

PRESS RELEASE: Trump Administration Moves One Step Closer to Revoking Chaco Canyon Protections, Ignoring the Wishes of Pueblo People and the Broader Public

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The Department of the Interior's Proposal Provides Only 14 Days to Weigh In

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Below, multiple organizations have released statements detailing what this reversal could mean for the Greater Chaco Area:

“This proposal is a step backwards into a history we have fought hard to move beyond,” **said Keegan King, Executive Director, Native Land Institute.** “The Greater Chaco Landscape holds the origins of our Pueblo world, and it has already endured serious damage from decades of unchecked development. To strip away protections now, against the clear opposition of Tribal Nations, shows a disregard for our sovereignty, our health, and our future. The Native Land Institute stands with the Pueblos and all Tribal Nations in demanding that the federal government honor its trust responsibility and keep this landscape protected.”

“The proposed rollback of protections for the Greater Chaco Landscape is coming amid a broader wave of federal actions that are narrowing Tribal input, accelerating extraction and infrastructure approvals, and treating sacred places and public lands as obstacles rather than living homelands,” **said Marissa Naranjo, Deputy Director of Sovereign Energy.** “For Pueblo peoples, Chaco is an active cultural landscape tied to migration histories, ceremony, sacred sites, and ongoing responsibilities to the land and each other. Undoing these protections through a rushed process sends a dangerous signal across Indian Country that even places recognized globally for their cultural significance can still be sacrificed for short-term industrial interests. Tribal Nations and frontline communities deserve meaningful consultation, adequate time to respond, and protection of federal trust responsibilities.”

“We are appalled that Secretary Burgum is moving to revoke the mineral withdrawal and put Chaco’s 10-mile zone of protection and the Greater Chaco Landscape at risk. The amazing cultural heritage of Chaco Culture National Historical Park must not be compromised. As the process moves forward, a 14-day comment period is ridiculously short and not compliant with established practice. This process should unfold with a 90-day NEPA process and public meetings, allowing the public to fully participate,” **said Paul F. Reed, New Mexico State Director, Archaeology Southwest.**

“This decision sends a dangerous message that no place, not even one that holds a thousand years of history, is too important to sacrifice for oil and gas drilling,” **said Maude Dinan, New Mexico Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association.** “Chaco Canyon is one of the most extraordinary cultural landscapes in our National Park System and has endured as a place of community and connection that continues to hold profound meaning for Tribes today. Now, the

Trump administration is auctioning it off to the oil and gas industry, trading sacred and scenic vistas for pumpjacks and the drum of drilling. This is not about energy strategy. It's an attack on cultural heritage, community health, and all that our national parks were created to protect."

"What we stand to lose with the Greater Chaco Region is a living, cultural landscape, sacred to the Pueblos and the Diné People whose connections to this place remain active today," **said Michael Casaus, New Mexico State Director at The Wilderness Society.** "An attack on Chaco disregards millennia of Indigenous stewardship and ignores the hundreds of thousands of people who have called for its protection from reckless drilling. The decisions made now will define what future generations inherit, with lasting consequences for cultural preservation, community health, and this irreplaceable landscape."

"The breathtaking speed with which DOI is unraveling protections for the Greater Chaco landscape indicates a predetermined result and complete apathy toward public opinion," **said Sally Paez, Staff Attorney for New Mexico Wild.** "Over 100,000 people expressed their outrage during the seven-day scoping period; the public strongly supports protecting Chaco for current and future generations. Despite this, DOI continues to fast track a decision that will harm our shared cultural heritage, public health, climate, wildlands, wildlife habitat, and Chaco's famous dark skies."

"The Chaco Culture National Historical Park represents a significant part of the cultural history of this continent and must continue to be preserved and protected," **declared Charlotte Overby, New Mexico-based Vice President of Conservation Field Programs at the Conservation Lands Foundation.** "The administration's attempt to short-circuit federal law with a reduced public comment period represents a significant betrayal of the promise of America: we must honor and defend significant historical sites like Chaco Canyon, defend Tribal sovereignty, and not sell public lands off to the highest bidder for oil and gas drilling that will endanger the remarkable evidence of an important native culture that thrived there. Defiling Chaco Canyon in this way will send a signal that nothing in this country is precious and everything is worth only what it can be sold for, and it will deprive all people from learning the stories of the Native people who have lived here since time immemorial."

"Opening up the Greater Chaco Region to reckless oil and gas drilling means an irreplaceable crown jewel of New Mexico public lands – home to thousands of archaeological and cultural sites of deep importance – will be at needless risk of destruction. This misguided decision means that all sorts of oil and gas wells, pipelines and infrastructure will degrade these sacred lands, pollute the air we breathe and the water we drink – jeopardizing public health, wildlife, and the longevity of traditions and cultures that are inextricably linked to this region," **said Jesse Deubel, Executive Director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation.**

"Removing the buffer zone protecting public lands in and around Chaco Canyon invites dangerous pollution to a place sacred to Indigenous peoples and local communities, and valued worldwide. With over 90 percent of nearby public lands already leased for drilling, it's unacceptable for this Interior Department to turn a UNESCO World Heritage Site into a sacrifice zone," **said Gabrielle Ubaldez, Executive Director at New Mexico Voices for Children.**

"Chaco Cultural National Historical Park has incalculable ecological and historical value. It is too special to be exposed to oil and gas drilling. The park is one of the last sanctuaries for desert

animals seeking respite from surrounding drilling and human interference,” **said Ellen Montgomery, Great Outdoors Campaign Director for Environment New Mexico.** “Protecting this special place has overwhelming public support in New Mexico and across the country. The protections enacted in 2023 should be left in place.”

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