Introduction

The conservation program of the National Park Service's Intermountain Region Museum Services Program is designed to support the preservation of museum collections in its eight states of Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. There are 90 parks in the region with a wide range of collection materials from historic, artistic, and archeological provenance adding up to over 10 million items. Approximately 5.5 million are stored at the Western Archeological and Conservation Center, the physical home of the conservation labs. The remainder are stored and exhibited at parks and repositories throughout the region. The conservation team, consisting of two National Park Service conservators and two additional project staff, is active both in-house and onsite at parks to address conservation and preservation issues.

Park collections are managed by curators, museum technicians, archaeologists, cultural resource managers, or collateral duty staff from other areas of the park. With such a range of experience and training, the approaches to outreach and advocacy vary from park to park.

**Outreach**

Outreach is a major part of the daily lives of the conservation team, addressing needs large and small. These needs range from the preventive conservation of a single object to the treatment of hundreds of objects within a collection.

As with many museums, successful outreach of conservation and preservation within the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service is achieved through:

- Cultivating relationships and trust between curators and conservators
- Improving communication and education
- Collaborating with other programs, specialists, and project designers, all while remaining receptive and flexible to the specific assets or limitations of the individual park.

An ongoing challenge to outreach within the park service is the movement of staff between parks throughout the country. These promotions or transfers often mean that project leadership can change mid-way through a process, thus focus may shift as well. Outreach has to include updates and review for new team members to ensure collections are cared for, even as new focus and ideas are introduced by leadership.

Education is a major component of outreach within our program. Opportunities to educate include answering individual questions on a regular basis and providing more formal training opportunities through workshops and on-site work projects. The conservation team may join park staff for large projects, such as designing a packing strategy and providing guidance for moving a collection. During these types of projects, the conservation team often assists with the most difficult issues or most sensitive objects.

Advocacy

Recommendations from the conservators are often used by park staff to advocate for special projects that will improve preservation of the collections. In most parks, the leadership is making decisions about many different issues, including natural resource, cultural resources, visitor support and park maintenance. Curators have to advocate for the needs of their collection amongst a crowded field of important, urgent issues. As the conservation team surveys materials at a park, we are able to guide the curatorial staff in prioritizing conservation needs and back up recommendations with strong data about their collections. Throughout this work, we are able to help develop and implement projects that improve the overall stability of the collections in the region.

In addition to working with parks on an individual level, we are able to identify issues that exist beyond the park boundary, trends that exist throughout a climate or the whole region. As part of the regional Museum Services Program, we are able to recognize and advocate for strategies that may address the preservation needs at several parks.

Overall we have found that successful outreach and advocacy requires a recognition of individual needs rather than a formulaic approach (just as in conservation treatment!). This requires listening, collaborating with park staff, accommodating individual needs, knowledge of park issues and experiences of the people involved.

Conclusion:

Outreach and advocacy are a major part of the daily lives of the conservation team and includes regular conversations with park museum staff to discuss issues large and small, from working with environmental data loggers, to preparing for exhibits, to preparing for the move of 1 million objects.

The position of the conservation program within the regional structure of the National Park Service allows outreach and advocacy to exist on many levels including: open communication with an individual park regarding collection needs, identifying trends across parks to address a greater need, and participating on multidisciplinary teams to advocate for preservation. Through our work reaching out to parks to address preservation issues or playing a supporting advocate role for the park museum staff, the conservation team continues to develop improved methods of outreach and advocacy for conservation and preservation within the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service.

**Author Information:**

Brynn Bender, Senior Conservator, Intermountain Region Museum Services Program, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, 255 N Commerce Park Loop, Tucson, Arizona, 85705, (520)-791-6430, brynn.bender@nps.gov

Dana Senge, Assistant Conservator, Intermountain Region Museum Services Program, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, 255 N Commerce Park Loop, Tucson, Arizona, 85705, (520)-791-6432, dana_senge@nps.gov

Project Conservator, Maggie Kipling, working with Safari Life Collection staff to pack collections for transit to WACC for conservation and short term storage. Photo by Dana Senge.