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Greater Chaco Protection Means More Than Lines on a Map

Impacted Community Members Call for Landscape Level Safeguards at BLM Public Meetings

Farmington, NM - This week Greater Chaco Coalition members are participating in [public meetings](#) as part of the Department of Interior's "Honoring Chaco Initiative", urging the Bureau of Land Management to protect the entirety of the Greater Chaco Landscape and address the cumulative impacts of oil and gas on communities and Tribal Nations.

The meetings are part of the Bureau of Land Management's public comment process on its proposal to pause new mineral leasing on public lands within a 10-mile buffer of Chaco Culture National Historical Park for a period of 20 years. Supportive of the withdrawal, the [Greater Chaco Coalition](#) has long insisted much more needs to be done to protect the Greater Chaco Landscape and meaningfully involve impacted communities and Tribal Nations.

The Greater Chaco region is a living and ancient cultural landscape. A thousand years ago, Chaco Canyon in northern New Mexico was the ceremonial and economic center of the Chaco Cultural Landscape, an area encompassing more than 75,000 square miles of the Southwest in NM, AZ, CO and UT and sacred to Indigenous Peoples. Now, the vast majority of lands across the region are already leased for fracking, with over 40,000 oil and gas wells scarring the landscape, impacting the land, air, water, health, and cultural resources of local communities.

Late last year, in response to calls from Tribes, Pueblos, and impacted communities, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland launched the "[Honoring Chaco Initiative](#)", a two-part process involving the 10-mile mineral withdrawal and a new, collaborative, and still undefined process to address meaningful cultural landscape management and protection.

The comment period on the proposed buffer closes May 6 when members of the Greater Chaco Coalition [plan to deliver](#) thousands of public comments supporting the proposed mineral withdrawal and calling for broader landscape level protections. Since 2016, the Coalition has delivered over one-million public comments to the Bureau calling for an immediate moratorium on fracking across the landscape.

Despite promising to protect Greater Chaco, the Bureau of Land Management [continues to approve new oil and gas wells and fracking related projects](#), including miles of roads, pipelines, and irreparable disturbances with heavy machinery within and outside the proposed 10-mile buffer. New Mexico, the second-largest oil producer in the US, has become known as an [energy sacrifice zone](#). Oil and gas extraction is so extensive in southeastern New Mexico's Permian Basin that the region has been described as a [climate bomb](#). Avoiding catastrophic global warming [requires ending new investments in fossil fuels](#). Ending new federal fossil fuel leasing, responsible for [one-quarter of U.S. climate emissions](#), is the elementary place to start.

Truly honoring Greater Chaco requires a pause on all new oil and gas activities while the Honoring Chaco process is underway and while the Department consults with Tribes, Pueblos, and impacted communities to address the cumulative impacts of oil and gas in the region.

STATEMENTS

“Diné CARE stands with local Diné communities and allottees that have passed resolutions supporting the need to rethink land, air, water and cultural resource planning within the Greater Chaco Landscape. The proposed twenty-year withdrawal cannot be the be-all and end-all of Greater Chaco protection, especially while oil and gas activities on *existing* leases continue to endanger the health of Diné people. With legacies of broken promises, fracking has already contaminated the lands, air, water and destroyed sacred cultural places across the Greater Chaco Landscape. The Biden Administration has reneged on its promise to stop oil and gas on federal lands, and sadly, it is grassroots and frontline communities that must push to make this promise a reality. As a designated “energy sacrifice zone,” Diné communities and allottees are right to mistrust broken promises of the federal government, and they will continue to take action to defend the land, air, water and the sacred.”

- Robyn Jackson, acting executive director for **Diné C.A.R.E.**

“As a collective of Diné allotment owners and heirs, we stand in direct support of the 20 year ten mile withdrawal that will help to protect the Greater Chaco landscape and those who call this space home. We understand that this is not the save-all to the issues of extraction in this region, but it's an effective start. We need real solutions and initiatives implemented that continue to protect and consider the Diné people of the Eastern Agency. Industrialized fracking has exacerbated the harms of longstanding extractive regimes, with the vast majority of available lands leased for oil and gas, and more than 40,000 oil and gas wells across the Greater Chaco Landscape. DAAX advocates for the fair and just treatment of allottees, for an end to the era of extractive colonialism in Eastern Navajo Agency, and for new processes of collaboration and consent with federal and state agencies to ensure environmental justice for Diné people. We advocate for federal, tribal, and state policies that honor allottees' rights, protect the health, wealth, and wellness of our communities, and support a just transition towards a non-extractive future in which future generations can thrive in harmony and balance with the land.”

