in its collections. Of those, 39 are the state’s responsibility. The remaining 220 are under the control of federal agencies.](#) Those include 127 that are under the purview of the Nevada office of the Bureau of Land Management, which hasn’t repatriated any remains at all since 2010.

“It’s been 33 years since NAGPRA was enacted, and I really believe we should be a lot further,” Downs said.

Some universities, institutions and individuals have looked at NAGPRA as compromise legislation, she noted, rather than as a mandate. But the tribes, Downs said, see the 1990 law “as human rights legislation.”

For more than 200 years, collecting the remains of dead Native Americans was a common practice. In the 1800s, the bones of Indians were gathered from battlefields and massacre sites like Wounded Knee, S.D., to be shipped to the U.S. Army Medical College and museums. [Franz Boas, considered the father of American anthropology, collected and sold Indian skulls to help pay for his field work.](#) “It is most unpleasant work to steal bones from a grave,” Boas wrote in his diary in June 1888, “but what is the use, someone has to do it.”

Indigenous people were excluded from white society, but once dead, their skulls, bones and possessions were prized by the dominant culture as curios or objects of scientific inquiry.

“As human beings, we haven’t been valued, but our cultural items are highly valued,” said Michon Eben, historic preservation officer at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, “You go to any museum and you’ll have natural history, dinosaurs, and Native Americans. We’re a curiosity, a theory to be studied.”

Eben saw firsthand how some museums treated and used Indian remains during visits to Harvard University’s Peabody Museum. She said she and other tribal members were horrified to see catalogue numbers painted on skulls stored in file cabinets. In 2012, Downs, on behalf of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, helped repatriate remains that originated in Northern Nevada.



PHOTO/DAVID ROBERT: Michon Eben, historic preservation officer at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony.

Beginning in the late 19th century, [Harvard anthropologists conducted studies on Indian skulls to support the now-discredited field of eugenics](#), in an attempt to assert the superiority of white

people over other ethnicities. The skulls of Native Americans and other ethnic minorities were compared to the craniums of Caucasians, who were considered to be at the top of a racial hierarchy. Those [theories were used by Nazis to justify the attempted genocide](#) of Jews, disabled people and others they considered “[unworthy of life.](#)”

Harvard scientists, Eben said, measured Indian skulls for decades.

“It was sick,” she said. “It’s a sick policy, sick thinking, junk science. And why was it that our Native American human remains are ‘less than’?”

Traditional knowledge, she noted, was dismissed as myths and legends, while non-Native researchers shaped theories based on their own—and society’s—stereotypes and biases.

Archaeologist Diane L. Teeman, a doctoral candidate in anthropology at UNR, said she began studying that science to help her community navigate the maze of historical and legal issues that affect Indigenous people. Teeman is a member of the Burns Paiute Tribe in Burns, Ore., chairwoman of the tribal council and its cultural and heritage director. She noted that Native Americans were not consulted or notified when laws affecting them were being written and had no voice in telling their own stories. She is helping to change that paradigm.

“At the University of Oregon, they were continuing to drag out our ancestors’ bones to put them on metal trays for the students to fondle and learn about Native American human osteology,” she said. “I don’t think they do that anymore.”

In field studies, archaeologists mined the remnants of ancient communities and emptied graves while ignoring the voices of tribal people.

“But (now) there’s a growing number of archaeologists who see the value, and can empathize with the power dynamics between mainstream Western science and tribal communities that have been marginalized through colonialism,” Teeman said. Some scientists now design research projects that have value for tribal communities and are done in a way that is culturally appropriate, or at least culturally acceptable, she said.

In 2019, Teeman and Sarah E. Cowie, an associate professor of anthropology at UNR, launched what may have been the first Native-taught archeological field school with all Native American students. The course, accredited through UNR, was conducted on the campus of the [Stewart Indian School in Carson City. Stewart was among more than 400 Indian boarding schools](#) nationwide aimed at erasing students’ tribal identities and “assimilating” them into American society.

“That (Stewart field school) was the only time where I felt that I and the students—Natives who are studying archaeology—were able to fully express themselves in a way that was going to be completely heard and completely valued without some of the colonial attitudes and power struggles that can happen in other conversations,” Teeman said.

