

# THE ALASKA HERITAGE RESOURCES SURVEY - POLICIES AND GUIDELINES ACCESS, DATA USE, AND DATA LIMITATIONS – MARCH 2024

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## Background

The Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRs) is a collection of reported cultural resources (archaeological sites, buildings, structures, objects, or locations, etc.), from prehistoric to modern, and some paleontological sites, from throughout the State of Alaska. The AHRs is maintained by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Office of History and Archaeology (OHA) staff and the electronic database portion of the AHRs is the AHRSPortal. The AHRs provides access to qualified users for potential research, development of historic contexts, and for project-planning purposes.

The AHRs contains, either physically or digitally, cultural resources information reported to OHA over the last 50+ years. The cultural resource inventory of Alaska is incomplete and ongoing. To date, the AHRs database contains over 50,000 records of cultural resources from throughout Alaska. Sites listed in the AHRs are under the jurisdiction, ownership, or control of other entities, such as state and federal agencies, municipal governments, private individuals, and tribal organizations.

## Restricted Access

To protect sensitive cultural sites against unauthorized disturbance, access to the AHRs database and related information that would put sites at risk (i.e., coordinates and maps or texts that depict precise locations of archaeological sites) is withheld from the public. Restricted or confidential site information is withheld from public records disclosure under Alaska state law (AS 40.25.110) and under the federal Freedom of Information Act (PL 89-554). The restriction of site inventory information is allowed by AS 40.25.120(a)(4), Alaska State Parks Policy and Procedure No. 50200, the National Historic Preservation Act (PL 89-665, 16 U.S.C. 470), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (PL 96-95).

## Statement of Access

OHA restricts AHRs access to users with a legitimate need for the information. Authorized users are limited to representatives of federal, state, local, or tribal governments on official business, scientific researchers, and qualified representatives of cultural resource management firms conducting investigations that will contribute to resource protection.

AHRs access granted to agency or government employees who do NOT meet the [United States Department of the Interior, Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualifications \(link\)](#) is for preliminary planning purposes only. Please contact cultural resources professionals on staff or on contract if you have any questions or comments about cultural resources noted in your project planning or for planning cultural resources work. If you have any questions about what that means and/or why, please feel free to contact the AHRs Manager.

OHA restricts all other non-agency AHRs access to cultural resource professionals who meet the qualification standards. Any agency users who are not cultural resources professionals should consult with a qualified individual or company before using AHRs data for anything other than preliminary planning purposes.

## Use and Security of AHRs Data

Since AHRs access and use are restricted by law, those who gain access to the AHRs are responsible for the subsequent use and/or transmission of the information they gather from the database or from physical sources at OHA. Any misuse of AHRs login credentials and/or AHRs information in general may result in the revocation of access privileges for the original account owner. If you have any questions concerning how AHRs/AHRSPortal information is to be used by others in your organization or how it might be shared with the public, please contact OHA for review and guidance.

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**DO NOT** include AHRS information in public documents that would put sites at risk (such as non-OHA permit applications, grant applications, and/or other documents for which public access cannot be restricted). Information such as coordinates and maps or text with explicit site locations: (a) shall be held in a secure place with restricted access; (b) shall be used for legitimate planning or scientific research; and (c) shall not be redistributed to those who have not signed an AHRS User Agreement Form and submitted that form to OHA (see exceptions below). When in doubt, AHRS Users should consult with OHA Staff.

Coordinates, maps, and text that depict specific site locations may be made available to interested parties (at OHA's discretion) in a particular project planning process but should be marked "Restricted – Not for Public Distribution." Maps with generalize site locations used to illustrate presence of cultural sites, such as would be used in Environmental Impact Statements, management plans, and other documents available to the public, should be at such a scale and resolution to preclude the map's use for relocating individual sites in the field. OHA can provide advice or examples if needed.

### Data Downloads/Data Sets

Data download permissions and data sets downloaded or provided by the AHRS Staff are provided at the discretion of the OHA staff and are usually only provided to AHRS Users who are qualified cultural resources professionals. This usually involves submitting a Corporate / Agency User agreement with statements of data storage, data handling, and data destruction. Data sets may be distributed by AHRS staff to AHRS Users if it is determined to be in the best interest of protecting or mitigating impacts to cultural resources within that data set.

The Corporate Agreement documentation should also provide a description of how the information is to be housed and kept secure (limited access, products reviewed by cultural resources professionals, etc.) once downloaded. Digital data exported from the AHRS database under a Corporate / Agency User Agreement (i.e., shape files or other data sets suitable for populating a database) shall not be made available to those who have not signed an AHRS User Agreement. Corporate terms of access for specific projects may be defined or modified through the execution of a Programmatic Agreement (PA) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by the Chief of the Office of History and Archaeology in lieu of a Corporate Agreement.

Static AHRS database exports should be destroyed after completion of a project to prevent further use on subsequent projects or use for other means. Please obtain new data downloads for new projects. Because the AHRS database is a dynamic system, large data sets downloaded from the AHRS become increasingly obsolete as site records are created or updated. Routinely relying on the AHRS database rather than static data sets will ensure the most current information is used.

### Data Limitations

Use of the AHRS database and interpretation of any AHRS data requires familiarization with cultural resource types and historic preservation laws and practices. It also requires an understanding of data limitations and potential issues with AHRS data in general.

The AHRSPortal Mapper does not display a presence/absence type data set and the lack of results within your area of interest requires more work, not less. Because much of Alaska is remote and sparsely populated, only a very small portion of Alaska has been systematically surveyed for cultural resources. The absence of cultural resources on the AHRSPortal Mapper in a particular location likely means that location has never been systematically surveyed. Further research is needed to verify the lack of investigation. Determining if an area has or has not been surveyed requires a qualified cultural resource professional to determine past investigations in an area and to provide more thorough AHRS database analysis.

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The AHRS and AHRSPortal database represent work conducted primarily under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, National Register Program. As such, **the AHRSPortal may not currently include locations considered cultural resources by local or state communities/local groups.** These locations may be natural features (mountains, lakes, rivers) or areas culturally important to a village or community (hunting grounds, spiritual areas, subsistence areas). Most, if not all, of Alaska is important to the people and communities that have lived in these regions for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Consulting with local communities and interested parties as early and often as possible is critical in understanding the effects projects may have on cultural resources in an area.

### Summary

The AHRS/AHRSPortal is a collection of reported cultural resources (archaeological sites, buildings, structures, objects, or locations, etc.), from prehistoric to modern, and some paleontological sites, from throughout the State of Alaska. The AHRS provides access to qualified users for potential research, development of historic contexts, and for project-planning purposes.

AHRS Users have several responsibilities related to the protection and use of the AHRS/AHRSPortal and AHRS data. This includes securing physical copies, pdfs, or electronic data sets collected from OHA or online from the AHRSPortal. It also includes how and how much information to provide to the public or in a public forum. Please contact the AHRS staff if there are any questions related to the use and dissemination of AHRS data for projects and/or to the public.

Users are also expected to understand the limitations of the data set and use the information accordingly. The database represents over 50 years of reporting to OHA on cultural resources encountered throughout Alaska, although only a small portion of the state has been systematically surveyed for cultural resources. Differences in the quality and quantity of information reported, and differences in how it was collected, entered, and displayed, affect the quality of the information within the current database. While OHA is reasonably certain that information within the database is correct, there is always the chance that locations and/or descriptions are not accurate. Accessing the source material to verify the information presented is always recommended. Cultural resources professionals can access this source material and, as such, should be consulted before any cultural resource decisions using AHRS data are made.