



National Wildlife Federation

National Advocacy Center

1200 G Street NW, Suite 900 • Washington, DC 20005 • 202-797-6800

June 5, 2019

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Chair
1324 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don Young
Ranking Member
1329 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Haaland and Ranking Member Young,

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation (NMWF) and National Wildlife Federation (NWF) write in support of H.R. 2181, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act. We appreciate you scheduling this legislation for a hearing.

Founded by Aldo Leopold in 1914, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation is the state's oldest conservation and sportsmen's organization dedicated to sustaining and protecting New Mexico's land, water and wildlife. With 80,000 members statewide, NMWF strongly values the diverse cultures of New Mexico while advocating for sound wildlife management, protecting public lands, and the outdoor traditions that make America what it is today.

The National Wildlife Federation, one of America's largest conservation organizations, has worked for over eighty years to unite Americans from all walks of life in giving a voice to wildlife. NWF has 52 state and territorial affiliates and more than 6 million members and supporters, including hunters, anglers, gardeners, birders, hikers, campers, paddlers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. Its programs work to protect the 600 million acres of public lands owned by all Americans and ensure these lands are properly managed for fish, wildlife, and communities.

We support of the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act because it would safeguard the area and cultural sites around Chaco Canyon. As a world heritage site, Chaco Canyon is known across the world for its archaeological significance and cultural importance. Containing over 5,000 fragile archaeological artifacts, and with buildings and sacred dwellings still standing from the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries, Chaco Canyon is home to an ancient network of villages, sacred shrines and communications sites. Many of those still exist today. Modern-day pueblos and tribes throughout the Southwest claim cultural affiliation and connection to Chaco Canyon. The area attracts thousands of visitors every year.

Chaco Canyon sits in the San Juan Basin, one of the most developed natural gas basins in the United States. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has already leased or allowed drilling on the vast majority—approximately 90 percent—of the basin's federal lands. This development has seriously impacted the area's ecosystems, water and wildlife. However, the lands immediately surrounding Chaco Canyon have not been intensively leased and drilled and remain some of the last undeveloped lands in

May 14, 2019

Page 2

the San Juan Basin. The Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act is important in preventing any future leasing or development of minerals owned by the U.S. government that are located within an approximately 10-mile protected radius around the Chaco Cultural National Historical Park. If this area and these sacred sites are destroyed or violated they cannot be replaced nor can their significance to indigenous communities be understated. Energy development in this area not only threatens one of America's most important historical, cultural and spiritual sites, but truly threatens a treasure revered and valued on a global level. We urge the subcommittee's support for this important legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tracy Stone-Manning

Tracy Stone-Manning
Associate Vice President, Public Lands
National Wildlife Federation

/s/ Jesse Deubel

Jesse Deubel
Executive Director
New Mexico Wildlife Federation