A question of power

In the 30 years since the repatriation law was passed, Teeman noted, the government agencies

and institutions “still hold most of the power in assessing whether someone is Native American (and) whether someone’s going to be repatriated.” Those entities often want to retain remains for future study, she said, and consider tribal funerary, ceremonial and cultural objects as their property.

“The repositories covet those items; they covet our ancestors’ bones,” Teeman said. “I think it’s improved some, but that (attitude) still needs to be addressed.”

[Some critics define the conflict over remains and artifacts as pitting scientific inquiry against tribal mythology and tradition](#). They worry that if Native Americans have too much control over how archeology is conducted, efforts to understand the ancient history of North America will grind to a halt. Anthropology students, they argue, will abandon those studies to specialize in the archeology of other countries that have fewer restrictions.

Prof. Kent Lightfoot, an archaeologist at the University of California, Berkeley, doesn’t agree. He and others in academia are developing new methodologies that are sensitive to tribal concerns and can be done in partnership with Indigenous people.

“As human beings, we haven’t been valued, but our cultural items are highly valued. Go to any museum, and you’ll have natural history, dinosaurs and Native Americans. We’re a curiosity, a theory to be studied.” *Michon Eben, historic preservation officer at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony*

“What we’re trying to do is a kind of archaeology which is not destructive and where we can be fairly precise (with) where we’re working and what we’re uncovering,” he said. “We’re making it so that it’s of interest—and of utility and of significance—to the tribes we’re working with.”

Traditionally, he said, archaeology was similar to exploratory surgery: cutting into a site without knowing what may be found. Trenches were carved with backhoes or shovels.

“That was destructive,” he said. “They would really destroy places where they shouldn’t have been excavating, like burials and other things. And this was done back in the day when we didn’t work with tribes, and there wasn’t any real collaboration.”

Lightfoot said that hearing tribal peoples’ concerns led to “rethinking that whole methodology.” Today, before doing any excavation or sub-surface work, archeologists first look at the surface and near-surface of a site, he said. They use new technologies including ground-penetrating radar, satellite imagery, light detection and ranging sensors (LiDAR), and magnetometers. Like modern surgeons, they rely on non-invasive techniques rather than hacking away at a patient just to see what’s beneath the skin.

In addition, he said, archeologists typically no longer collect artifacts from dig sites.

“But we will analyze them in place, and again, this is done in partnership with the tribes,” Lightfoot said.

Research teams first ask if tribal members want to do excavation, and if so, where. For example, he said, if traces of buried ancient dwellings are spotted by radar, is there potential value in unearthing one of the buried structures to get a sense of what it looks like? If so, the archeologists can then make that case to the tribe involved.

“It’s a very different kind of process than what has been done in the past,” he said. “... We’re getting to a point where we’ve got it pretty well refined.”

A 10,600-year-old Nevadan

Between 1994 and 2016, Nevada was the epicenter of a repatriation conflict that made headlines world-wide. The case involved the mummified remains of a man whose testing showed was laid to rest about 10,600 years ago in [Spirit Cave, a rock shelter in Churchill County](#). The Nevada State Museum had stored the man’s remains in a box since the 1940s and commissioned carbon-14 dating tests in 1994, four years after the passage of the repatriation law. Because the cave is on federal land, the BLM controlled the disposition of the remains.

(pic omitted)

A painting by California artist Ron Oden depicts what life may have been like in central Nevada more than 10,000 years ago, when the area was a land of lakes and marshes. The man whose remains were found in Spirit Cave was laid to rest at that time.

The carbon-14 testing—done without tribal permission—revealed the Spirit Cave man’s antiquity. BLM officials ruled that his remains and two other cremated sets of remains removed from Spirit Cave were not “culturally affiliated” with any modern tribal people. In other words, the agency decided there was no evidence connecting the dead man to the tribe that wanted to rebury him. The ancestor remained in a box in Carson City; a legal battle stretched across two decades.

Downs, now at UNR, was the cultural resource officer for the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone tribe, which took the lead for repatriation on behalf of all of the Great Basin tribes. She was on the team that assembled evidence to prove the man from the cave was a forebear. The ancestor, who lived at the tail end of the Ice Age when the Fallon area was a wetland, was found with a rabbit-skin blanket, tule mats and other objects familiar to today’s tribal members.

