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House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chair Stauber and Ranking Member Ocasio-Cortez,

We are writing in opposition to H.R.4374, which would nullify Public Land Order No. 7923, withdrawing certain land in San Juan County, New Mexico, from mineral entry. We support Order No. 7923, which will protect the greater Chaco Canyon landscape.

Chaco Culture National Historical Park preserves part of an important place that was once the center of life for Ancestral Pueblos. The park provides a safe haven for diverse plant and animal species that were once more numerous in the San Juan Basin. Oil and gas activity have long threatened the last undeveloped portions of the Greater Chaco Landscape.

Chaco Canyon is known for its dark skies. Situated in an often-cloudless desert far from the lights of development and industry, it's so uniquely perfect for stargazers that in 2013 it was designated an "International Dark Sky Park." In this darkness and isolation, desert wildlife thrive. Elk, bobcats, badgers, bats and lizards all make their homes here in dense concentrations, living and roaming among the ruins and the red rock formations that surround them. Some of them are nocturnal, adapted to, and dependent on, the dark night skies.

In developing Public Land Order No. 792 to protect this national treasure, the Department of Interior followed all necessary processes. During a public comments period which included public meetings throughout 2022, they received more than 130,000 comments from the public in favor of the withdrawal.

We urge you to oppose H.R.4374 and to support the protection of Chaco Canyon.

Sincerely,

Lisa Frank
Executive Director, Washington Legislative Office

Ellen Montgomery
Public Lands Campaign Director