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Photos

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Coalition Delivers nearly 80K+ Comments to Bureau of Land Management at Rally To “Truly Honor Chaco”

Commenters demand more meaningful protections for Greater Chaco and greater involvement of impacted communities

Santa Fe, NM - Today, the [Greater Chaco Coalition](#)/Frack Off Chaco, composed of environmental justice advocates, Indigenous grassroots organizations, tribal community leaders, and members of the public, rallied and [delivered nearly 80,000](#) comments to the Bureau of Land Management demanding greater protections for the Greater Chaco Landscape and surrounding communities from expanded oil and gas activities.

Today's rally coincided with the deadline to submit comments on the Bureau of Land Management's proposal to stop new oil and gas leasing for a 20-year period on roughly 350,000 acres of land within a 10-mile radius of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. More than 20 people attended the rally and participants contributed their name and comments to an artistic display of what it means to truly 'Honor Greater Chaco'. Speakers included Samuel Sage, Community Services Coordinator of Counselor Chapter House; Trenton DeVore, Lead Youth Organizer with Pueblo Action Alliance; Mario Atencio, Vice President of Torreon/Starlake Chapter, and Reyes DeVore, Community Programming Director with Pueblo Action Alliance.

Responding to the threat of unchecked fracking in the region, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland last year announced the [“Honoring Chaco” initiative](#), a two-part process involving the withdrawal of federal minerals within 10 miles of Chaco Park and a new collaborative process to address the need for landscape-level management reforms. The Honoring Chaco process has yet to be defined and coalition members have long called on the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management to address environmental racism, ensure just transition efforts and infrastructure investments in impacted communities, to fully analyze the cumulative impacts of oil and gas drilling, meaningful tribal consultation and free, prior and informed consent within decision making processes, and for permanent landscape-level protections beyond a 10-mile protective zone.

Since 2015, Greater Chaco Coalition members have delivered nearly [two million public comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management calling for an immediate moratorium on oil and gas leasing and drilling on public lands throughout the region.

The oil and gas industry's stranglehold is strong in New Mexico, with the state receiving [\\$1.1bn](#) last year from mineral leasing on federal lands— more than any other US state, directly undermining efforts [needed to halve greenhouse gas emissions](#) this decade. New Mexico is the [fastest-warming](#) and [most water-stressed](#) state in the continental US, where wildfires have recently devoured over 120,000 acres and remain uncontained. Despite this, the oil and gas industry tightens its grip with [boondoggle hydrogen scams](#) while [holding public education hostage](#) to deepen the state's dependence on fossil fuels.

Members of the coalition already sent a [letter](#) to the agencies outlining their concerns with the Chaco withdrawal public meetings. The coalition also stressed that the Honoring Chaco process must result in meaningful consultation with impacted community members and serve as a model for landscape level protections that address the legacy impacts of over 40,000 oil and gas wells in the region.

Despite launching the Honoring Chaco initiative, the Bureau of Land Management [continues to approve](#) new oil and gas wells, miles of pipelines, and associated oil and gas infrastructure outside of the 10-mile buffer. [New development](#) is already underway in other areas.

Today's action underscores long-standing calls for landscape-level management outside of the 10-mile buffer that includes the cultural, social, economic and environmental concerns that have been raised and for the meaningful involvement of impacted communities and Tribal Nations to truly 'Honor Chaco'. If no further action is taken to protect the Greater Chaco Landscape from fossil fuel extraction and related development, the Greater Chaco region will remain an "energy sacrifice zone" and public health and environmental concerns will continue to worsen.

Coalition Statements:

"The tribal consultation session regarding the mineral withdrawal held at Nageezi Chapter was severely inadequate. So far, the tribal consultation process has lacked answers to the questions posed by leadership and citizens regarding the actual area of dispute. The questions from leadership require critical back and forth dialogue with substantial qualitative and quantitative analysis within the land withdrawal area. Cumulative pollution impacts on the landscape remain huge issues not addressed throughout the public process that ends today. Public lands are public lands belonging to the public as a whole. Until the land status or tenureship is changed, then we should all have a say in the land and mineral withdrawal process."

