

House of Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources  
July 11th, 2023

Written Testimony on H.R. 4374. Nullifying Public Land Order No. 7923, Withdrawing Certain Land in San Juan County, New Mexico, from Mineral Entry

Name: Wendy Atcitty  
Allottee Information: Yes  
Chapter House: Huerfano

I am Wendy Atcitty, Navajo Nation enrolled citizen. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the bill to nullify public land order No. 7923, Withdrawing Certain Land in San Juan County, New Mexico, From Mineral Entry, H.R. 4374. Representative Elijah Crane, R-AZ-2, introduced the bill. I strongly oppose the legislation and request this Committee's solidarity to stand with the front-line Navajo community and Allottee members for permanent and broad protection of the Greater Chaco Landscape.

I am a registered voter from Huerfano, approximately 50 miles from the Chaco Culture National Historical Park (Chaco Canyon), and an enrolled Navajo Nation citizen. Our family has resided in the region during the development and experienced the harmful legacy of oil and gas development within our homesite. I am uniquely qualified to speak upon the need for a 10-mile withdrawal area and the Department of Interior's (DOI) administrative decision to withdraw federal lands and minerals surrounding Chaco Canyon from future mineral development for a 20-year term.

There is an era partially responsible for establishing checkerboard land parcels on the Eastern Navajo Agency that encompasses land in New Mexico. However, since time immemorial, my clan, family, and community have resided in Huerfano. We adhere to Diné Traditional Law, which has teachings to guide our existence on Mother Earth as stewards of her body and ecosystems.

It cannot be denied that petrochemical exploration and development have encroached on and harmed land and cultural landscapes important to Diné people, Pueblos, and Tribes who have had cultural affiliation since time immemorial. Chaco Canyon has had 90 percent of federal land and minerals leased to oil and gas development without sufficient cumulative environmental and ethnographic analyses. Our health and ecological impact are real for front-line Diné communities as there is a connection to the fracked water systems used in oil and gas and the emissions. In 2016, a health study began to account for health complications that impact Diné communities from mineral development. It is called Counselor Health Impact Assessment. It culminated in another critical research in 2021, "A Cultural, Spiritual and Health Impact Assessment of Oil Drilling Operations in the Navajo Nation area of Counselor, Torreon, and Ojo Encino Chapters."

As a Diné citizen, I strongly support the 2023 public land order from the DOI to administratively withdraw federal lands in an approximate 10-mile withdrawal area surrounding the Chaco National Historical Park and its outliers for a 20-year term. I also support the Honoring Chaco Initiative (HCI) ongoing effort to create better land co-management practices in the Greater Chaco Region.

The region encompasses the impacts of oil and gas leasing. Several local Chapter resolutions supported the Navajo Allottee and community efforts to preserve the Navajo Nation and Allottees' rights for mineral development on their land. It supports a status quo of yearly Congressional appropriations moratorium language to prevent the Bureau of Land Management from using resources to conduct mineral leasing on public lands within the withdrawal area.

For ten years, there have been resolutions by Navajo Chapter Houses to have the federal government implement better land management and prevention of further leasing on Public lands, with conditions to explore options for oil and gas leases that support the Navajo Nation and Allottees. It also carries a timeline of inter-Tribal and public engagement in support of protecting the Greater Chaco landscape.

- 2013 - The Eastern Navajo Agency Council called for a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the region. It was followed by the passage of multiple Navajo Nation Chapter resolutions supporting the protection of the landscape from oil and gas extraction.
- 2016 - Over 2 million public comments have been submitted to federal agencies in support of protecting the Greater Chaco Landscape from oil and gas extraction.
- 2017 - The All Pueblo Council of Governors and Navajo Nation President and Vice President issued a joint statement opposing horizontal fracking in Greater Chaco, and the National Congress of American Indians passed a resolution to support a moratorium on leasing and permitting in the region.
- 2019 - The New Mexico State Land Office issued Executive Order 2019-002 Moratorium on New Oil and Gas and Mineral Leasing within a 12-mile area around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. It convened a Chaco Working Group to make recommendations regarding land management practices in the Greater Chaco region.
- 2019 - APCG and the Navajo Nation met in a historic summit to support the protection of the Greater Chaco Landscape.
- 2021 - President Biden and Interior Secretary Haaland initiated concurrent administrative efforts to protect Chaco Canyon and the Greater Chaco Region and improve land management practices through the HCI.

There are numerous internal family and community meetings where a consensus emerged on protections that would incorporate the option to preserve Navajo Trust lands and Allotment lands to seek mineral development for economic benefits as there is a lack of opportunities in economic development.

I request you to oppose H.R. 4374, the bill to nullify public land order No. 7923, Withdrawing Certain Land in San Juan County, New Mexico, From Mineral Entry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy Atchity". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.