



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 Indian Affairs**



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

CENTRAL REGION – DENVER FIELD OFFICE

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January 29, 2010

To: Jerold L. Gidner
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

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 Indian Affairs (C-IS-BIA-0004-2010)

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

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

Results of Inspection

Overall, we found widespread issues with the preservation practices at the BIA sites. While some sites had only a small number of deficiencies, others had numerous deficiencies in multiple categories. *See Appendix.* For example, none of the sites reviewed monitored temperature and/or humidity to determine its impact on the condition of artwork and/or artifacts maintained by the sites. Additionally, one site did not perform more than half of the preservation controls we inspected.

Because the preservation of the collections at many BIA sites has been neglected, countless artwork, artifacts, and other museum objects are in jeopardy. Identified deficiencies could jeopardize museum objects and result in irreparable harm, irreversible damage, or loss of the item. Overall, all seven of the BIA sites (100 percent) had one or more deficiencies.

Site	Percentage of Checklist Items with Deficiencies
Central Office	43%
Central Region	39%
Northern California	36%
Alaska Native Claims	39%
Rocky Mountain	64%
Southern Plains	25%
Western Regional	11%

Recommendations

We recommend that the Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 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 seven sites identified in this report.

Recommendation 2. Inspect all remaining BIA 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.

	Observed			Self-Reported			
	Central Office West	Central Region Office	Northern California Agency	Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Office	Rocky Mountain Regional Office	Southern Plains Regional Office	Western Regional Office
<input type="checkbox"/> No Deficiencies Noted							
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deficiencies Noted							
% Percentage of Deficiencies Noted							
STORAGE	15%	38%	8%	23%	15%	8%	0%
1. Safe from flooding.							
2. Appropriately insulated.		X					
3. Appropriate space.		X					
4. Sufficient space.		X		X		X	
5. Adequate storage cabinets.							
6. Cabinets not over-stacked.							
7. Open shelving safe.							
8. Stacked items protected.				X			
9. Earthquake safe.							
10. No overcrowding.		X					
11. Secure exhibit cases.	X	X	X		X		
12. Appropriate exhibit cases.					X		
13. Properly framed artwork.	X						
ENVIRONMENT	67%	67%	67%	67%	89%	78%	44%
14. Temperature & humidity monitored.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
15. Observations recorded.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
16. Observations permanently saved.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
17. Observations analyzed.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18. Hygrothermographs maintained.		X			X	X	
19. Outside light appropriately controlled.		X			X	X	
20. Artwork away from vents.							
21. Pest control devices used.	X		X	X	X		
22. Type of pests analyzed.	X		X	X	X	X	
SECURITY	25%	38%	13%	25%	75%	0%	13%
23. Appropriate staff have keys.		X					
24. Keys are controlled.	X		X		X		
25. Visitors escorted.		X					
26. Visitors sign in.		X		X	X		X
27. Closing procedures documented.					X		
28. Alarm systems maintained.	UTD				X		
29. Sensitive items stored separately.				X	X		
30. Irreplaceable items guarded.					X		

☐ No Deficiencies Noted

☒ Deficiencies Noted

% Percentage of Deficiencies Noted

	Observed			Self-Reported			
	Central Office West	Central Region Office	Northern California Agency	Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Office	Rocky Mountain Regional Office	Southern Plains Regional Office	Western Regional Office
FIRE PROTECTION	20%	0%	0%	20%	60%	0%	0%
31. Fire detection and suppression.	UTD				X		
32. Fire extinguishers.					X		
33. Staff trained on fire extinguishers.				X	X		
34. Fire suppression systems clear.							
35. No flammable liquids.							
HOUSEKEEPING	75%	25%	100%	50%	100%	25%	0%
36. Housekeeping performed.	UTD		X		X		
37. Written rules on housekeeping.	UTD	X	X	X	X		
38. Housekeepers trained.	UTD		X		X		
39. Smoking & eating prohibited.			X	X	X	X	
PLANNING	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%	33%	0%
40. Written plan.	X	X	X	X	X		
41. Assessment of property.	X		X	X	X		
42. Plan to evacuate property.	X	X	X	X	X	X	
STAFFING	100%	0%	50%	0%	100%	50%	0%
43. Staff assigned responsibilities.	X				X		
44. Staff have been trained.	X		X		X	X	
ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS							
1. Checklist Report	UTD		X		X	X	
2. Basic Security Protection Report	UTD	X	X		X	X	
3. Fire Protection Plan	UTD	X	X		X		
4. Integrated Pest Management Plan	UTD	X	X		X		
5. Environmental Control Plan	UTD	X	X		X	X	
6. Annual Emergency Management Plan	UTD	X	X		X		
7. Current Collection Storage Plan	UTD				X	X	
8. Written Handling Procedures	UTD		X		X		

UTD = Unable to determine. No one at the site was able to answer the question.

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