- Corn Howland, **Diné Allottees Against Extraction(DAAX)**

“Pueblo Action Alliance feels that the fight for the Greater Chaco region is a fight for a healthier future for all generations to come. We can no longer be ignored and concrete action must be taken now! The initial announcement of the potential 10-mile mineral withdrawal around Chaco National Park boundaries along with the 90-day comment period was not only an unprecedented move from the Dept of Interior, but also a pivotal moment for Indigenous peoples and grassroots organizations who have been advocating for the protection of The Greater Chaco Landscape for decades. It is far past time for the need to hold our decision makers accountable to the injustices that have historically taken place throughout the Greater Chaco Landscape. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent ,also known as FPIC, can be a vital tool throughout the “Honoring Greater Chaco” process, especially as it relates to the 10-mile withdrawal of public lands. We demand a fair and just transition away from fossil fuels!”

- Gracie Aragon, **Pueblo Action Alliance**

“Many of our sacred sites are important ecological sites that are on the frontlines of the cumulative impacts of climate change and environmental destruction that comes from fossil fuel development. [We recommend the development of meaningful and equitable co-management processes and practices for the protection of the Greater Chaco landscape.](#) We also offer the following recommendation for the implementation of an equitable and culturally-sensitive approach to consultation and consent that uphold the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

- Dr. David J. Tsosie, **Diné Centered Research and Evaluation**

“Fracking is violence against our sole source aquifer and to ourselves as water beings. We must be in respectful, right relations with our Earth, Sky, and All, for our survival now and into the future. Natural law must be given their protective rights above any governmental claims to exploit resources that only enact harm.”

- Talavi Cook, Environmental Health and Justice Manager, **Tewa Women United**

“Native Organizers Alliance stands in solidarity with the Indigenous communities across the Greater Chaco region who support a 20-year pause on new mineral withdrawals within a 10-mile buffer surrounding the Chaco Culture National Historical Park. More importantly, these communities seek broader protections. Greater Chaco communities affected by adverse cumulative impacts caused by oil and gas development have a basic human right to enjoy clean air, healthy water, agriculturally sustainable land to support food security, and unlimited access to cultural resources that will sustain the diverse cultures across the Greater Chaco landscape. Systemic change is necessary to ensure a quality of life for these communities. It is necessary for the Bureau of Land Management to ensure opportunities for those directly affected by oil and gas development to have a voice in the entire process of energy development.”

- Carol Davis, Managing Director, **Native Organizers Alliance**

“While San Juan Citizens Alliance supports the administrative withdrawal, it is not a substitute for a complete landscape-level analysis by the Department of the Interior.”

- Mike Eisenfeld, Energy and Climate Program Manager, **San Juan Citizens Alliance**

“If the Department of the Interior truly wants to ‘Honor Greater Chaco’, it would refrain from approving any more drilling permits and associated infrastructure throughout the entire Greater Chaco landscape and prioritize protecting the air, land, water, and public health of communities

in the region. This region continues to be desecrated by oil and gas development. The only path for restoring the cultural integrity of this landscape is to expand permanent protections beyond a 10-mile mineral withdrawal around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The administration can, and must, be bold and go further”

- Miya King-Flaherty, Organizing Representative, **Sierra Club - Rio Grande Chapter**

“Fracking is devastating Navajo communities and despoiling the cultural integrity of the Greater Chaco landscape far beyond the 10-mile buffer around Chaco Canyon. If the Interior Department is serious about honoring Chaco, then the Department needs to get serious about ending fracking in the entire Greater Chaco landscape.”

- Jeremy Nichols, Climate and Energy Program Director, **WildEarth Guardians**

“A tragic legacy of colonization and exploitation has been endured by the people and communities indigenous to the Greater Chaco Landscape for generations. We are at a moment when that legacy must be addressed, and for justice to be actively sought. The Honoring Chaco Process and a 10-mile withdrawal is a step in that direction, but new lines on a map aren’t enough. We must secure a just transition away from fossil fuel exploitation, not only for those currently living in the shadow of development, but for the future generations who will inherit these lands.”

- Kyle Tisdell, Attorney and Climate & Energy Program Director, **Western Environmental Law Center**

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