



The Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act One Pager

Background

Chaco Canyon, one of the most important cultural and historical areas in the United States, is located in northern New Mexico and is a contemporary sacred site of the Pueblos, who descend from the Chacoan people who called this place home. It is protected as a United Nations (UN) World Heritage Site and is managed as Chaco Culture National Historical Park by the U.S. National Park Service and the surrounding landscape by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). As the UN notes, among many other remarkable features, the area “has an ancient urban ceremonial center that is unlike anything constructed before or since.” However, mineral drilling and extraction are threatening these sacred, ancestral homelands in the Greater Chaco Region, putting this treasured landscape at risk. Chaco Canyon remains a site with religious and cultural significance to the Pueblos, Navajo, and other Tribal Nations that would be significantly altered by new oil and gas leasing in the surrounding area.

Chaco Canyon has been home to some of the most resilient communities in history, and it is our responsibility to protect this living landscape for Chacoan people and the Tribal Nations that call it sacred. We must halt future oil and gas development on the surrounding non-Indian federal lands to address the cultural, environmental, public health, and economic needs of this region.

Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act

The bill will protect Chaco Canyon and the greater landscape surrounding the Chaco Culture National Historical Park by preventing future leasing and development of oil, gas, and minerals on non-Indian federal lands located within a 10-mile buffer zone around the park. This proposed Chaco Protection Zone will preserve the sacred sites and cultural patrimony within the Greater Chaco Region.

The BLM suspended new leasing in this region during the Obama Administration but resumed consideration of proposed leases during the Trump Administration. Given administrations’ changing priorities, this legislation is urgently needed to permanently ban oil, gas, and mineral development on non-Indian federal lands in the Greater Chaco Region. The bill withdraws 316,076 acres of non-Indian federal land within the proposed Chaco Protection Zone from any new development of mineral resources. Only lands owned by the federal government (or roughly 1/3 of all lands surrounding the park in the Protection Zone) are subject to withdrawal -- private, state, and Tribal lands, including those owned by Navajo allottees, are excluded from the withdrawal.

Support

The Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act is supported by the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG), New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, Southwest Native Cultures, as well as more than 40 other organizations.