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(S.D.)-Feds Pledge To Improve Protection Of Sacred Sites

By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 12/07/2012 08:11 AM

WASHINGTON (AP) - Protection of sites held sacred by American Indian and Alaska Natives will be bolstered under a memorandum of understanding signed by four federal agencies and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The memo signed Thursday by the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Energy and Interior also calls for improving tribal access to sites that are on federal land.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar says the agreement recognizes the shared responsibility the agencies have to respect and foster Native American cultural and religious heritage.

The agencies plan to work during the next five years to raise awareness about sacred sites. That includes developing a website, a training program for federal employees and guidance for managing sacred sites.

The agreement comes just weeks after thieves made off with rock carvings that had graced a sacred site in California's Sierra Nevada.

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