

# GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-110](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Federal laws prohibit the theft and damage of Native American cultural resources, such as pottery, tools, and sacred objects, on federal and Indian lands. Federal agencies help protect these resources by attempting to prevent theft and damage and by investigating and prosecuting such crimes. These agencies include the Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service; the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

GAO was asked to review these agencies' efforts. This report examines (1) approaches selected federal agencies have taken to prevent and detect theft and damage; and (2) factors that have hindered agencies' efforts to prevent, investigate, and prosecute incidents of theft and damage. GAO analyzed data from seven federal agencies, reviewed agency documents, and interviewed agency officials and representatives of Native American tribes.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations that each agency take steps to identify and obtain information to enhance their ability to analyze and respond to risks to Native American cultural resources. The agencies generally concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-21-110](#). For more information, contact Anna Maria Ortiz at (202) 512-3841 or [ortiza@gao.gov](mailto:ortiza@gao.gov).

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## NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL RESOURCES

### Improved Information Could Enhance Agencies' Efforts to Analyze and Respond to Risks of Theft and Damage

#### What GAO Found

Seven federal agencies that GAO reviewed have taken a variety of approaches to help prevent and detect the theft and damage of Native American cultural resources on federal and Indian lands that may contain such resources. These agencies' approaches included conducting public awareness programs, installing physical protection measures (see photo), and monitoring sites with electronic surveillance equipment. For example, the Bureau of Land Management has partnered with a tribe to host an event in Colorado to remove graffiti and address vandalism on canyon walls and rock art and increase public awareness about the importance of protecting these and other Native American cultural resources.

#### A National Park Service Sign in Arizona Aims to Prevent Theft and Damage



Source: GAO. | [GAO-21-110](#)

Agency officials cited various factors hindering their efforts to prevent, investigate, and prosecute incidents of theft and damage to Native American cultural resources. These factors included resource constraints and limitations with data to support decision-making. For example, officials from all seven agencies said that funding and staff constraints limit their capacity to implement costly prevention measures, such as shore stabilization or physical surveillance. In addition, officials from four of the seven agencies said that not being able to readily access incident data hindered their ability to decide where to focus prevention measures. Officials from three agencies said that limited data on the location and condition of archeological sites hindered their ability to investigate incidents of theft and damage. To address risks in protecting Native American cultural resources, given constrained resources, agencies need sufficient information to support decisions and target efforts. Taking steps to obtain such information would provide agencies with a more informed basis for allocating resources to mitigate the greatest risks to Native American cultural resources. For example, agencies could identify ways to facilitate easier retrieval and analysis of the location and condition of Native American cultural resources to better align available resources with high-priority sites when considering where to implement protective measures.