

# Dinosaur 13 doesn't unearth whole truth about paleontology and fossil protection on US public lands

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In light of the film Dinosaur 13, which describes the discovery and loss of the complete Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton known as "Sue" by the Black Hills Institute of Geological Research, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology reiterates its strong endorsement of the U.S. Federal laws and regulations that protect fossils on public lands, which are fully consistent with the professional standards held by paleontological scientists and with the ethics of the Society.

Most vertebrate fossils are rare, many of them unique. The laws and regulations for collecting fossils on Federal lands help safeguard the scientific and educational value of vertebrate fossils by ensuring that scientifically important specimens are placed in [public trust](#) so that their story can be studied now and in the future.

The film Dinosaur 13 erroneously implies that the regulations impede paleontological science by placing onerous and confusing restrictions on field collecting. Not so. Federal law embodies the same principles and ethics adopted by professional paleontologists themselves. These same principles are part of the Society's Bylaws (Article 12, Code of Ethics). The Federal permitting process helps ensure that field collecting is well planned and professionally conducted, that the scientific context of fossils is documented, and that the fossils are placed established research repositories with a demonstrated commitment to preserving them in perpetuity for scientific research and public enjoyment.

When the skeleton of "Sue" was seized from the Black Hills Institute in 1992, that organization was already under investigation for improper collecting of fossils from [public lands](#). The Institute was found guilty of three felony counts relating to the theft of fossils from public lands including Badlands National Park, Buffalo Gap National Grasslands, and Gallatin National Forest. These criminal convictions from federal lands are not related to the tyrannosaur "Sue". The film Dinosaur 13 presentation of these facts is not clear, comprehensive and will undoubtedly lead to further misunderstanding by the public of this historically important case.

The legal action taken in 1992 by the Federal government eventually resulted in the preservation of this extraordinarily important dinosaur skeleton under the public trust where it is now available for scientific study and public viewing.

Provided by Society of Vertebrate Paleontology

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