

Support for the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said: "As Native Americans, we are connected to the land and it is important to preserve sacred places. This is not only a Navajo teaching but an acknowledgment of a way of life for all indigenous peoples. The Nez-Lizer Administration stands firmly with the All Pueblo Council of Governors in protecting Chaco Canyon. We thank Senator Udall for continuing to be a champion for Indian Country through his sponsorship of the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act."

All Pueblo Council of Governors Chairman E. Paul Torres said: "Thank you Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich, for your leadership, and your unceasing commitment to support the efforts of our tribal nations in the preservation of the Greater Chaco Region. This land is a part of our histories as tribal nations, and holds life-affirming resources that many of our Pueblos still remember and use, as a vital part of our present identity through story, song, prayer, and pilgrimage. This landscape is a part of our past, present, and our future. Once these areas are developed, they are gone forever. We hope the reintroduction of this bill sends a strong message to Washington - that it must be understood that we will do all we can to take these resources our Creator gifted us and hand them to our children and our generations to come. We thank you Senators, the Navajo Nation, and the New Mexico State Land Office for our unified support in this movement to protect Greater Chaco."

New Mexico Commissioner of Public Lands Stephanie Garcia Richard said: "I am excited to join with Senator Tom Udall in ensuring state trust land included in the boundaries are off-limits to future oil and gas exploration. Protection of the Greater Chaco Heritage Area is critical and an important first step in respecting our tribes' and state's rich, cultural history."

Camilla Feibelman, Director of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter, said: "We must protect sacred sites, communities and cultures, and our wild and special places, which is why the Greater Chaco region must be protected from expanded fracking. We applaud Senators Udall and Heinrich and Representatives Luján and Haaland for their efforts to ensure that the Greater Chaco region and the people who live there are safeguarded from the Trump administration's attempts to sell it off to the fossil fuel industry."

Paul F. Reed, Preservation Archaeologist, Archaeology Southwest, said: "Greater Chaco is one of the most remarkable landscapes in North America, but it is threatened by oil and gas development. I want to thank Senators Udall and Heinrich and Representatives Luján, Haaland, and Torres Small for introducing these bills and for their ongoing leadership and commitment to protecting the Greater Chaco Landscape. Withdrawing federal minerals from leasing within the 10-mile protection zone around Chaco is an important step in protecting the fragile and irreplaceable cultural sites and landscapes of Greater Chaco."

Ernie Atencio, Southwest Regional Director, National Parks Conservation Association, said: "National Parks Conservation Association applauds Senator Udall and the entire delegation for introducing legislation that provides commonsense protections for Chaco Culture National Historical Park. It's no secret that the oil and gas industry has targeted lands rich in cultural and natural resources surrounding the national park for development, ignoring concerns from local Pueblo and Navajo tribes, along with the greater coalition of conservation voices."

The measures outlined in this legislation begin to once again place the interests of the public and local citizens above that of private industry, who are more focused on the revenues generated from short-term mineral extractions than the health of those living nearby. The bills themselves recognize the need for additional studies and protective measures to address health, safety, and environmental concerns, while calling for an end to the oil and gas industry's unprecedented land grab by returning non-producing lands back to the public where they belong.

We are grateful that New Mexico's entire delegation has considered the long-standing concerns from local tribal communities and conservation groups, recognized the importance of cultural resources that reside throughout the region, and are working to prevent our cultural legacy from becoming an island within a sea of development."

Thomas J. Cassidy, Vice President of Government Relations and Policy, National Trust for Historic Preservation, said: "We listed the Greater Chaco Landscape as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2011 because of the many stunning and irreplaceable examples of Chacoan architectural and cultural resources throughout the area and its enduring cultural and religious importance for many Native Americans. As such, we strongly endorse the common-sense legislation introduced by Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and Rep. Ben Ray Luján and supported by the entire New Mexico delegation. This bill would protect nationally and internationally significant areas around Chaco Canyon from irresponsible development and to safeguard priceless cultural heritage for future generations."

