February 3, 2014

John Francis, Ph.D.
Vice President for Research, Conservation, and Exploration
National Geographic Society
1145 17th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036-4688

Dear Dr. Francis:

The Arizona Archaeological Council (AAC), Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society (AAHS), and Archaeology Southwest are not-for-profit associations that promote education, research, and cultural preservation in Arizona and throughout the American Southwest. Our memberships include professionals with diverse backgrounds ranging from archaeology to historic preservation, and avocationalists committed to research and preservation. Together, our organizations represent several thousand members who are passionate about archaeology, cultural heritage, and cultural preservation in the American Southwest.

In December 2013, the National Geographic Channel’s television show Diggers began filming in southern Arizona. The AAC, AAHS, and Archaeology Southwest learned that show personnel conducted metal detecting and ground disturbance activities in the Naco, Tombstone, and Tubac areas. In at least one instance, they removed artifacts from a buried context on private land. The AAC, AAHS, and Archaeology Southwest and their members are also aware that the show attempted to conduct interviews and film at Tubac Presidio State Historic Park, an Arizona State Parks unit. The show’s request was declined.

The AAC, AAHS, and Archaeology Southwest would like to express our collective concern about the reality television program, Diggers. In accordance with statements made by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) and Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), the AAC and other archaeological organizations in the Southwest are troubled by both the ethical and legal issues surrounding the show. The program depicts the discovery and excavation of archaeological materials in a manner that is incompatible with professional archaeological standards and that misleads the public about archaeology. It promotes a message that it is acceptable practice and even “cool” to remove archaeological materials from their original position and to damage archaeological sites and contexts. Thus, the program actively detracts from the true excitement of conducting thorough archaeological investigations that address important questions about the past.

The Diggers program devalues archaeological practices and ethics in several fundamental ways. Foremost, the program does not explain the important reasons (e.g., compelling questions) that lead archaeologists to collect information from a particular site. Instead, the show suggests that the primary reason for investigation is simply to find artifacts. This reasoning is not consistent with responsible archaeological methods and results in the loss of prehistoric and historical information. Second, the show does little to explain that the information and artifacts archaeologists obtain are invaluable and nonrenewable. Instead, Diggers promotes the destruction of incredibly important archaeological information in an effort to obtain objects, often solely for the sake of discovering and procuring them. By excavating artifacts and removing them from their original positions, the program is promoting the destruction of irreplaceable archaeological information that, left in context, can be used to understand amazing details about past human behavior. Even more
egregious, the program places monetary value on some “finds” and monetizes priceless cultural heritage belonging to all Americans. For example, in a recent 2013 filming in Kentucky, the show displays several graphics that highlight the monetary value of Civil War-era artifacts and then, at the end of the show, dramatizes the value of a confederate belt buckle. Finally, the television show does little to explain to its audience where the *Diggers* are allowed to conduct metal-detecting activities and where they are prohibited from doing so. It is important to convey to TV viewers that state and federal permits are required to conduct archaeological work on public lands. Otherwise, the show may mislead viewers to think that digging and treasure-seeking in archaeological sites and historic landmarks is both legal and acceptable.

The AAC, AAHS, Archaeology Southwest, and our organizations’ members view the *Diggers* program and the activities it promotes as a threat to Arizona’s rich and diverse cultural heritage. We oppose further *Diggers* filming and any associated destruction to cultural resources in Arizona. We also oppose the show’s messages that mislead the public about archaeological work and the application of responsible methods and standards.

The AAC, AAHS, and Archaeology Southwest advocate that the National Geographic Society either work to alter its content substantially in cooperation with professional archaeologists affiliated with the SAA and SHA or cease its endorsement of *Diggers*. If the show’s producers are unable to make meaningful changes, we urge the National Geographic Society to remove the National Geographic brand from the program. We are aware that many other professional archaeological organizations, at both the national and state level, have issued similar requests. We are aware that the National Geographic Channel and the show’s producers have already failed to respond adequately to the SAA’s requested changes (http://www.saa.org/Portals/0/SAA/GovernmentAffairs/NGC%20Diggers.pdf).

By substantially altering or removing the National Geographic brand from the *Diggers* program, the National Geographic Society can return to its core mission as a non-for-profit scientific and educational institution that promotes and publicizes scientific research in accordance with ethical and legal standards. The organization can continue educating the public about professional archaeological investigations that are exciting, that answer compelling questions about the past, and that provide opportunities for member of the public to participate in this professional work.

The AAC, AAHS, and Archaeology Southwest encourage the National Geographic Society to honor its mission and esteemed past of working closely with professional researchers. Moreover, we urge National Geographic to respect the ethical standards and opinions of the professional archaeological community. Let us work together to highlight newsworthy archaeological research, educate the public about the values and principles of this work, and promote cultural preservation for the future.

Cordially,

[Signature]

Christopher P. Garraty, Ph.D., RPA
President
Arizona Archaeological Council
P.O. Box 27566
Tempe, AZ 85282
William H. Doelle, Ph.D.
CEO and President
Archaeology Southwest
300 North Ash Alley
Tucson, AZ 85701

Jesse A. Ballenger, Ph.D., RPA
President
Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society
Arizona State Museum
P.O. Box 210026
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ 85721-0026

CC:
Gary E. Knell, President and CEO, National Geographic Society
John Fahey, Chairman of Board of Trustees, National Geographic Society
Julie Frazier, Communications Manager, National Geographic Channel
Fredrik Hiebert, National Geographic Fellow
W. H. Wills, National Geographic Committee for Research and Exploration
David Lyle, CEO, National Geographic Channel
Ann Day, Director of Communications, National Geographic Society