



TEXAS TECH™

Operating Policy and Procedure

OP 74.03: Collecting Objects on State or Federal Land

DATE: May 22, 2025

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Operating Policy/Procedure (OP) is to ensure correct standards for the use and distribution of objects collected on state and federal lands.

REVIEW: This OP will be reviewed every two years after publication by the Associate Vice President for Research with substantive revisions forwarded to the Vice President for Research & Innovation.

POLICY/PROCEDURE

1. Object Status

All objects (artifacts, specimens, or samples) collected on state- or federally maintained land remain the property of the state or federal government. Under certain conditions, permission is granted through a permit to collect objects for the purpose of research and study. The authorizing agency also may allow the requesting institution to hold objects in trust for an undefined period. In all cases, except where specifically stated in the agreement, contract, or permit, the collected objects remain the property of the State of Texas or the United States of America and are not the possessions of the person(s) authorized to collect or the curatorial facility authorized to house them. As Texas Tech University is ultimately responsible for the well-being of these objects, appropriate professional practice and ethics are expected of all persons and/or departments involved in the collection process.

2. Agreements, Contracts, or Permits

When permission is granted to collect objects on state or federal land, a letter of agreement, contract, or permit is issued by the authorizing agency. The agreement, contract, or permit number must be included in all documentation associated with the collected material. A separate held-in-trust agreement is transacted between the authorizing agency and the curatorial facility by which stewardship, but not ownership, of the collected material is transferred to the curatorial facility.

3. Field Records

Reasonable and prudent care should be taken to record the location, condition, circumstance, and all other pertinent information relating to the collection of objects. This information should be recorded in a manner consistent with professional practice and give standard references that will not be altered by season, time, or natural alteration of terrain. All field records (notes, maps, images, and other related documents) are a part of the permanent record of the collection effort and must accompany the collected objects. All field records, as part of the collection, are the property of the state or federal government. Careful protection and maintenance of field records is considered an implicit part of field research.

4. Destruction of Objects

Except when specifically allowed by agreement, contract, or permit, objects collected on state or federal land shall not be destroyed or allowed to deteriorate through neglect. Nor shall they be rendered useless for future research through other than responsible collection practices.

5. Storage of Objects

The responsibility for properly housing and maintaining objects collected on state and federal land is inherent in the act of collecting. Persons initiating a request to collect on state or federal land must be prepared, either through personal, departmental, or grant funding, to provide professionally acceptable storage units to house the objects.

6. Repository for Objects and Field Records

Contracts, agreements, or permits that require the principal investigator and/or Texas Tech University to recommend the most appropriate curatorial facility for objects and field records recovered and created as a result of work performed must be approved by the anticipated curatorial facility and authorizing agency before final approval by the Vice President for Research & Innovation. In rare instances where appropriate curatorial facility recommendation is not included as part of the contract, agreement, or permit, specific instructions for disposition of objects and field records should be arranged before the beginning of field research. These arrangements must be reviewed and approved by the Vice President for Research & Innovation before the collection process begins.

7. Other Considerations

This policy is not intended to impede or restrict research or investigative collecting of objects on state or federal land. It is designed to protect those objects and resulting field records against loss or destruction due to lack of careful or thorough planning. It may be necessary for some persons and/or departments to re-examine their collection practices to assure that the maximum protection is being provided for held-in-trust collections.