



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACEC – Area of Critical Environmental Concern – BLM

Anthropomorph – a rock art term for a human-like figure.

Archaeological District – is a grouping of archaeological resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way. This relationship can be a time period, culture, or other characteristics. Districts may be prehistoric, historic, or contain components from both periods.

Archaeological Monitoring – involves identifying the condition of a site and watching over the resource in an effort to recognize and protect associated features and artifacts. This activity is usually done in relation to potential or pending impacts of a site including visitation.


Archaeological Resources – include artifacts, features, sites and districts from both prehistoric and historic time periods. These resources may be of regional, national or international significance. Archaeological Resources are sometimes combined with *Cultural Resources*.

Archaeological Sites – are concentrations of artifacts or features that reflect activities conducted by prehistoric and/or historic people. Examples are prehistoric ruins, rock art, mining camps, and railroad construction sites. These areas are usually, but not always, accompanied by artifacts or features.

Archaeology – the systematic study of past human life and culture by the recovery and examination of remaining material evidence, such as graves, buildings, tools, and pottery.

Archaic – from earlier people or an earlier time period.

ARPA – the Archaeological Resources Protection Act.



Atlatl – a wooden handle (about 24 inches long) that is used to cast or throw darts with great accuracy and tremendous force. The darts are about 5 or 6 feet long and are flexible and look like oversized arrows.

Artifact – any object made, used, or modified by humans.

Attribute – characteristic or property of an object such as size, color, or shape.

Baseline – a standard of comparison. Your first site visit provides you something to compare your future visits to so it is called a baseline visit. Annual photographs are called baseline photographs because they also provide a point of reference.

Biface – a stone tool, such as a projectile point, that was worked on both sides.

BLM – Bureau of Land Management

BOR – Bureau of Reclamation

Context – the relationship artifacts have to each other and the situation in which they are found.

Collectors Pile – collection of lithics, sherds and other material moved from its original context by site visitors – also called a Trophy Pile.

Carsonite – a sign placed in soil to educate, inform, and mark federal boundaries, often indicating what is allowed and not allowed in a particular area.

Data – information, especially information organized for analysis.

Datum – a known point or location that is used as a basis for measuring.


Deface – spoiling or marring the surface or appearance of something.

Diagnostics – artifacts that have been determined by scientific methods to occur during a certain period of time or within certain geographical areas.

Features – any non-portable remains of human activity, such as a hearth, road or house.

Fossils – are paleontology resources consisting of remains or traces of plants and animals that existed in a previous geological period.

GPS – Global Positioning System is a satellite-based navigation system made up of a network of 24 satellites placed into orbit by the U.S. Department of Defense. GPS was originally intended for military applications, but in the 1980s, the government made the



system available for civilian use. GPS works in any weather conditions, anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day.

Great Basin – a term applied to the geographic area centered on Nevada, including eastern California (to the crest of the Sierra Nevada), western Utah (to the crest of the Wasatch Range), south-central Oregon (to the southern Cascades), and small parts of southeastern Idaho and southwestern Wyoming. It is unique as no drainages go to the ocean.

Interpretative Site – highly visible, well known and/or easily accessible sites with signs, kiosks, or other markers to identify them for the public.

Land Manager – an employee of a federal land managing agency (such as the Bureau of Land Management) with authority to decide how land under the jurisdiction of the agency and the resources on it will be used.

Lithics – artifacts made from stone such as projectile points, bifaces, scrapers, drills, etc.

Mano – Spanish word for “hand”. This is an artifact used to grind materials on metates. This is the term for the portion that is held by the hand that moves back and forth or the upper grinding surface. These can be one-handed or two-handed in size.

Metate – a Central American term for a flat stone used for grinding. This is the term for the nonmoving or stable lower grinding surface.

Midden – a mound of trash that may include dark organic looking soil, charcoal, broken pottery, bones, lithic material, etc.

NCA – National Conservation Area (example Red Rock Canyon, Black Rock Desert)

NDOW – Nevada Department of Wildlife (Game Warden)

NPS – National Park Service

Obsidian – a hard, dark, glassy, volcanic rock that is formed when lava cools.


OHV – Off Highway Vehicle

ORV – Off Road Vehicle

Paleo – ancient or long ago.

Paleontological Localities – a place where a fossil is visible in the ground.

Pecking – method of creating a petroglyph using a sharp pointed rock.



Petrified Wood – is a paleontology resource of ancient wood that has been turned into rock over a long period of time.

Petroglyph – a design chiseled or chipped out of a rock surface.

Pictograph – a design painted on a rock surface.

Pit House – a home built partly underground by ancient peoples.

Pleistocene – the ice age(s) and period in the world’s history from about one million years ago until about 10,000 years ago. During this period of time much of the earth was covered with ice.

Pottery – earthenware or clayware pots, cups, bowls, and other dishes or objects that were made from clay and hardened by heat.

Public Site – this designation can only be made by the land managing agency.

Rock Writing – a general term for the pecking, incising, or painting of designs onto rock surfaces.

Rock Art Panel – a group of pictographs or petroglyph figures.

Shard – a fragment of broken glass.

Sherd – a fragment of broken pottery.

SHPO – State Historic Preservation Office

Spalling – thin pieces of rock breaking off naturally through freezing and thawing as well as heat.

Survey – a systematic examination of the surface of the land for the purpose of locating and recording archaeological sites.

Timeline – a visual representation of events in chronological order.

Tinaja – a Mexican word for a natural hole in rock that can catch and hold water.

Wickiup – a hut, usually an oval base, constructed with a rough brushwood frame covered with reed mats, grass, or bark.