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News Release

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Study on ancient remains discovered near Kennewick begins today at Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Wash.

Walla Walla, Wash. -- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials said that study on the ancient remains discovered on the Columbia River near Kennewick, Wash., will begin today at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture on the University of Washington campus in Seattle.

Deemed a suitable repository for the safekeeping of these human remains, the ancient skeleton has been curated there since 1998.

The 9,000 year-old human remains were discovered on Corps property in July 1996 and are commonly referred to as "Kennewick Man." The dispute over the disposition of the remains began in October 1996 when several groups filed in court to stop the turnover of the remains to local Native American tribes for reburial. A group of scientists also made a request to study the remains as part of their lawsuit.

The Corps is required under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act to turn over Native American human remains to tribal groups that have a cultural affiliation with the remains.

The District Court of Oregon found that the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act did not apply because Kennewick Man could not be reasonably determined to be Native American under the statute. This decision was affirmed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The District Court ordered the Plaintiffs' request for access to study be granted, subject to the type of reasonable terms and conditions that normally apply to studies of archaeological resources under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

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The work over the next two weeks at the Burke principally includes a taphonomic study which focuses on observations and studies to determine the effects to the remains since the time of Kennewick Man's death. This study looks at the remains and effects of the environment on the bones.

As part of the overall studies, some of the remains (hip and skull) were transported by the Corps to Chicago

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Ancient Remains Study/2-2-2

where they were scanned using industrial computed tomography. These scans, which have a higher resolution than a hospital grade CT-scan, produce three dimensional pictures which then can be used to produce casts and replicas of the bones. These replicas will then be used during the study for reconstruction and analysis and will limit the amount of handling needed of the actual bones.

Also, samples that were taken during the government studies in 1999 and 2000 will be reanalyzed by doing additional chemical tests in the next couple of months.

The Corps will continue to curate the remains in an appropriate manner pursuant to federal regulations. The remains are government property and will remain so. The scientists will not be given the bones, but will be allowed access to the remains for their studies. By law, it is the government's responsibility to protect and preserve the research potential of the remains for the future.

Public access or requests to film the remains have not been granted at this time.

More information on the discovery of the ancient remains and studies that have been completed is available at the National Parks Service Kennewick Man web site at www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick.

-30-