Jefferson — State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program

— Richard A. Boisvert (State Archaeologist, SCRAP Director, and Deputy SHPO, NHDHR)

The State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program (SCRAP) is the principal means through which the public engages in New Hampshire archaeology. Embedded in the program is a commitment to investigate sites that are at risk of being lost to erosion, development or other threats. In the autumn of 2013 community members alerted SCRAP that a septic system upgrade for a bed and breakfast in Jefferson would directly impact a major portion of a Paleoindian site previously identified and investigated by a SCRAP field school the previous year. Negotiations with the owner, a local bank as the property was under foreclosure, opened the way for rescue excavations. An initial window of opportunity of four days eventually stretched out to five weeks, allowing SCRAP to bring in a large number of volunteers. Since SCRAP has been training the public for more three decades, a significant pool of well-trained avocational and professional archaeologists was available. Volunteers came from all of New England, New York, Pennsylvania and Quebec, contributing more than 1,400 hours of excavation time.

The results of the investigations were substantial and significant. One of the excavation blocks produced the largest number of Paleoindian fluted points recovered from any single habitation area in the state. Rare, if not unique, examples of tool forms were recovered and are undergoing analysis. Financial support from community members allowed SCRAP to submit three tools for protein analysis, which resulted in the identification of black bear on one specimen. The site is one of only seven in North America with documented evidence for that animal in association with Paleoindian people. Although the excavations were executed as quickly as possible, the highest standards of recovery were maintained. Consequently SCRAP has the opportunity to analyze in detail the internal organization of activity of a 12,000-year-old family encampment and an associated specialized fluted point manufacturing work area. This detailed data will be provided to students and others who will generate new insights through publication of theses and dissertations, academic articles, popular publications, and public presentations. At the same time the residents of the community have learned a great deal about the history of their region and have become staunch advocates for the protection and appreciation of archaeology. The new owners of the B&B have even designated one of their rooms as the Paleo Room, accompanied by information on the site on the property. The residual effects of the rescue excavations will be felt for many years.

SCRAP is one vehicle for the public to learn of the importance and rewards of avocational archaeology. The rescue excavations at the Jefferson site simultaneously provided a means to educate the public about the value of archaeology and to directly engage them in meaningful research and rescue as well as make a significant contribution to the cultural history of the state.