

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are in the midst of dealing with a global pandemic and public health crisis with the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and many State, Local, and Tribal leaders and their communities are diligently working to ensure that their families and communities are safe during this unprecedented time. However, ongoing land-use planning processes continue.

The Bureau of Land Management Farmington Field Office, in with coordination with the Bureau of Indian Affairs has prepared a joint Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (RMPA/EIS) to analyze and update resource management issues in the area around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The public has been invited to participate in the planning process by providing comments during a 90-day public comment and review period which began on February 28, 2020. Due to rapidly evolving situation with COVID-19, it is imperative that the public be given sufficient time to submit comments on the RMPA/EIS. Therefore, we ask that the Department extend the comment period of the aforementioned RMPA/EIS by at least 120-days, to allow sufficient time for comments after the threat of pandemic has passed.

Furthermore, the U.S. government has specific trust and treaty responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). And as you know, the Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill as part of the FY20 spending package (P.L. 116-94) signed into law included \$1 million for an ethnographic study conducted by Tribes to be included in the RMPA/EIS. Therefore we also ask that Tribes be given the same extension during the scoping process to ensure their direct participation in crafting the study.

Thank you again for your attention to these matters. Public comments are a critical part of any environmental review process. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Senator Tom Udall (digital)

Tom Udall
United States Senator

/s/ Senator Martin Heinrich (digital)

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/ Representative Ben Ray Lujan (digital)

Ben Ray Lujan
United States Representative

/s/ Representative Deb Haaland (digital)

Deb Haaland
United States Representative

/s/ Representative Xochitl Torres Small (digital)

Xochitl Torres Small
United States Representative