



**SOCIETY *for*  
HISTORICAL  
ARCHAEOLOGY**

**J.W. (Joe) Joseph, PhD, RPA**

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Representative Clay Ingram  
Chair, Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee  
222 The Capitol  
402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re. House Bill 803

Dear Chairman Ingram:

As the President of the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), I am writing to voice opposition to House Bill 803. The SHA is an international association promoting the archaeology of sites from the historic period, with more than 2,100 members, 125 of whom are citizens of Florida. This bill would allow anyone to receive an archaeology permit to excavate in state waters. The bill would relinquish state ownership of cultural property for a minimal fee.

Florida law, as in the majority of states, currently only provides archaeological permits for work on state lands to qualified archaeologists with qualified research needs. The current law recognizes that archaeological sites are fragile and unique resources and that those that are on state lands should be protected for the common good.

If passed, these bills would offer an archaeological permit to anyone for a fee of \$100. This would result in significant damage to archaeological sites through the looting of artifacts for sale. It would result in significant damage and loss of irreplaceable archaeological sites and resources. While the law requires the reporting of site discoveries, that would be difficult to enforce, and the information that artifacts contain comes from their context as well as the artifact itself. Furthermore, while the law applies to "submerged" resources, it is highly likely that it would also result in the mining of artifacts from stream banks and other settings adjacent to state waterways. Such actions could further damage and jeopardize archaeological resources.

If passed, this bill will expose the state to a variety of legal liabilities. Excavations in state waters could create impediments to boaters, while stream bank excavations could pose a danger to visitors to state lands. It is also likely that American Indian burials would inevitably be disturbed by such excavations, bringing the state into conflict with the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes and in conflict with Florida burial laws. Finally, it burdens the state with additional costs to record and inspect permitted excavations that would well exceed the revenues generated by permit fees.

Florida has a robust network of archaeological societies and networks meant to connect the public to the state's past in a meaningful and responsible way. The Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) and the various chapters of the Florida Anthropological Society (FAS) promote knowledge of Florida's past and participation in archaeological studies and provide Florida's citizens the resources to share in our understanding of the past. The proposed bills would damage those associations by allowing anyone to claim the title of "citizen archaeologist."

I urge you to reject these efforts, to protect Florida's past, and to preserve Florida's legacy for all of its citizens and guests.

Sincerely,

SOCIETY FOR HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

J.W. Joseph, PhD, RPA, President