



Archeology Program

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Activity: Protecting Our Archeological Past

Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA)

In 1979, lawmakers in the United States Congress wanted to stop archaeological sites on public lands and Indian lands from being damaged and artifacts from being stolen. They believed that these sites and artifacts are an important part of our history. Lawmakers created the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) to help protect these important places and objects on public lands. The law says that people may not dig for or collect archaeological resources including pottery, baskets, bottles, sites with coins or arrowheads, tools, structures, pit houses, rock art, graves, and human skeletons. No person may sell or buy archaeological resources that are taken illegally. People who break this law are punished.

First Offense: A person who breaks this law for the first time may be fined \$100,000 and spend one year in jail. If the cost of repairing the damage to the site costs more than \$500, the person may receive a fine of \$250,000 and spend two years in jail.

Second Offense: A person who breaks this law for the second time may be fined \$250,000 and spend five years in jail.

Additionally, vehicles and other equipment used in breaking this law may be taken away from the person who breaks this law.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act rewards people who tell law enforcement officers about people who break this law.

ARPA protects all public lands including those managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, military lands, and tribal lands.

Laws similar to ARPA have been passed by several states. Contact your State Historic Preservation Office or the State Archaeologist to learn what the laws are in your state.