

The SHOSHONE-BANNOCK TRIBES

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FORT HALL BUSINESS COUNCIL
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March 23, 2026

The Honorable Jim Guthrie
Idaho Senate Committee on State Affairs
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0081

Re: Opposition to House Bill 898 – State Historic Preservation Officer Restructuring

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Members of the Idaho Senate Committee on State Affairs,

On behalf of the Fort Hall Business Council, the governing body of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes (Tribes), I write to voice the Tribes' opposition to House Bill 898 (H0898). This legislation would move State Historic Preservation Officer oversight, currently under the Idaho State Historical Society, to the Office of Species, Minerals and Energy Coordination (OSMEC). This creates a conflict of interest as State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) responsibilities would move from an office focused on historical preservation to an office that per statute, "...facilitates federal and state permitting processes..."

As a sovereign government, the Tribes currently have a Government-to-Government relationship with the State of Idaho and rely upon the SHPO to ensure the state's historic and archaeological properties are preserved, interpreted, and managed. We view H0898 as a direct threat to our inherent sovereign rights, our cultural patrimony, and our ancestral lands.

Removing the SHPO from the State Historical Society and placing it under the OSMEC is not a simple administrative move. It represents a fundamental breach of the trust and consultation framework that we have worked diligently to establish and maintain with the State. Moving the SHPO sends a clear and unacceptable message that obtaining permits for development will take precedence over the protection of our cultural heritage. ***This favors development interests, while undermining the impartiality and integrity required for meaningful section 106 reviews that are mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).***

The current structure housing the SHPO within the State Historical Society ensures that decisions regarding our homelands and ancestral sites are guided by cultural and historical expertise. Moving this office under the OSMEC creates an inherent conflict of interest. It places the protection of our most sacred sites under the purview of an entity whose purpose includes advancing energy and mineral interests that could adversely affect cultural resources. The Tribes cannot trust that these cultural resources will be protected if the very office responsible

**TO: Chairman Guthrie and Members of the Idaho Senate Committee on State Affairs,
RE: Re: Opposition to House Bill 898 – State Historic Preservation Officer Restructuring**

for their oversight is subordinate to an office with the objective of coordinating permitting for natural resource extraction and development. This move jeopardizes the delicate balance between economic development and cultural preservation, a balance that the current SHPO structure has maintained with integrity. ***The Tribes respectfully request to know what mechanisms will be established to ensure SHPO recommendations and agreements remain independent, objective, and not in conflict with the objectives of the OSMEC.***

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have an excellent working relationship with the SHPO as our cultural resources are spread throughout our homelands. Some of these resources are managed by the SHPO. For example, as required by the NHPA, the SHPO maintains a statewide inventory of historic properties through the Idaho Cultural Resources Information System (ICRIS). This system centralizes records of over 103,000 resources—including buildings, sites, districts, structures, objects, and archaeological sites and is used in part to support Section 106 compliance review. The Tribes utilize this tool to assist with protection of cultural resources in our homelands.

The relationship between the Tribes and the SHPO is not merely cooperative, it is legally mandated. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the SHPO is required to consult with the Tribes regarding any federally funded or permitted project that may impact sites of religious and cultural significance to our people. These include ancient villages, burial grounds, and sacred landscapes that are integral to our identity as a people. ***If OSMEC objectives include a focus on permitting, how can future consultations be meaningful and lead to mutually agreeable outcomes?***

Lastly, we urge this committee and the Legislature to consider the federal implications of this move. As a federally mandated office operating under federal guidelines, moving it to an office that would compromise its independence may jeopardize Idaho's compliance with the NHPA, potentially leading to challenges in federal permitting and the loss of federal historic preservation funds. This does not streamline government; it injects unnecessary legal risk into state projects.

The Fort Hall Business Council formally requests that you reject HB 898. The independence and integrity of the SHPO within the Idaho State Historical Society should be preserved.

Respectfully,



Donna Thompson
Chairwoman,
Fort Hall Business Council
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes