



PRESS RELEASE
February 29, 2024

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SB Museum of Natural History's Chumash Exhibit in Transition to Comply with New Federal Regulations

- New federal NAGPRA regulations took effect on January 12, 2024, outlining that tribal consultation was required for exhibiting certain kinds of items.
- To comply with these regulations, the Museum has closed its Chumash Life exhibit space while tribal consultation is pending.
- Museum staff are planning temporary covers for the Chumash Life displays, with text to educate the public about NAGPRA.

SANTA BARBARA, CA— On January 12, 2024, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History closed its Chumash Life exhibit to comply with new federal regulations that were released under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). In deference to tribal perspectives, the updated regulations now require museums to obtain tribal permission to display certain kinds of sacred and culturally significant objects.

While tribal consultation on Museum exhibits is pending, Museum staff are planning temporary covers for the Chumash Life displays, with text to educate the public about NAGPRA.

The original NAGPRA law dates back to 1990 to give tribes the right to reclaim their ancestral human remains (hereafter referred to as ancestors), funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.

In fall 2021, the Museum received [a large repatriation request for thousands of items](#) and in 2022, fulfilled that request and hired a full-time specialist to focus on NAGPRA. "Having a staff member in this role helps the SBMNH be proactive by reaching out to initiate transfers and sustain ongoing dialog with Native communities," said Museum President & CEO Luke Swetland. Since hiring NAGPRA Officer Jonathan Malindine, the Museum has been proactively repatriating all Native American ancestors and NAGPRA-eligible cultural items. The Museum's substantial progress can be compared to that of 622 other institutions in [ProPublica's Repatriation Database](#).

"Leading museums around the country have complied with the update to NAGPRA by covering or emptying displays pending consultation and our leadership agrees this is the right approach," Swetland added. The Museum hopes to use the opportunity provided by the



temporarily available exhibit space to educate the public about the need for NAGPRA, and its relationship to the field of archaeology.

“The scientific nature of our institution is built on the opportunity to learn and change,” said Swetland. “We have been proactive in our efforts to work closely with our tribal partners to ensure that we have adhered to the law and are doing what is right in this situation. The long-term future of the hall will be informed by a lengthy collaborative process, and I’m confident in our collective ability to ultimately create a compelling and educational experience for students and guests.”

Learn more about the update to NAGPRA on the [Federal Register](#).

For the Museum’s Statement on Repatriation please visit sbnature.org/repatriation.

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About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. Founded in 1916, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History inspires a thirst for discovery and a passion for the natural world. The Museum seeks to connect people to nature for the betterment of both, and prides itself on being *naturally different*. For more information, visit sbnature.org.