- Chairman Daniel Tso, Health Education and Human Services 24th Navajo Nation Council representing Baca-Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreón-Starlake and Whitehorse Lake Chapters

"The oil and gas industry has made a significant impact on our landscape, causing a lot of damage. Just last week, I noticed a new pipeline project going in. It was kicking dust up everywhere and destroying the land. The companies and the Bureau of Land Management never come to our Chapter to notify or ask our community about these projects. We find out after the ground is already being broken. Over 91% of available federal lands in the Farmington Field Office alone have already been leased for extraction. When are they going to stop?"

- Samuel Sage, Community Services Coordinator for Counselor Chapter and Vice President of the Board of Diné C.A.R.E.

"In 2015, the Torreón-Starlake Chapter of the Navajo Nation Government passed a resolution *"Requesting the New Mexico Congressional Caucus to Intervene on behalf of their citizens regarding the actions of the Bureau of Land Management on the leasing of certain parcels of public lands for horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing by calling for a moratorium until the*

Resource Management Plan is revised or amended.... In 2016, the Eastern Navajo Agency Council passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on fracking in the Eastern Navajo Agency. Then in 2019, the Torreon/Starlake Chapter passed a resolution supporting a mineral withdrawal of minerals leasing within 10 miles of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The Navajo Nation Administration has supported a moratorium on fracking and has had historic summits with the All-Pueblo Council of Governors supporting, and reaffirming, protections for the Park. As Vice-President of the Torreon/Starlake Chapter, I stand with the positions of past and present leaders and support the Administrative mineral withdrawal and wholeheartedly welcome the mandated discussion that surrounds landscape-level protections that are supposed to accompany the mineral withdrawal.

- Mario Atencio, Vice President of Torreon/Starlake Chapter

“As a collective of Diné allotment owners and heirs that advocate for the health and well-being of the land, air, water, culture and people, we are demanding that we need more protections for the people and landscape in the Greater Chaco Region. Federal agencies are responsible for providing a full analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of oil and gas extraction on the land, air, water, plants, cultural and sacred resources and sites, public health, and the climate. Along with these demands, it is also widely recognized that the General Allotment Act of 1887 is a settler colonial tool for dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their collective land base. In Eastern Navajo Agency, the federal government broke up collectively-held Diné lands into allotments, which are now surrounded by a checkerboard of federal, state, private, fee, and tribal lands. Between this jurisdictional nightmare, the fractionation of allotment properties, and the theft of Diné lands, Diné communities and the Navajo Nation face significant challenges to sovereignty and self-determination over land use decisions in Eastern Navajo Agency. Because of these injustices and more, we demand that the federal government, in its entirety, fulfill its Trust Relationship and Responsibility to Indigenous allotment owners not only in the Greater Chaco area but everywhere in the so-called United States. Protect Greater Chaco! No more broken promises!”

- Corn Howland, Diné Allottees Against eXtraction(DAAX)

“Promising steps are being taken to consider the serious environmental and health impacts associated with resource extraction within Navajo communities who still call the Chaco region home. However, the federal government has shown blatant disregard for the well-being of local Indigenous communities in its failure to study the health and ethnographic impacts endured by local residents even after a centennial of intentional destruction. The negative impacts caused by industrial activity far outweigh the benefits in a rural region where many residents lack access to basic resources such as running water and electricity.

“As a Dine woman, I personally harvest local plants to this day. How much longer will this sustenance last if the land continues to be mistreated and poisoned? Throughout my childhood I have roamed these lands without fear for my future. Now, I must consider the risk of water contamination and air pollution poisoning my homelands. The decisions we make now will echo throughout the rest of my People’s time.”

