



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 L Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20540

202-219-3200

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FORWELCOME

Dr. Douglas Scott
President
Society for Historical Archaeology
1540 Shady Grove Road, Suite 100
Kensville, MD 20885

Dear Dr. Scott:

Thank you for your letter asking the National Park Service to consider endorsing or incorporating the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (since that is our agency's internal guidelines about the practice of underwater archaeology on lands and sites under our jurisdiction).

As you know, several National Park Service archeologists participated as members of the U.S. Delegation to the UNESCO experts meetings on the topic and played an important role in development of the *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act*. The *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act* establishes international professional standards for the conduct of underwater archaeology and for which there was unanimous support by all participating delegations, including that of the United States.

The National Park System was created in 1916 to conserve unimpaired and provide for public enjoyment of many of the nation's most historically significant places and magnificent natural landscapes. The system consists of 398 areas covering more than 84 million acres in 49 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. About 85 percent of the areas contain unscathed lands including 4 lakeshores, 49 ranches, 13 rivers, wild and scenic rivers, and riverways, 18 recreation areas, and 135 other areas with islands, coastlines, inland lakes, and rivers. About 5 percent of park acreage is unscathed.

The National Park System has a long tradition of preserving and protecting unscathed archeological resources with the earliest documented project taking place in the 1930s. To date, about one percent of the system's unscathed acreage has been inventoried to locate, identify, evaluate, and document unscathed cultural resources. Notwithstanding the incomplete inventory, we estimate that about 11 percent of park areas contain unscathed archeological resources or have the potential for such resources.

We manage park cultural resources in accordance with a broad set of Federal laws including the National Park Service Organic Act, the Antiquities Act, the Historic Sites Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and park-specific enabling legislation and Presidential proclamations.

We conduct research to identify, evaluate, document, and maintain park cultural resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or take steps to preserve and protect the resources for public enjoyment and understanding. These activities must conform to legal requirements as well as to Department of the Interior and National Park Service policies, standards, and guidelines, all of which are available on the Internet at <http://www.doi.gov> and <http://www.nps.gov>. This includes the:

- Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation
- NPS Management Policies (2001)
- NPS Director's Order 62-1 Cultural Resource Management and its handbook Cultural Resource Management Guidelines, and
- NPS Director's Order 62-4 Archeology and its handbook Archeology Guide.

These policies, standards, and guidelines are consistent, in our view, with the *stare decisis* and assure that the practice of archeology in the parks meets current professional standards. The archeological components of these policies, standards, and guidelines apply to all archeological resources whether they are prehistoric, proto-historic or historic in nature or are located on land or underwater.

The NPS Archeology Guide is relatively new and functions as the third tier of policy after the NPS Management Policies and Director's Orders. It consists of a web-based set of modules containing policy guidance for use by archeologists, park managers, and others undertaking archeological activities in park areas. Recently, the first module was issued and can be accessed at <http://www.nps.gov/archeology/apsguide/>.

Many modules are planned and in development. Not wishing to reinvent the wheel, modules are developed using as their foundation existing scientific standards and guidelines. Should we develop a module on underwater archeology, it undoubtedly will consider existing standards and guidelines including the UNESCO *stare decisis*, the ICOMOS Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage, the *stare decisis* to the "International Agreement Concerning the Historic Shipwreck Vessel RMS Titanic," and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's "Guidelines for Research, Exploration and Salvage of RMS Titanic."

Sincerely,



Mary A. Roman
Director