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Tribal, Environmental Justice, Health, and Climate Coalition Calls on U.S. Interior Secretary to Protect Greater Chaco Region from Fracking

Despite promise to Honor Chaco, Bureau of Land Management rubberstamping Trump-era oil and gas leasing, more oil and gas extraction

Washington, D.C.-- Today a coalition of more than 50 groups, joined by nearly 10,000 people, called on the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Deb Haaland, to live up to the Biden administration's promise to Honor the Greater Chaco region of northwest New Mexico and halt new oil and gas leasing and fracking in the held-sacred landscape.

The call comes as the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management recently upheld the Trump administration's sale of nearly 45,000 acres of oil and gas leases in the region. A coalition originally sued the agency for illegally approving this leasing and the Bureau ultimately [agreed to reconsider its decisions](#).

Despite its [promise to reconsider the past leasing](#) in response to litigation, the Bureau of Land Management completely re-approved the Trump-era sale in early August, opening the door for a massive surge in oil and gas extraction and fracking. In the letter, the coalition stated:

Given the Interior Department's pledge to honor the Greater Chaco region, this decision is especially disconcerting. The 45,000 acres of oil and gas leasing approved under the Trump administration was not only illegal, it was the result of fast-tracking for the oil and gas industry at the expense of public notice, environmental justice, community outreach, the climate, and the region's air and water. The 2018, 2019, and 2020 leasing in the Rio Puerco and Farmington Field Offices of northwestern New Mexico stood to open the door to expansive drilling and fracking near Navajo residences and communities. The Trump administration relied on lawless logic, claiming the environmental impacts of oil and gas leasing are not significant.

For years now, the Greater Chaco region, its people, and its cultural fabric, have been under assault by oil and gas companies. Fracking has [exploded across the landscape](#), irreparably degrading sacred Chacoan sites and other cultural resources, **while frontline and Indigenous communities in the region continue to endure fracking impacts that fundamentally threaten public health, air, land, water, and climate.**

Last year, the Biden administration and Interior Secretary Haaland pledged to Honor the Greater Chaco region, [launching a process to permanently protect the landscape](#) from oil and gas drilling and fracking.

Consistent with “Honoring Chaco,” the coalition today called on the Interior Secretary to intervene and undo the Bureau of Land Management’s leasing, urging Deb Haaland:

We hope that you take these concerns to heart and chart a new path toward justice in Greater Chaco, rather than uphold Trump administration business as usual. Ending the continued sacrifice of the Greater Chaco Landscape to the oil and gas industry and ameliorating legacies of broken promises is what honoring Chaco means. The Department of the Interior must exercise some semblance of balance and restraint.

The latest oil and gas leasing in the Greater Chaco landscape comes as the Bureau of Land Management also continues to approve new oil and gas industry proposals to drill, frack, and build roads and pipelines in the region.

While groups are weighing legal options to defend the Greater Chaco region, the coalition in the meantime is urging Secretary Haaland to “consider intervening and doing the right thing.”

Since 2015, Greater Chaco Coalition members have sent nearly [two million public comments](#) to the Bureau of Land Management calling for the agency to exercise restraint and restore the balance in the Greater Chaco region, including [over 80,000 comments in May](#) calling for an end to new fracking activities beyond the proposed 10-mile buffer around Chaco Culture National Park. Today’s letter is accompanied by nearly 10,000 New Mexicans and Chaco advocates who joined [Sierra Club](#) and [WildEarth Guardians](#) petitions to Secretary Haaland, asking her to reconsider re-issuance of these contested leases.

See a copy of the letter [here >>](#)

Statements from Plaintiff Groups:

“For nearly a decade, Greater Chaco Diné communities, like Counselor Chapter, have passed resolutions opposing oil and gas leasing. The approval of the 45,000 acres endangers drinking water resources for over 5,000 Diné in the Greater Chaco region. These Trump-era leases are illegal and the Biden Administration must stand to live up to its trustee responsibilities and take action to protect the public health of the Diné allottees in the far Eastern Navajo Agency.”

- Mario Atencio, Greater Chaco Energy Organizer, **Diné C.A.R.E.**

“Honoring Chaco means protecting the region from unchecked oil and gas extraction, not upholding the Trump administration’s illegal oil and gas leasing. Secretary Haaland and the Biden administration need to change course now otherwise we’ll be left with no choice but to go back to court to protect Greater Chaco and challenge their lawlessness.”

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

“The decision to move forward with Trump-era oil and gas lease sales speaks volumes to the Bureau of Land Management’s business-as-usual attitude, which prioritizes industry interests over community concerns and impacts, environmental justice, climate impacts, and public opposition. It’s unfortunate that the agency passed on a chance to live up to promises that ‘Honor Chaco’, and instead chose to sacrifice more lands to a polluting industry. Re-approving these lease sales directly contradicts what it means to ‘Honor Chaco’ and top leadership should reconsider this decision.”

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

“The concept of honoring Chaco is not supported by unanalyzed oil and gas leasing and development which would thoroughly industrialize the landscape. In addition, consultation has not been meaningful on this fast-tracked project.”

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

Statements from Greater Chaco Landscape Organizations and Representatives:

“Rio Puerco BLM is currently operating under an outdated 1986 Resource Management Plan that never considered oil and gas activities, period. Now the agency continues to approve more activities without study or consideration to the people. The millions of gallons of water to be used on each fracking well wasn't anticipated in the 1986 RPFO RMP. There wasn't any consultation with the Tri-Chapter area of the Navajo Nation. One just has to look at the record. Now the US Government is requiring tribal consultation as a policy pedestal, but the BLM RPFO continues to fail in its trust responsibility to the overall general public and most especially the tribal communities.”

