



*Office of*  
**INSPECTOR GENERAL**

*U.S. Department of the Interior*

# INSPECTION REPORT



**Museum Collections:  
Preservation and Protection Issues  
with Collections Maintained by the  
Bureau of Land Management**



# United States Department of the Interior

## OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

CENTRAL REGION – DENVER FIELD OFFICE

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January 29, 2010

To: Bob Abbey  
Director, Bureau of Land Management

From: Lorelee Bennett  
Deputy Regional Audit Manager

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lorelee Bennett".

Subject: Inspection Report - Museum Collections: Preservation and Protection Issues with Collections Maintained by the Bureau of Land Management (C-IS-BLM-0005-2010)

The long-term preservation and future availability of artwork, artifacts, and other items maintained in museum collections operated by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) requires BLM to minimize those factors that tend to shorten an object's life. As a result, we evaluated BLM museum collections to determine whether BLM was adequately preserving and protecting its artwork, artifacts, and other museum objects.

### *Background*

Bureaus within the Department of the Interior manage museum collections that are estimated to include over 146 million pieces of artwork, artifacts, and other museum objects. Museum property is acquired to be preserved, studied, or interpreted for public benefit and can include objects representing archeology, art, history, botany, zoology, paleontology, or geology.

Because museum property is intended for long-term preservation, its management requirements are necessarily different from the requirements of property that can be easily replaced. Therefore, the Department's Museum Property Handbook defines seven preservation categories for use in protecting museum property: storage, environment, security, fire protection, housekeeping, planning, and staffing.

On December 16, 2009 we issued a report titled "Department of the Interior Museum Collections" (Report No. C-IN-MOA-0010-2008). The review found that the Department was a poor steward of these museum collections and could take additional steps to improve preservation and protection of museum collections. To assess the adequacy of the Department's preservation practices, we developed a 44 question checklist assessing the seven preservation areas identified in the Department's guidance. Using this checklist, we visited one BLM site and

completed the checklist based on both our observations and interviews with museum personnel. We also received self-reported checklists from an additional two BLM sites. This report provides you with specific results for these BLM sites.

## *Results of Inspection*

Overall, we found the preservation practices were generally adequate at BLM sites included in this review. *See Appendix.* However, despite the generally adequate preservation practices, even one deficiency could jeopardize museum objects and result in irreparable harm, irreversible damage, or loss of the item. For example, while the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City, OR used a hygrothermograph<sup>1</sup>, no data analysis had been conducted on the readings for two years because

Site	Percentage of Checklist Items with Deficiencies
Oregon Trail	9%
Anasazi Heritage	2%
Billings Curation	9%



of a lack in staffing. However, while recording temperature and humidity is important, analyzing the reading for variations is crucial. Analysis could help identify problems in the environment, such as unusual climatic conditions, a leaky roof, the need for recalibration of equipment, or unusual visitor patterns. At this site, we observed historic items such as leather boots and hats that would be susceptible to deterioration if humidity levels were not appropriately controlled.



## *Recommendations*

We recommend that the Director, Bureau of Land Management, ensure that a plan is developed and implemented to:

**Recommendation 1.** Correct and/or mitigate, to the greatest extent possible, deficiencies identified at the three sites identified in this report.

**Recommendation 2.** Inspect all remaining BLM sites that house museum collections and correct and/or mitigate, to the greatest extent possible, all identified deficiencies.

<sup>1</sup> Hygrothermographs record relative humidity and temperature levels continuously over a period of time.

We would appreciate being kept apprised of the actions planned, or taken, on our recommendations as we will track the status of their implementation. We ask that you inform us of the planned course of action of the recommendations within 30 days.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this advisory, please call me at (303) 236-9243.

☐ No Deficiencies Noted

☒ Deficiencies Noted

% Percentage of Deficiencies Noted

	Observed	Self-Reported	
	National Historic Oregon Trail IC	Anasazi Heritage Center	Billings Curation Facility
<b>STORAGE</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>0%</b>
1. Safe from flooding.			
2. Appropriately insulated.			
3. Appropriate space.			
4. Sufficient space.			
5. Adequate storage cabinets.		X	
6. Cabinets not over-stacked.			
7. Open shelving safe.			
8. Stacked items protected.			
9. Earthquake safe.			
10. No overcrowding.			
11. Secure exhibit cases.			
12. Appropriate exhibit cases.			
13. Properly framed artwork.			
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>11%</b>
14. Temperature & humidity monitored.	X		
15. Observations recorded.	X		
16. Observations permanently saved.	X		
17. Observations analyzed.	X		
18. Hygrothermographs maintained.			
19. Outside light appropriately controlled.			
20. Artwork away from vents.			
21. Pest control devices used.			
22. Type of pests analyzed.			X
<b>SECURITY</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>13%</b>
23. Appropriate staff have keys.			
24. Keys are controlled.			
25. Visitors escorted.			
26. Visitors sign in.			
27. Closing procedures documented.			X
28. Alarm systems maintained.			
29. Sensitive items stored separately.			
30. Irreplaceable items guarded.			

	Observed	Self-Reported	
	National Historic Oregon Trail IC	Anasazi Heritage Center	Billings Curation Facility
<input type="checkbox"/> No Deficiencies Noted			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deficiencies Noted			
% Percentage of Deficiencies Noted			
<b>FIRE PROTECTION</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
31. Fire detection and suppression.			
32. Fire extinguishers.			
33. Staff trained on fire extinguishers.			
34. Fire suppression systems clear.			
35. No flammable liquids.			
<b>HOUSEKEEPING</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>50%</b>
36. Housekeeping performed.			<b>X</b>
37. Written rules on housekeeping.			<b>X</b>
38. Housekeepers trained.			
39. Smoking & eating prohibited.			
<b>PLANNING</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
40. Written plan.			
41. Assessment of property.			
42. Plan to evacuate property.			
<b>STAFFING</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
43. Staff assigned responsibilities.			
44. Staff have been trained.			
<b>ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS</b>			
1. Checklist Report	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
2. Basic Security Protection Report			<b>X</b>
3. Fire Protection Plan			
4. Integrated Pest Management Plan			
5. Environmental Control Plan			<b>X</b>
6. Annual Emergency Management Plan			
7. Current Collection Storage Plan			<b>X</b>
8. Written Handling Procedures			<b>X</b>

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