- Kendra Pinto, Four Corners Indigenous Community Field Advocate, Earthworks

“Pueblo Action Alliance, as a long member of the Frack off Chaco coalition, have worked in solidarity to address the protection of land, water, air and communities within the entire landscape. A 10 mile buffer, while it’s a step in the direction to address how the federal fossil fuel leasing program is negatively impacting the land and its cultural resources, greater protections that address public health is an environmental justice. The land, water, air and its communities need justice as we are fighting a historic legacy of extraction. It has been decades of discretion to the landscape and has contributed to global greenhouse gas emissions. Protecting Chaco is climate justice, environmental justice, and reproductive justice. We are

gathered yet again, all on the Bureau of Land Management to include greater long term protections for the landscape.”

- Julia Bernal, Executive Director, Pueblo Action Alliance

“Honoring Chaco is about honoring the living communities who for decades have suffered environmental and cultural resource degradation, and health disparities caused by unchecked oil and gas fracking. Over 91% of public lands across the Greater Chaco region in northwest New Mexico are leased for oil and gas development. To truly honor Chaco would be to permanently end mineral withdrawals on federal lands across the Greater Chaco landscape so sacred sites, stories, and cultural resources could continue to thrive across the diverse cultures who claim a connection to the Greater Chaco landscape.”

- Carol Davis, Managing Director, Native Organizers Alliance

“There is an immense struggle to protect Native and vulnerable communities from climate change impacts, health impacts from pollution, and systemic and environmental racism. For too long, these impacts have been enabled from the Bureau of Land Management with no accountability. Our maternal/infant health is suffering and there is so much more to be done. We can start with withdrawing the leases and honoring Chaco, then move forward in centering Indigenous birthing as a standard for environmental protections in our state.”

- Beata Tsosie, Organizational Director, Breath of My Heart Birthplace

“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

“There is a shrinking window of time for the President to cut off our dependence on fossil fuels and end oil and gas extraction. We can’t wait any longer for President Biden’s prevarications. We’re asking him to start keeping his promises to ban fracking and drilling on federal lands. We’re asking him to start by protecting Chaco Canyon.”

- Jorge Aguilar, Southern Region Director, Food & Water Watch

“Here we are, yet again, delivering thousands of comments to the Bureau of Land Management calling for greater protections for the entire Greater Chaco Landscape. Those protections should include air and water quality, health and safety of surrounding communities, and analyzing, addressing and mitigating the cumulative impacts of oil and gas drilling. A mineral withdrawal is a step in the right direction, but more must be done to address the legacy impacts of more than 40,000 wells throughout the region that continue to harm communities, the environment and cultural integrity of the Greater Chaco Landscape.”

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

“Protecting 10 miles around Chaco Canyon is an important step forward, but without landscape-level safeguards for the Greater Chaco region, fracking will continue to tear apart the land, its people, and its cultural integrity. Honoring Chaco means ending fracking throughout all of Greater Chaco, not just a 10 mile buffer.”

- 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

“While the 10-mile buffer is an important first step toward permanent protection for the Greater Chaco landscape, fighting the climate crisis demands even bolder action. If the administration truly wants to safeguard the region’s tribes and communities from disastrous oil and gas development, they must extend protections beyond this radius.”

- Raena Garcia, Fossil Fuels and Lands Campaigner, Friends of the Earth US

“The swiftness with which the Chaco region has been developed for oil and gas extraction is simply mind-boggling, so we feel tremendous gratitude for the leadership from the Department of the Interior to protect the cultural heritage and present-day communities near Chaco. Let’s honor Chaco by honoring the input of local communities through meaningful and equitable engagement, and pausing oil and gas approvals until the "Honoring Chaco" process is complete.”

- Shelley Silbert, Executive Director, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

“For the next generations, we must do everything we can to protect our land, air, and water. The sacred landscapes of the Greater Chaco Region should be protected and restored to preserve and honor this rich cultural history and give our children a safe, clean environment in which to thrive.”

- Anni Hanna, New Mexico Climate Justice