



## *U.S. Geological Survey Manual*

### **500.6 - American Indian and Alaska Native Sacred Sites**

6/20/97

#### **OPR: Director's Office**

**1. Purpose.** This chapter establishes the USGS policy, responsibilities, and procedures regarding accommodation of access and protection of American Indian and Alaska Native sacred sites in accordance with Executive Order No. 13007, Indian Sacred Sites (May 24, 1996).

#### **2. Definitions.**

A. *Federal lands* means any land or interests in land owned by the United States, including leasehold interests held by the United States, except for Indian trust lands. Indian trust lands are lands held in trust by the United States government on behalf of Tribal governments or individuals. Trust lands are predominantly, though not solely, reservation lands.

B. *Indian tribe* means an Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, or community that the Secretary of the Interior acknowledges to exist as an Indian tribe pursuant to Public Law 103-454, 108 Stat. 4791, and an "Indian" refers to a member of such an Indian tribe. These tribes are frequently referred to as "federally recognized tribes". Not all tribes are federally recognized, and the list of such tribes will change through time.

C. *Sacred site* means any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land that is identified by an Indian tribe, or an Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to or ceremonial use by, an Indian religion; provided that the tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion has informed the Department of the Interior of such a site.

D. *Work by the USGS that could potentially impact sacred sites* includes the physical activities that are parts of field studies such as data collection, drilling, emplacement and maintenance of equipment, and mapping. Other USGS activities that could potentially impact sacred sites include distribution and publication of digital data and maps.

**3. Authority.** Executive Order 13007, May 24, 1996, Indian Sacred Sites.

**4. Policy.** Executive Order 13007 states that Federally recognized tribes or certain American Indian and Alaska Native individuals may identify sacred sites to Federal agencies that have statutory or administrative responsibility for the management of Federal lands. The Executive Order applies only to Federal lands and not to Indian lands. It is the policy of the USGS to extend the same protections to lands held by or in trust for American Indians or Alaska Natives. Therefore, this policy and the implementation processes set forth in it, shall apply to USGS activities relating to both Federal and Indian lands. USGS division American Indian/Alaska Native liaisons will coordinate with the bureau's American Indian/Alaska Native liaison to

resolve issues that arise from the Executive Order and this USGS policy. The bureau liaison will coordinate with other bureaus and with tribal representatives to ensure that identified sacred sites are not adversely impacted. The bureau liaison will maintain regular contacts with regulatory and land-managing bureaus to determine which sacred sites might affect USGS activities, policies, or products. Exceptions to this policy will be considered by the group of USGS division and bureau American Indian/Alaska Native liaisons, with recommendations presented to the Director or appropriate Division Chief(s) for action.

## **5. Implementation.**

A. USGS employees will avoid disseminating information about the names and (or) locations of known sacred sites in USGS products, including publications, topographic maps, and publicly available digital data bases, unless the appropriate American Indian, Alaska Native, or Federal authority authorizes the release of such information. In some cases, information that a site is sacred may become known to the USGS after the product is distributed; when these products are revised, the USGS will eliminate the names and associated Federal symbology used to depict sacred site locations or identifications, when the identifying authority requests such omissions. Natural features are not anticipated to be eliminated from USGS map and other products, although name changes will be considered through currently existing procedures of the inter-departmental U.S. Board on Geographic Names. The locations and (or) names of sacred sites will be eliminated from map, digital, and other products whenever appropriate and feasible.

B. Managers of USGS field projects and field personnel will develop government-to-government contacts with appropriate tribal leaders. In the course of all fieldwork, USGS employees shall make diligent efforts to be aware and respectful of sacred sites and to respect access restrictions and ceremonial observances. When planning for field work commences, USGS employees are always expected to contact the Federal land manager, on whose lands they are working, to inquire about the locations of and access restrictions concerning sacred sites. Employees must avoid adversely affecting the physical integrity of such sites. If field work is anticipated at the location of a sacred site, the USGS employee's division American Indian/Alaska Native liaison and the land manager's Indian liaison shall be notified. The Federal liaisons shall work together with American Indian or Alaska Native elected or traditional leaders to avoid adversely affecting the site while completing the mission of the USGS. USGS liaisons will assist USGS employees in determining the appropriate tribal contacts, with the knowledge that some tribes do not occupy nor are they proximate to their traditional homelands.

C. Information about a sacred site that a Tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion shares with the USGS shall not be retained in USGS but shall be returned to the submitting party as soon as is practical. Requests for information on Indian/Native sacred sites under the Freedom of Information Act shall be resolved in consultation with representatives of the Department of the Interior's Office of the Solicitor. Alternatively, a Memoranda of Agreement may be developed with each Tribe to address the issues of maintaining information in a confidential manner. The USGS will follow the dispute resolution procedures of the Federal land managing agency for Federal lands and may use peace councils or other venues for Indian and Alaska Native lands regarding sacred sites.

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