



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF ALBERTA

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March 16, 2026

The Honourable Tanya Fir  
Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women  
Room 227, Legislature Building  
10800-97 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, AB  
T5K 2B6

Attention: Minister Tanya Fir  
cc: Deputy Minister David Link

### **RE: Archaeological Society of Alberta Annual Operating Grant**

Dear Minister Fir,

We are writing to request the restoration of annual funding for the Archaeological Society of Alberta (ASA), one of the Provincial Heritage Organizations (PHOs) whose \$29,000 funding was eliminated from the 2026 budget. We listened to the explanation that you gave in the Legislature on March 11 of why our PHO lost funding. At that meeting you explained that you needed to direct funds to organizations that provide extensive service throughout the sector. That the ASA would *not* be seen as such an organization surprised us as it is the embodiment of the type of investment in Alberta that has been articulated through your Volunteer Action Plan. Your comments made us realize that we have done a poor job of articulating how we provide service throughout Alberta and across a variety of sectors in our province. We would like to do that here and ask that you restore our stable annual funding.

While we appreciate the opportunity to apply for funding through the Community Initiative Projects (CIP) Program, there are a number of reasons why a modest annual budgetary allotment for our organization is essential for our operations, in addition to CIP funding possibilities. Having us appear as a “line item” in the budget, even for such a modest amount, is an important statement regarding the value your government places in heritage and helps us articulate to our volunteer members the importance of working with the government to achieve our mutually beneficial aims. Many grant opportunities require “matching funds”, and we have been very successful in leveraging our modest annual budget in such a fashion. Our organization offers much to Alberta across multiple sectors, and our goals and activities are well aligned with many of the priorities that have been articulated by the government and especially in the current budget.

To begin, it is important to explain the structure of our organization, and how that structure facilitates engagement across the entire province and through a variety of sectors. We are a volunteer Provincial Heritage Organization that is organized into six regional centres located in Edmonton, Bodo, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. These six centres operate in tandem with one another, overseen by a provincial executive with representatives from each of the six regions. ASA members pay an annual fee that is used to help defray costs associated with our activities, which are open to any member of the public; membership is not a requirement. In fact, it is our members who create, handle logistics, and host these free activities that are offered to all Albertans. We are not a club, where members pay for access to activities. We are an organization that mobilizes volunteers for community/provincial engagement. We are the provincial government’s “boots on the ground”, explaining to Albertans and visitors to Alberta the importance of Alberta’s heritage. The membership fees help cover the costs of space rental, transportation, printing, etc., to support our Alberta heritage programs. These membership fees and government funding are needed to offer our programs and resources. It is perhaps best to think of our members as donors to Alberta rather than “club members”. Their membership fees, and more importantly the time they give to the society, are donations above and beyond the PHO grant, and are used to support public outreach and heritage preservation for all Albertans. These fees are somewhat akin to the kind of membership fees museums typically use to encourage active participation of community members while raising funds to support activities.

The number of volunteer hours dedicated to our organization last year was officially counted as 7,696, which, using provincial minimum wage standards can be valued at \$115,400.00. This is a 23% increase in volunteer hours since we reported to you in 2024. There are many different ways that this volunteerism manifests. We publish the *Alberta*

*Archaeological Review (AAR)*, the only periodical dedicated to the archaeology of our province; members get print copies, but digital copies are freely available through the University of Lethbridge to anyone who desires access. Likewise, our newsletter is publicly available on our website.

Each centre organizes a free monthly lecture series, in which presenters report on aspects of Alberta's culture and heritage. Lectures are aimed at interested community members, bringing heritage specialists into direct contact with the interested public. Students, avocationalists and professionals in heritage and related sectors, and seniors are particularly enthusiastic for these opportunities to learn more about the province. The annual government funding provided to the ASA helps offset some of the costs for speakers to travel to different parts of the province.

When possible, these presentations/lectures are recorded and presented on the society's YouTube channel (Alberta Archaeology). This increases the reach of these presentations quite substantially, sharing and celebrating Alberta and its archaeology across the world. A lecture about Medicine Wheels in Alberta has been viewed 1424 times as of today; Duane Mistaken Chief's presentation on Blackfoot concepts and language has been viewed 1073 times. Presentations by scholars based in Alberta on other topics have been viewed over 3000 times. We have more than 20 videos that have been watched a total of 15,465 times, with more planned for the coming season. This has been a very successful component of our programming, but the production of high-quality videos that do justice to the presentation of Alberta's culture, is quite expensive.

Our activities extend far beyond lecture-based presentations. We hold many community outreach events, including at rural locations outside of the six centres, providing access to people living outside of urban settings. We offer a number of workshops throughout the year and throughout the province, providing a variety of different kinds of hands-on learning experiences, ranging from Indigenous beadmaking to actual archaeological excavation (sometimes even marshalling volunteers for emergency salvage work). Field trips take members of the public to difficult-to-access archaeological locations throughout Alberta.

Perhaps our best-known outreach program is what we call "Stones and Bones", where experts in Alberta heritage travel to different locations offering opportunities for people to visit booths to have one on one contact with knowledgeable society members and learn about Alberta culture. Often, visitors to such events bring in cultural materials to have these experts explain their importance. These outreach events provide important opportunities for our members to explain to other Albertans about the laws regarding the

treatment of antiquities and archaeological materials. Often visitors do not realize that there are laws about how such materials are to be treated and having the opportunity to learn about these laws in a safe setting furthers our government's ability to uphold laws outside of a judicial or policing context.

