



*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 Reclamation**



# United States Department of the Interior

## OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

### CENTRAL REGION – DENVER FIELD OFFICE

134 Union Blvd., Suite 510

Denver CO 80228

January 29, 2010

To: Michael L. Connor  
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation

From: Loralee Bennett *Loralee Bennett*  
Deputy Regional Audit Manager

Subject: Inspection Report – Museum Collections: Preservation and Protection Issues with Collections Maintained by the Bureau of Reclamation (C-IS-BOR-0006-2010)

The long-term preservation and future availability of artwork, artifacts, and other items maintained in museum collections operated by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) requires BOR to minimize those factors that tend to shorten an object's life. As a result, we evaluated BOR museum collections to determine whether BOR 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 two BOR sites and

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

## *Results of Inspection*

Overall, we found BOR could take steps to improve the preservation practices at BOR sites included in this review. *See Appendix.* While some sites had only a small number of deficiencies, others had numerous deficiencies in multiple categories. Even one deficiency could jeopardize museum objects and result in irreparable harm, irreversible damage, or loss of the item. For example, at the New Melones Artifact Storage Facility in Jamestown, CA we were informed that, while the site had a security alarm system, the museum specialist did not arm the system. The specialist stated he did not arm the system because there was no one for the alarm company to notify if the alarm was triggered. As a result, artifacts at this location were placed at increased risk of being stolen or tampered with.

Site	Percentage of Checklist Items with Deficiencies
Middle Snake River	25%
New Melones	32%
Hover Dam Repository	2%
Huhugam Heritage Center	5%
Lower Colorado Office	0%

## *Recommendations*

We recommend that the Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, ensure that a plan is developed and implemented to:

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

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

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		
	Middle Snake River Field Office	New Melones	Hoover Dam Repository	Huhugam Heritage Center	Lower Colorado Regional Office
<b>STORAGE</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>0%</b>
1. Safe from flooding.		X		X	
2. Appropriately insulated.		X			
3. Appropriate space.					
4. Sufficient space.	X				
5. Adequate storage cabinets.					
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>78%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
14. Temperature & humidity monitored.	X				
15. Observations recorded.	X	X			
16. Observations permanently saved.	X				
17. Observations analyzed.	X	X			
18. Hygrothermographs maintained.					
19. Outside lights appropriately controlled.	X				
20. Artwork away from vents.					
21. Pest control devices used.	X				
22. Type of pests analyzed.	X				
<b>SECURITY</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
23. Appropriate staff have keys.		X			
24. Keys are controlled.		X	X		
25. Visitors escorted.		X			
26. Visitors sign in.					
27. Closing procedures documented.					
28. Alarm systems maintained.		X			
29. Sensitive items stored separately.					
30. Irreplaceable items guarded.					

☐ No Deficiencies Noted

☒ Deficiencies Noted

% Percentage of Deficiencies Noted

	Observed		Self-Reported		
	Middle Snake River Field Office	New Melones	Hoover Dam Repository	Huhugam Heritage Center	Lower Colorado Regional Office
<b>FIRE PROTECTION</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
31. Fire detection and suppression.		X			
32. Fire extinguishers.		X			
33. Staff trained on fire extinguishers.					
34. Fire suppression systems clear.					
35. No flammable liquids.					
<b>HOUSEKEEPING</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
36. Housekeeping performed.	X	X			
37. Written rules on housekeeping.	X	X			
38. Housekeepers trained.					
39. Smoking & eating prohibited.					
<b>PLANNING</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>0%</b>
40. Written plan.	X	X			
41. Assessment of property.		X			
42. Plan to evacuate property.				X	
<b>STAFFING</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</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		X		X	
2. Basic Security Protection Report	X	X	X		
3. Fire Protection Plan		X			
4. Integrated Pest Management Plan		X			
5. Environmental Control Plan	X	X			
6. Annual Emergency Management Plan					
7. Current Collection Storage Plan	X				X
8. Written Handling Procedures	X				X

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