

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 6, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

New Mexico is a state with abundant natural resources as well as vibrant history and culture. The need to balance the use of our resources with the protection of our cultural heritage is no more clear than in the area surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The park itself, but also the greater Chaco area, contains ancient Puebloan roads, kivas, sacred sites, artifacts and great mysteries regarding the people who inhabited Chaco. These lands and sites are important to the Navajo Nation, whose lands surround the park, and several New Mexico Pueblos who consider the sites sacred.

In order to provide the necessary protection of this cultural heritage, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—along with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)—have embarked upon a unique joint planning process, to appropriately manage the lands in the region. The agencies completed scoping this spring on the Joint Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and aim to issue a Draft RMPA this fall, based upon the input from pueblos, chapter houses, oil and gas producers, conservation groups, local officials, and all interested stakeholders.

While this joint BLM/BIA process is ongoing, the BLM has deferred leasing in the area directly surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park to provide a basic level of protection. Regarding the last lease sale in the area, the BLM has reiterated their policy, publically announcing that, "We have deferred any leases within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park."¹ We strongly support maintaining this buffer zone.

Unfortunately, it has recently come to our attention that the BLM has begun the process of leasing parcels within the 10 mile radius of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park. This action would not only violate the previous commitment of the BLM and BIA, but the spirit of the ongoing joint public process which these agencies are conducting with the community.

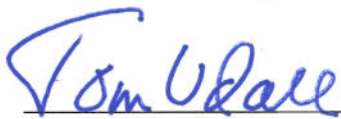
We have appreciated the opportunity to raise the importance of this joint planning process between BIA and BLM during your confirmation and in subsequent communications. Most recently you wrote Sen. Udall on July 25, 2017 and stated:

Regarding leasing of Federal and Indian minerals in the San Juan Basin near the Chaco Culture National Historical Park in northwest New Mexico, we believe that BLM and BIA's cooperative approach to planning is exactly the right method to find the creative answers needed to conserve the cultural and environmental landscapes of the area, while still developing the fluid mineral resources for both Indian allottees and the Nation's energy needs.

We further appreciate your recent public support for the BLM and BIA's cooperative approach, and respectfully request that you maintain the status quo and defer leasing within 10 miles of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park until the Final Joint BLM and BIA RMPA is finished. This request is also supported by the Navajo Nation and the All Pueblo Council of Governors, whose leadership recently pinned an op-ed in the Albuquerque Journal encouraging continued cooperation in protecting the Chaco Culture National Historical Parkⁱⁱ.

Thank you for your consideration of this timely matter and we look forward to continuing to work with you in the future on this and other important issues for New Mexico.

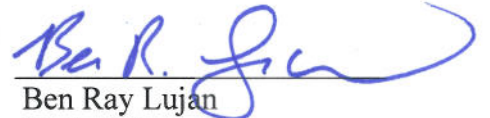
Sincerely,



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Congressman

ⁱ Black Leigh, Irvin. (2017, January 11). Tribal officials try to stop Chaco leasing. Farmington Daily Times. Retrieved from <http://www.daily-times.com/story/news/local/four-corners/2017/01/11/tribal-officials-try-stop-chaco-leasing/96445354/>

ⁱⁱ Begaye, Russell and Torres, Edward Paul. (2017, August 14). Tribal nations push Chaco protection. Albuquerque Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.abqjournal.com/1047471/tribal-nations-push-chaco-protection.html>