Many of our ASA events take place at provincial heritage sites; they offer opportunities to encourage people to make use of (and pay admission fees to) these government-run facilities. We volunteer at Alberta parks, museums, and heritage sites, offering unpaid support to these locations that are of such significance to our province. You used an example in your remarks on March 11 that in your new budget you will be able to again offer free admission to Alberta's museums and heritage sites on special occasions. This is an excellent use of funds, and we were happy to hear this. During these special occasions, our organization and its dedicated volunteers are fundamentally important; we offer significant unpaid support that make these opportunities possible. We effectively expand staff capacity by offering educational experiences delivered by volunteers present at the sites during these free admission days, something that we have been doing to support Alberta heritage for years. For example, this year we had 10 volunteers "working" at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump on Family Day.

Outreach events aimed at children allow Alberta's youth the opportunity to explore Alberta's culture through hands-on activities, experiencing the past with leading experts on different topics. More formal school presentations are also facilitated by our organization, in which ASA members travel to schools around the province, bringing with them artifacts, and distributing our children's workbook. The workbook is expensive to print but teachers and students really appreciate its innovative approach to teaching about the past. Our teaching resource kit is continuously updated through the annual funding provided by the government, replacing broken items and culturally updating materials as needed. ASA representatives are also present at school conventions, helping teachers find ways to incorporate Alberta's archaeological heritage directly into the provincial curriculum. Funding for these activities are amongst the most expensive line items in our budget and are the most likely activities that we will have to cut if our budget is not restored.

One of our activities that is most in danger through the loss of a stable annual budget is our support of the Bodo Archaeological Centre and Sites, located in the municipal district of Provost in East Central Alberta. As the largest archaeological site in Canada, the Bodo Archaeological Centre draws hundreds of tourists to that area every summer. It is the largest tourist attraction in the region. Bodo is one of the most important archaeological sites in Canada, used by First Nations people for at least 5000 years, and for the last 500

years as a bison pound, an important hunting method where bison were corralled into a penned area. The archaeological preservation is breathtaking, and Bodo summer programs allow children and adults to participate in archaeological excavations. It provides experiential learning opportunities for rural students within that region, and from schools hundreds of kilometers away. Through the Bodo center, anyone, regardless of academic background, can experience archaeology. The success of the Bodo Archaeological Centre and Sites is one of the ASA's greatest accomplishments, one that is directly threatened by the elimination of stable annual funding because between 10-20% of its annual budget comes from funds supplied through the ASA.

Our society works closely with your ministry through the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, and a representative is always present at our executive meetings offering guidance on best practices, regulations, and governmental priorities. The ASA's network of volunteers assists the Archaeological Survey of Alberta with the protection of Alberta's heritage. Our volunteers engage in the monitoring of sites across the province and work directly with the Archaeological Survey of Alberta when threats to Alberta's heritage become apparent. Our society provides emergency support for archaeological heritage, and we provide small-scale funding for preservation activities. For example, we funded a project to digitally preserve the Brooks Aqueduct, a national and provincial historical site, an example of the technological ingenuity that Albertans brought to bear in the early part of the twentieth century in order to introduce dryland irrigation and make southern Alberta the agricultural centre that it is today. Related, your staff at the Archaeological Survey of Alberta no longer have the capacity to support the Report-a-Find Program, an important mechanism through which community members who have found archaeological materials can inform the government. We have taken up this work on your government's behalf; we now fill that gap, connecting your government with local communities, urban and rural.

The ASA helps connect students directly with industry partners. As I am sure you are aware, professional archaeological work is conducted in our province through private companies, who work with industry and Indigenous leaders to facilitate economic activities in our province. These industrial activities are supported by our organization and are incredibly important for our resource economy. By working with these firms and Indigenous partners, Alberta is able to demonstrate to the world that our province cares deeply about the ethical management of resources. Through the Alberta Advanced Education Work-Integrated-Learning (WIL) Advanced Voucher Program, we connect students with volunteer archaeological centres/societies, Cultural Resource Management (CRM) firms, and post-secondary institutions (PSIs), assisting them with job training that leads directly to work that supports our resource economy. In just three years, we facilitated the placement of

eighty (80) post-secondary and graduate students in part-time and full-time positions, with thirty-two (32) participating employers. This program helped students gain valuable job training preparing them for work in the industry. And it also inspired industry partners to invest in Alberta education through matching grants. While the WIL program is now completed (as of December 2025), it is an example of how successfully the ASA works in tandem with the provincial government.

The ASA facilitates interaction between the government and different heritage organizations within it, Indigenous leaders, industry, education, post-secondary education, and an extensive network of volunteers. Bringing all of these stakeholders into contact is deeply impactful for a variety of sectors of importance to Alberta as a whole. The tourism sector is supported through our outreach activities. We advertise our heritage throughout and beyond the province and our activities at different archaeological sites, interpretive centres, and museums offer added value, encouraging repeated visits to tourist venues throughout Alberta. The Education sector is supported by the resources we create and our work with K-12 schools takes place across the province. Post-secondary education is supported by the lectures and workshops we offer, and the opportunities for service and work-integrated learning that the ASA facilitates. Our resource sector benefits from the work that the ASA does and our engagement with Indigenous community members provides direct evidence that our province's resource extraction industry is amongst the most ethical and responsible in the world.

We feel that the stable annual funding that had been allotted in the past to the Archaeological Society of Alberta is a small and modest investment that provides a substantial return for our province as a whole. Having the ASA present as a line item on the provincial budget provides important recognition of our mutual relationship and the importance that your government places in our province's heritage. We respectfully request that you reconsider the elimination of our funding given how well our organization supports our province and the priorities that have been identified by our current government.

Respectfully,

Wendy-Ellen Nittel  
President, Archaeological Society of Alberta