

July 13, 2023

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We are writing to express our strong support for your efforts to protect the Greater Chaco region. This vast and culturally significant landscape spanning northwestern New Mexico, northeastern Arizona, southeastern Utah, and southwestern Colorado holds immense importance not only for the present generation but also for future generations to come.

As a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to safeguarding the Greater Chaco region, we have long advocated for the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management to take decisive action against unchecked fossil fuel development. The impact of oil and gas drilling, fracking, pipelines, processing facilities, and mining on the region's public lands, clean air and water, and community health cannot be ignored. Over the years, millions of voices have joined together, calling on you and other leaders to put an end to the costly and unsustainable industrial exploitation that jeopardizes this precious landscape. Federal courts have even ruled that the current levels of exploitation are unjustified and unlawful. The overwhelming support for safeguarding Greater Chaco has remained steadfast and resolute.

We commend President Biden for launching the Honoring Chaco Initiative in 2021, which offers immense promise in delivering the necessary protections and paving the way for preserving this invaluable cultural landscape.

Today, we urge you to recommit yourself to the protection of Greater Chaco, its communities, and the pursuit of a just and equitable transition. The Honoring Chaco Initiative provides an opportunity to establish a new paradigm for the management of public lands and resources in this region, one that prioritizes principles of health, justice, equity, and sustainability.

While we appreciate the steps that have been taken to protect certain areas of Greater Chaco from industrial exploitation, we recognize that more needs to be done beyond mere buffer zones and lines on maps to truly safeguard the safety and well-being of this cultural landscape.

Looking ahead, we call on you to ensure the Honoring Chaco Initiative continues to progress and advance the following core goals:

- Wind down and phase out fossil fuel exploitation in Greater Chaco.
- Develop and implement Tribal co-management strategies for the region's public lands and resources.
- Fully protect and restore the air quality, ground and surface waters, and healthy lands of the region.
- Allocate resources to enable communities to achieve economic security and sustainability.

Now is the time to redouble our efforts in support of the Honoring Chaco Initiative. With the momentum built over the years in the fight to safeguard Greater Chaco, we must take decisive

action to guide a just and equitable transition away from exploitation for this cherished landscape and its communities.

The future of Greater Chaco lies in our collective hands, and we deeply appreciate and value your leadership in this crucial endeavor. We would also like to address the unacceptable attacks directed personally at you, Secretary Haaland. We strongly condemn such behavior and reaffirm our unwavering support for your dedication and commitment to fostering the first-of-its-kind Honoring Chaco Initiative.

The Greater Chaco Coalition (Frack Off Chaco) stands united as a collaborative effort between Indigenous community leaders, Native organizations, nonprofits, and public lands and water protectors. Guided by the Jemez principles, the Coalition works together to advance the following platform:

- An end to sacrifice zones and further oil and gas extraction across the Greater Chaco region.
- Meaningful Tribal and community consultation and consent at every stage of decision-making.
- Consideration of cumulative impacts and the health and holistic wellness of impacted communities.
- Advancement of environmental justice and just transitions for the Greater Chaco region beyond extraction.

The overwhelming support for this platform over the past decade and through three administrations highlights the depth and breadth of commitment to advancing these principles. Notable instances of support include:

- **2013:** Eastern Navajo Agency Council resolution calling for a moratorium on horizontal fracking.
- **2015:** Resolutions from Torreon Chapter, Counselor Chapter, and Ojo Encino Chapter on Navajo Nation calling for a moratorium on horizontal fracking.
- **2015 - Present:** The Greater Chaco Coalition's protests against federal oil and gas lease sales in New Mexico, including the Greater Chaco Landscape and the Permian Basin, resulting in over 2 million individual protest comments submitted.
- **2016:** Publication of an amended notice of intent that includes the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as a co-leading agency with the BLM in the Farmington Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) process, marking the first collaboration of its kind between the agencies. Impacted community members provide over 1,000 in-person comments during the RMPA public scoping process.
- **2017:** Joint statement from the All Pueblo Council of Governors and Navajo Nation President and Vice President opposing horizontal fracking in the Greater Chaco region.
- **2017:** Passage of a resolution by the National Congress of American Indians to support a moratorium on leasing and permitting in the Greater Chaco region.
- **2017:** Passage of House Memorial 70 to protect the Greater Chaco Canyon Landscape by the New Mexico Legislature.
- **2018:** Rally with over 200 advocates at the BLM New Mexico State Office protesting the oil and gas lease sale, including 44,000 acres in the Greater Chaco region and 40,000 acres near Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Department of the Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke deferred the parcels in the Greater Chaco region to further analyze over 5,000 cultural sites within the leasing area.

- **2019:** Delivery of over 33,000 protests by the Greater Chaco Coalition opposing a BLM oil and gas lease sale in Greater Chaco and Greater Carlsbad regions.
- **2022:** BLM and BIA host a series of public Q&A sessions and a 90-day comment period on the proposed administrative mineral withdrawal. Members of the Greater Chaco Coalition delivered nearly 80,000 comments to the BLM New Mexico State Office, urging broader landscape-level protections beyond a 10-mile buffer and calling for the agencies to 'Truly Honor Chaco'. In response to widespread criticism of the public engagement process and a request from the leadership at the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the BLM and BIA held additional public meetings, changed the format to allow for public comment, and extended the comment deadline by an additional 30 days.
- **2023:** Diné CARE, et al. v. Bureau of Land Mgmt., et al. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit rejected nearly 200 Trump-era approved drilling permits defended by the Biden administration in favor of conservation groups. The ruling found that the agency violated NEPA by failing to account for the health impacts of toxic air pollution from oil and gas activities and the carbon pollution impacts to the climate. This marks the first time the 10th Circuit has ruled in favor of citizen groups on these issues, resulting in a halt to new drilling permits.

Given this resounding support and the significant milestones achieved over the years, we urge you to continue championing the cause of Greater Chaco. The Honoring Chaco Initiative represents a beacon of hope for the preservation and protection of this cherished landscape.

Thank you for your tireless dedication to safeguarding Greater Chaco, promoting justice and equity, and ensuring a sustainable future for all. We stand ready to support your efforts and work collaboratively to honor the legacy of this extraordinary cultural landscape.

Sincerely,

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