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*Preserving America's Heritage*

## **Painted Bluff Restoration Project Honored with Chairman's Award**

Washington, DC — A partnership among federal and state agencies, Indian tribes, and other stakeholders to save a set of centuries-old Native American petroglyphs, pictographs and historic signatures in Alabama has received the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's (ACHP) Chairman's Award for Achievement in Historic Preservation.

The project brought together the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Alabama Historical Commission, 15 federally recognized Indian tribes, researchers and volunteers from the University of Alabama and University of Tennessee, and local volunteers to camouflage and remove graffiti that had impacted the images located at the Painted Bluff site in Marshall County, Alabama, just to the west of Guntersville Dam, on land owned by TVA.

"TVA and its partners are honored to receive this prestigious award for their work at Painted Bluff," said TVA Board of Directors Chair Joe Ritch. "The cultural significance and rarity of this site makes Painted Bluff a priority for TVA's archaeologists and historians, and its preservation is a testament to their mission of service to the people of the Valley."

In 2004, archaeologists from the University of Tennessee—led by Dr. Jan Simek—visited the site and began to document the range of images. Simek's team found more than 80 images on the cliffs, dating back 600 years—making it one of the country's most significant rock art treasures.

The team also found Painted Bluff was under threat from natural weathering and damage caused by graffiti, rock climbing and vandalism, despite the site being protected under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and being eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thus, in 2013 the Alabama Historical Commission named Painted Bluff to its "Places in Peril" list, which highlights the most significant endangered landmarks in the state.

In 2014, TVA hired consultant Johannes Loubser and his firm Stratum Unlimited to study the site. Loubser's report recommended a multifaceted approach to resolving the problems, including removal and camouflaging of the existing graffiti, along with more public involvement and outreach.

In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, TVA next consulted with the Alabama Historical Commission and 15 federally recognized Indian tribes on restoration of the petroglyphs and pictographs. The tribes recommended that artwork impacted through natural means be left alone, and that the focus should instead be on ongoing human impacts to the site—in particular, those caused by rock climbing.

TVA then worked with Stratum and community volunteers from Huntsville and Guntersville, as well as students from the University of Alabama, to catalog, remove and disguise the damage at Painted Bluff. Any dates or names 50 years or older were left in place pending further archival research, while any

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disturbance less than 50 years old was removed or camouflaged. Ultimately, graffiti was removed or camouflaged from more than 120 different surfaces at the site.

TVA also collaborated with Southeastern Climbers Coalition, a local group, to close climbing routes located along the bluff. The Coalition created signs alerting climbers of the closures.

“The Painted Bluff project fulfills a number of the objectives we honor through the Chairman’s Award, including the rehabilitation and stewardship of historic resources, as well as the public involvement of partners and stakeholders in preserving those resources,” said ACHP Chairman Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA.

*About the ACHP:* An independent federal agency, the ACHP promotes the economic, educational, environmental, sustainability, and cultural values of historic preservation and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy. It also influences federal activities, programs, and policies that affect historic and cultural properties. See [www.achp.gov](http://www.achp.gov) for more information.