- Daniel Tso, Council Delegate and **Chairman of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, 24th Navajo Nation Council**

“The presence of oil and gas within the Greater Chaco Landscape has inflicted irreparable harm to communities that live within its boundaries. We appreciate and respect DOI's advocacy to ensure protections for the region through the Honoring Chaco Initiative, which we are motivated to be a part of, but all oil and gas activities and future development projects must be put on hold until adequate resource management planning and tribal consultation is completed. Assuring environmental justice and meaningful stakeholder engagement must be prioritized to truly honor the landscape.

- Julia Bernal, Executive Director, **Pueblo Action Alliance**

“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 immediately study the health and ethnographic impacts endured by local residents even after a centennial of intentional destruction.”

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

“The preservation of our natural environment is vital for the continuing healthy growth of our children; political decisions that undermine this aim are dangerous and will be long lasting.”

- Hazel James-Tohe, David J. Tsosie, **Diné Center Research and Evaluation**

“BLM, New Mexico BLM, stop destroying our beloved New Mexico Landscape. Start finding the billions of dollars that will be needed to clean up the Environmental Disaster that Northwestern New Mexico, the San Juan Basin and the Permian Basin is now. The DOI's Honor Greater Chaco is nothing but a check box on a checklist unless environmental justice is assured.”

- Terry Sloan, Director, **Southwest Native Cultures**

“As a Tewa led organization that honors the relational wisdom of supporting and bringing forth life, it is very traumatic to see the blatant disregard of our traditional cultures and lifeways that the BLM is upholding for the state. Indigenous Peoples have endured this trauma for too long with no accountability. We call on those with legal authority (that is denied to us), to end the exploitation of our sacred, living ecologies and relatives.

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

“It is for our children and our future that we must continue to push against the continued disregard for our Earth Mother. Pollution and contamination from past and current oil and gas industry extraction is a direct threat to the health and well being of our Indigenous families and communities.”

- Corrine Sanchez, Executive Director, **Tewa Women United**

“The continued sacrifice of the land and people in the Greater Chaco Region is unjust and unacceptable. In order to truly protect and honor Greater Chaco, we cannot accept any new extraction and we cannot accept any more broken promises from BLM.”

- Seneca Johson, Campaign Organizer, **YUCCA**

Statements from Greater Chaco Coalition members and Supporting Groups:

“New Mexico is not a sacrifice zone.”

- Debraura James, SEEDs of SW New Mexico, **Securing Economic and Energy Democracy**

“We’re appalled that our government is approving oil and gas leases and fracking permits that it should be canceling. It’s a disaster for our climate and for people already suffering from decades of deadly fossil fuel pollution. The Interior Department needs to reverse course now.”

- Taylor McKinnon, Senior Advocate, **Center for Biological Diversity**

“As students at the University of New Mexico, we understand the cultural and environmental value of the Greater Chaco region and want it to be protected from oil and gas leasing.”

- Kinneo Memmer, Director of Communications, **UNM Leaders for Environmental Action and Foresight (LEAF)**

“We New Mexicans need to honor & respect Native Americans and their historical sites.”

- Rev. Glen Thamert, **Jemez Peacemakers**

“The Greater Chaco Region is not a sacrifice zone and should not be treated as such. The Bureau of Land Management has failed the citizens and community by siding with big oil. Protect the land, protect the people.”

- Mary Gutierrez, Director, **Earth Ethics, Inc**

“Chaco Canyon is a national treasure whose preservation is critical to an understanding of our history.”

- Matthew Myers, President, **Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids**

“The Biden administration commitment to underserved communities is failing with this acceleration. Their lives are even more seriously at risk from leaving behind the safeguards for review. Environment and long term health must be considered.”

- Diane Hodiak, Executive, **350 Deschutes**

“The Biden Administration has vowed to reverse the pattern of the prior administration and to take steps to address climate change, and to promote climate justice. This decision is inconsistent with that pledge.”

- Selden Prentice, Federal Policy Lead, **350 Seattle**

“Trump-era oil and gas leases are an assault on natural systems in ignoring negative environmental impact of such projects. We strongly object to expansive drilling and fracking in the Chaco region.”

- Timothy Edward Duda, Director, **Terra Advocati**

“We must stop fracking if we are to have a livable planet. Fracking, coal mining and other non sustainable energy production must stop now!”

- Fran P Aguirre, President, **Unite North Metro Denver**

“Chaco Canyon is an International Heritage Site. This should exempt it from the greed and the moral and intellectual fraud of Petroleum industry piracy. “

- Ernest William Sturdevant, Vice-President, **Dr Martin Luther King Jr Multicultural Council Inc.**

“While working for the BLM in the 80's, I camped at and studied Chaco Canyon. It was very clear to me that this was a unique national and world treasure and I put in a lot of effort to stop the building of a coal mine and accompanying coal fired power plant. I lost my job, but I do not regret my actions.”

- Ron Druva, **community member and former BLM employee**

“Chaco is an irreplaceable, invaluable part of Indigenous and American heritage.”

- Dr. Ted Wolner, **Member of the Society of Architectural Historians**

“Chaco is a rare heritage site, important to all Americans, but especially Native Americans. It needs to be protected from corporate extraction of fossil fuels.”

- Mark Nolan, **community member**

“BLM is owned by Oil and Gas and the PEOPLE say NO over and over again. BLM betrays New Mexicans!”

- Pamela Marshall, **community member**

“It is essential that we as Americans stand together to preserve Chaco’s magnificent and irreplaceable monuments to human civilization, inclusive of their extensive surrounding natural areas unspoiled and uncontaminated by fossil fuel exploitation.”

- June Parsons, **community member**

“Impinging on the sacred and historic First Nations rights for the purpose of oil/mineral extraction further insults the indigenous land protectors by the empowered colonialist mindset.”

- Lari Tiller Howell, **community member**