“I’m a Toi Ticutta, which is a ‘tule eater’ from Fallon; we lived by the marsh, so all the items Spirit Cave man had were things we can name,” Downs said. “In the Great Basin ... tribes were nomadic. We lived in small groups. We traveled all around following resources.”

People were buried near where they died. Tribal tradition holds that the dead must be left in peace and allowed to make the long trek to the next world unmolested.

“Traditionally, when you put somebody away, you don’t talk about them,” Downs said. “You don’t go back and visit, because you want them to go on their journey,”

In the Spirit Cave case, experts testified for and against repatriation; the tribe offered evidence; and a federal review committee twice sided with the Native Americans. Lawsuits were filed, and the BLM repeatedly refused to explain its decision. A federal court in Reno later found the

agency's positions "arbitrary and capricious." Judge Larry R. Hicks speculated its officials "purposely obstructed" the repatriation process. Spirit Cave man was ["Native American," BLM officials admitted, but not affiliated with any modern-day tribe](#). That sounded like double-talk to frustrated tribal members.

"Well, what does a modern-day Indian look like?" asked Downs.

In 2016, the tribe agreed to allow DNA testing of the Spirit Cave remains with the caveat that he and the other associated remains and artifacts be returned to the tribe afterwards. [The results: The man had a DNA signature that exists among the Indigenous people of North and South America —and nowhere else on the planet](#). Although he was not found to be directly related to any modern populations, [he was an Ice Age ancestor of countless Native people](#).

In 2018, the ancient one was buried in a hidden place with ceremonies. He resumed his celestial journey.

"The Spirit Cave remains were finally laid to rest," Downs said proudly.

Under One Sky

That controversy is resolved, but the Nevada State Museum lives with the fallout. Previous museum staff had permitted research on the remains after NAGPRA was passed, without consulting local tribes.

"That stigma follows us to this day with certain tribal members," said Gene Hattori, the museum's current curator of anthropology, "as well as (the stigma) of just being archaeologists, and housing archaeological collections."

The case spurred the museum to collaborate with tribal people as it had not done before. Rather than devote an exhibit to the Spirit Cave remains, officials offered to work with tribal members on a display spotlighting their history, culture and traditions. The late Alvin Moyle, then the Fallon tribal chairman, accepted the proposal in a letter that suggested that all Northern Nevada tribes be honored in the exhibit. Moyle's letter included the phrase "under one sky"—now [the name of the exhibition, which opened in 2002](#).

[Museum patrons viewing the exhibition](#) hear recorded voices of Indigenous people speaking and singing in their mother tongues. Walls display life-size photos, both historic and more recent, of tribal members. One exhibit offers a peek inside a desert cave that sheltered generations of people. Artifacts include the tools and objects they created thousands of years ago. The exhibit presents both scientific and tribal perspectives side-by-side. Some critics complain Under One Sky gives traditional beliefs too much credibility; others insist it doesn't go far enough in presenting Natives' points of view.

"I deemed (the exhibit) a success because I got equal criticisms from tribal people and archeologists that I know," Hattori said.

When NAGPRA passed in 1990, officials predicted that repatriation would be completed in about seven years. Three decades later, tribes are still waiting, but positive changes are taking place.

Nevada lawmakers recently mandated that state officials adopt repatriation procedures previously hammered out by museum staff and tribal representatives. [Changes in federal rules expected this year are aimed at eliminating obstacles to returning remains and objects in collections.](#) The Nevada State Museum has a full-time staff member dedicated to NAGPRA repatriations. And, for the first time, an Indigenous person—[Josh Bonde, a member of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone—is director of the museum.](#)

BLM officials told the *RN&R* that they are “updating their records” relating to the 127 sets of remains the agency controls, and that they are committed to repatriating them.

Downs, who was on the team that created *Under One Sky*, is hopeful that the federal law will at long last do the job it was created to do—reunite ancestors with their own people without tribes having to navigate a maze of politics, contradictions and controversy.

“I learned from many elders and traditional leaders along this journey that tribes are not to fight amongst ourselves over repatriation of our ancestors,” she said. “We may not know who the individual is or where he came from, but what we do know is that the Creator knows.

“Our only job to get them back into the earth so they can get back on their journey—and the rest will take care of itself.”



[Bucky Harjo](#) [One of my favorite places to just sit and pray and bring it all in.](#)