Kye Miller, President, New Mexico Archaeological Council, said: "The New Mexico Archaeological Council enthusiastically supports the proposed Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act of 2019. Chaco Culture National Historical Park protects a tiny fraction of the Chacoan landscape. This bill will honor and protect the invaluable and fragile resources of the greater Chacoan landscape for future generations of Americans. The time has come for Congress to recognize the national significance of cultural landscapes and apply protections typically reserved for individual archaeological sites."

Mark Allison, Executive Director, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, said: "Many Chacoan sites exist outside the Park's official boundaries, so lease sales by BLM in the surrounding area almost always mean the loss of artifacts, history, and sacred sites as well as wildlands, habitat and dark skies. This bill represents a major step forward toward permanently protecting the area's rich cultural heritage, world-class archaeological resources and sensitive natural landscape. We are proud to stand in solidarity with the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the Navajo Nation supporting this legislation. New Mexico's entire federal delegation acting in concert sends an unmistakable message that this serious threat requires a serious response."

Brian Sybert, Executive Director, Conservation Lands Foundation, said: "Over 90 percent of northwest New Mexico's public lands are already leased for oil and gas drilling. Destroying the cultural landscape and resources that surround the National Historical Park is unconscionable, and irreversible. It's long past time to listen to tribal governments and protect the remarkable history and ties to living cultures that remain on BLM lands in the Greater Chaco region."

Susan M. Chandler, President, Society for American Archaeology, said: "There are few places more deserving of our respect and consideration than the Greater Chaco Landscape. I am heartened that

Senators Udall and the rest of New Mexico's congressional delegation share that understanding. Their bills would go a long way toward providing Greater Chaco with the protection it deserves – and so desperately needs – given that the administration continues to target the Greater Chaco Landscape for drilling.”

W. H. Wills, Professor of Anthropology, University of New Mexico & Patricia L. Crown, Leslie Spier Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, said: “Chaco Canyon is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that draws visitors to New Mexico from around the globe. The canyon is the center of an ancient cultural landscape that is testimony to 12,000 years of indigenous Native American history. Americans are appalled at the destruction of ancient heritage sites in other parts of the world and we should all be just as horrified by the destruction of the Greater Chaco Landscape in New Mexico. There is no going back if that landscape is destroyed, the physical remains of Chacoan society cannot be replaced or reclaimed. We applaud the efforts by Senators Heinrich and Udall to prevent the destruction of one of New Mexico's richest legacies.”

Stephen Lekson, Ph.D., University of Colorado, Boulder, said: “The civilization that centered on Chaco Canyon uniquely shaped – and was shaped by – its landscape. Beyond the magnificent buildings at the National Park, mysterious ‘roads’ radiated out to hundreds of smaller Chaco communities. Some ‘roads’ ran to natural landmarks. The Chacoan civilization was expansive and far-flung. Distances and vistas defined Chaco, and are as fundamental to its World Heritage values as the great buildings and monuments at the National Park. We know of nothing else in human history like Chaco. A great modern nation should preserve Chaco's ancient landscape.”

Ruth M. Van Dyke, Ph.D., Professor of Anthropology, Binghamton University - State University of New York, said: “The special fabric of the Greater Chaco Landscape – the sense of place, the feeling of wonder – is being irretrievably destroyed, and with it will go archaeologists' ability to unravel this complex chapter of human history. I applaud Senator Udall and the rest of New Mexico's congressional delegation for crafting these bills to protect the area surrounding Chaco Canyon from the depredations of mineral exploration.”

Terry Sloan, Director, Southwest Native Cultures, said: “Ahee’hee, Kwaq’Kwa (thank you) Honorable Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich for your beautiful work on the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act 2019. The People have spoken and you have listened. What an historic event for Mother Earth, her Inhabitants, Indigenous People and the People of New Mexico and around the World. Precedence has been set. We must all work together now to remind the BLM and other agencies to recognize and engage Tribal Consultation, perform a thorough Greater Chaco Region land impact and community health assessment(s), and more and together we can make this UNESCO World Heritage Site a Global Treasure for Mother Earth and her Inhabitants and the Seven Generations to follow. Again, Thank You Senators for working to protect our Sacred Chaco Canyon.”