

## 2026 ANNUAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS MEETING

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. (MST)

Uintah Conference Center

313 E. 200 So., Vernal, Utah 84078

Google Meet: <https://meet.google.com/asm-ikru-tan>

Or dial: (US) +1 470-327-0275 PIN: 298 259 753#

This year's special guests include Gary Webster and Jessica Christopher, staffers from Sen. Mike Lee's office who will discuss the senator's proposed changes to the Section 106 process. Ms. Christopher's presentation may need to happen between Senate hearings, so we will follow one of these two flexible agendas to accommodate her.

### Agenda Scenario 1

1:00-1:10 Welcome

1:10-2:00 State Agency Updates  
Joel Boomgarden (TLA)  
Liz Robinson (UDOT)  
Allan Wolfrum (FFSL)  
Tessie Burningham (DOGM)  
Arie Leeflang (DWR)

2:00-2:30 Sen. Mike Lee's Office  
Gary Webster  
Jessica Christopher

2:30-2:45 **Break**

2:45-3:15 SHPO  
Deb Miller  
Christopher Merritt

3:15-3:45 BLM  
Lori Hunsaker  
Nicole Lohman

3:45-3:55 USU  
Judson Finley

3:55-4:10 **Break**

4:10-5:00 Discussants  
Sherri Murray Ellis  
Tina Hart  
Lindsey Evenson  
Jody Patterson

### Agenda Scenario 2

1:00-1:10 Welcome

1:10-2:00 State Agency Updates  
Joel Boomgarden (TLA)  
Liz Robinson (UDOT)  
Allan Wolfrum (FFSL)  
Tessie Burningham (DOGM)  
Arie Leeflang (DWR)

2:00-2:10 USU  
Judson Finley

2:10-2:20 SHPO  
Deb Miller

2:20-2:35 **Break**

2:35-3:05 Sen. Mike Lee's Office  
Gary Webster  
Jessica Christopher

3:05-3:25 SHPO  
Chris Merritt

3:25-3:55 BLM  
Lori Hunsaker  
Nicole Lohman

3:55-4:10 **Break**

4:10-5:00 Discussants  
Sherri Murray Ellis  
Tina Hart  
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Respondents to this year's pre-meeting survey are concerned about how the current administration is affecting the protection of cultural resources and cultural resource management (CRM). Specifically, they cite cuts to staffing and funding and proposed changes to historic preservation law, either through legislation or executive and secretarial orders. They urge the CRM community to navigate these challenging times by exercising patience, efficiency, and collaboration. Other comments highlight the perennial need for consultants to understand and fulfill basic inventory and reporting requirements, and for agencies to provide clear guidance about what information can and can't be shared with project proponents without running afoul of the law. Consultants also want to better understand timelines in the Sec. 106 consultation process, presumably to provide their clients with realistic timelines for completing the process. One respondent wonders if new archaeological collections are being assembled through survey and excavation.

**What questions should agency representatives come prepared to answer, either during a group presentation or a sidebar conversation?**

### POLICY

- Is your agency implementing any new policies, regulations, or guidance that we need to follow in 2026?
- Can you provide any information about how recent executive and secretarial orders are affecting work under existing regulations, such as EO 14156, "Declaring a National Energy Emergency", EO 14154, "Unleashing American Energy", etc.? Have other policy changes weakened Section 106 obligations?
- How did the Utah SHPO's testimony before the Senate committee on Energy & Natural Resources ([October 29, 2025](#)) influence Senator Lee's opinions about the Section 106 consultation process?
- What information can and can't be communicated to clients through reports, emails, phone calls, etc.? We need specific guidance about what to redact so that each project does not require time-consuming, back-and-forth conversations with the lead agency about what can and can't be communicated to clients. How does this apply to cultural resources on private lands?
- Have there been any major changes to laws in Utah pertaining to wind and solar development in the last year?
- Is there anything we need to know about AI and data security as it applies to cultural resource management?

### OPERATIONS

- In general, what challenges does your agency face considering all the government changes in 2025? More specifically, how have impacts from DOGE on staffing and funding, as well as the government shutdown, affected agencies? Are agencies back to operating at pre-DOGE levels or are vacancies and hiring freezes still a significant obstacle? How will this impact the release of project work and attainment of agency goals this year?

- What are the significant budget cuts to federal agencies that put antiquities laws at risk? Does this include SHPO and THPO Offices as well?
- What is the forecast for federally funded work in 2026 and 2027, and how do you expect the priorities of the Trump administration to affect projects going forward? Are there any changes to the ways in which contracts are awarded (e.g., WRI)?
- Status of contracts which were paused or cancelled.
- How are federal entities working with NAGPRA now?
- How can state employees/non-feds ensure continuity of care during a shutdown?

### **POST-WWII ARTIFACT SCATTERS**

- Clarification on where and how any requirements on the post-WWII scatters are to be applied. We noticed this past year BLM and TLA have differing outlooks on level of reporting. Even then, neither standard at the time was clear on what the end product was to look like so we helped the specific project BLMer/TLA produce that for the reports. It went well and was a good collaborative experience, but in the past on such things, this stuff has led to misunderstandings and bad experiences. Also, when is an "object" an isolate or a site and how does NRHP elevations/management recommendations play into that.

### **What questions should consultants come prepared to answer, either during a group presentation or a sidebar conversation?**

- How has the CRM market changed for consultants since the new administration took the reins in January 2025?
- What changes have consultants had to make because of uncertainty in federal and state agency funding and project work?
- Capacity - do we have sufficient archaeologists to do the work? Are there jobs out there? What is the applicant pool like?
- What are the active regions where cultural resource work is occurring right now in Utah?
- How are the agencies doing, and how can they make your jobs easier? How do consultants and their staff feel about what agencies are trying to do with fewer professionals in the industry? What are your frustrations with agencies?
- Do you have any questions about permits and permit types?
- Lately, I've heard the phrase "client forward". How do contractors interpret this phrase?
- Last year, there was a great presentation on how private equity firms are buying—or attempting to buy—small to mid-sized CRM firms. I'm curious to know what this experience has been like for people who work(ed) for these firms before and after the transition.