

Testimony of Barnaby V. Lewis, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Gila River Indian Community

Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Lands

U.S. House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am Barnaby V. Lewis, a tribal member of the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC). The GRIC is a federally recognized tribe located in Southern Arizona consisting of the Akimel O’Odham (Pima) and the Pee Posh (Maricopa) Tribes. The Akimel O’Odham are part of one cultural group that has been split into four federally recognized tribes. These include the GRIC, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Ak-Chin Indian Community, and the Tohono O’Odham Nation. The Pee Posh have a separate and distinct culture, language, and history from the O’Odham. They instead share a closer cultural affiliation with Yuman Tribes to the west along the Lower Colorado River. I have resided within the Community for most of my life. I am 68 years old, and I currently serve as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Community. As the Community’s Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, it is my primary responsibility to consult with federal agencies regarding federal undertakings in order to ensure the religious and culturally significant interests of the Community are considered in project development.

What Is Casa Grande Ruins National Monument?

At present, Casa Grande Ruins National Monument (CAGR) encompasses 473 acres of federal land that is managed by the National Park Service. Within the current protected area, only a portion of the village where our ancestors the Huhugam lived is included, and the settlement originally extended over two square miles. This bill would make some small boundary adjustments to the national monument, and it would authorize incorporation of portions of the Grewe site, just to the east, where most of the community was settled between 500 and 1050 CE. Through cooperative management of a 200-acre parcel with the State of Arizona, the bill would also help protect and interpret a nearby village known today as Adamsville.

Importance to O’Odham Tribes

Archaeological sites define and establish the connections O’Odham have with their Huhugam ancestors. The spiritual, reverent, and respectful associations assist in maintaining our links to these ancestral and sacred places. Spiritual associations to sacred places in the landscape define the existence and extent of the O’Odham world. These places are not just historically significant; by virtue of their role in annual cycles of universal and spiritual renewal, religious practice, and traditional knowledge, they are critical to O’Odham beliefs about cultural perpetuation and survival.

Akimel O’Odham traditional knowledge and archaeological information gathered since the late 1800s are described in a recent article published in the professional journal *American Antiquity*. That peer-reviewed article presents the evidence that today’s Akimel O’Odham are the descendants of the people who built and lived in the Casa Grande community. Akimel O’Odham traditional knowledge indicates that the Casa

Grande settlement was known as *Tco'-oltûk* (Corner). It was governed by a powerful chief named either "Morning Green" or "Morning Blue." We Akimel O'Odham regard Chief Morning Green as a historical personage, and he appears in many stories. Morning Green is said to have had control over the Rain and Wind gods.

In 1694, O'Odham from the Tucson area led Father Eusebio Kino to visit a four-story adobe building on the Gila River. Kino placed it on his map of the area, and he even sketched the building and labeled it "Casa Grande." It has since been visited by many other travelers who have also sketched and described it.

Importance to the Nation

The United States has a long history of protecting and preserving CAGR. In 1892, President Benjamin Harrison signed an executive order preserving the Casa Grande and the 480 acres that surrounded it. It was the very first archaeological preserve established in the United States. In 1889, Congress allocated \$2,000 to "repair and protect" the site. In 1901, Frank Pinkley became the full-time resident custodian, and in 1903 a wooden protective structure was added. In 1918, the Casa Grande preserve became a national monument, and it has been managed by the National Park Service ever since. In 1932, at a cost of about \$28,000, the then-600-year-old multistory adobe building was protected by the metal roof that visitors see today.

These investments protect the considerable labor investment of the original builders. Incredibly, the structure still stands despite the fact it is roughly 700 years old. This national monument also serves as a place to educate Tribal youth, local community members, and American citizens in general about the deep history of this region and rich history of this nation.

Importance to Local Communities and the State of Arizona

Local residents in both Coolidge and Florence, Arizona, are strong supporters of this bill due to the economic importance of CAGR to this area. The GRIC also endorses this expansion. There is very strong bipartisan support from Arizona's representatives in Congress, and our two Senators have introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

Recent Ethnographic Survey by the National Park Service

Casa Grande Ruins National Monument worked to undertake a formal study of the monument. Research participants, of which I was one, explained that the monument is best understood as part of a broader cultural landscape encompassing surrounding landmarks and extending to distant places through social, cultural, and economic ties. The geographic extent of migration, trade, and pilgrimage routes were repeatedly underscored in our discussions.

All Tribal representatives involved with the study expressed their conviction that the area encompassing the monument has been occupied since time immemorial, and we believe the cultural landscape of the monument is of enduring significance to our communities. We view the protected resources as a means

of educating new generations about Tribal history and ways of life. We also want to gather necessary materials and conduct ceremonial activities at spiritually significant places in the monument. Finally, I believe it is vitally important that our perspective and history is integrated into the management and interpretation of the monument.

Summary

The O'Odham believe that everything within the proposed boundary expansion of the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument is of great cultural significance, and this bill will provide permanent protection for an important place our ancestors left behind. Such places serve as messages to us regarding how we should continue traditional ways of life. Importantly, local communities benefit economically from tourism at the monument, and the communities of Coolidge and Florence also support this bill. Other interested parties, including archaeological researchers, also strongly endorse this bill. Most importantly, in a time when bipartisanship is rare, this bill holds strong bipartisan support by Arizona's congressional delegation.