



June 4, 2019

The Honorable Debra A. Haaland
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Don Young
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee:

On behalf of more than one million of our members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to offer views on H.R. 1373, the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act and H.R. 2181, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act, being heard tomorrow in the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

H.R. 1373, the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act – SUPPORT

TWS strongly supports H.R. 1373, the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act, by Representative Grijalva. This bill makes permanent a 20-year mineral withdrawal, which prohibits new mining claims on approximately one million acres of public lands around Grand Canyon National Park and was enacted by the Department of the Interior in 2012.

There is a long and unfortunate history of the toxic effects of uranium mining and transport around Grand Canyon and across northern Arizona and the Four Corners region. Pollution of air, land, and waterways – and the consequent negative and too-often deadly health effects for local residents – is the legacy of prior ore transport and of abandoned mines.

The value of the Greater Grand Canyon to the American people and to future generations is dependent upon preservation of the functioning ecosystem, the hydrological connections of the many seeps and springs feeding the Colorado River, and habitats and connective corridors for native species. These factors contribute directly to the health of the greater Grand Canyon region and to the considerable tourism-based economy of the region.

Significant challenges must still be overcome to preserve the "wholeness" of the Grand Canyon region. Habitats and wildlife movement corridors need permanent protection.



Other threats to the Park and surrounding area need careful resolution. Abandoned mines of decades past that continue to poison the land today need to be cleaned up. Cultural connections to the landscape need to be recognized and respected.

H.R. 1373 is a good, pragmatic step in the right direction. H.R. 1373 has the support of local elected officials; of tribes with historic and contemporary connections to place; of conservation, recreation, and sportsmen groups; of Arizonans of all backgrounds. The Wilderness Society strongly supports H.R. 1373. We are grateful to Representatives Grijalva, O'Halleran, and Gallego as original co-sponsors from Arizona, and to the dozens-more Representatives who are co-sponsoring this legislation. We encourage the Subcommittee to advance H.R. 1373 without delay.

H.R. 2181, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act – SUPPORT

TWS strongly supports H.R. 2181, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act sponsored by Assistant Speaker Lujan and the rest of the New Mexico delegation, which would protect Chacoan ruins and the greater landscape surrounding the Chaco Culture National Historical Park (NHP) by withdrawing approximately 316,000 acres of federal minerals from any future leasing, creating a protected radius around Chaco Culture NHP. This bill would also protect irreplaceable sacred sites and history to ensure the interests of the Pueblos and Navajo Nation are permanently safeguarded. The bill is supported by the Navajo Nation and the All Pueblo Council of Governors, as well as a broad range of organizations and individuals, including conservation groups around the state and nationally. We urge the Committee to support H.R. 2181.

Extensive natural gas development has occurred on portions of the Greater Chaco Landscape, leading to the development of the majority of lands within the Bureau of Land Management's Farmington Field Office. The proposed Chaco Cultural Heritage Withdrawal Area is generally located west of the current target zone for Mancos/Gallup Shale Play oil drilling and, as a result, has more unleased lands than adjacent areas. Nonetheless, the area is more and more at risk. We have seen lands proposed for leasing within the proposed Chaco Cultural Heritage Withdrawal Area and more proposed leasing encroaching on the area. Passing the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act at this time will protect these internationally significant resources in an area that has remained intact despite being surrounded by intensive energy development.

A host of fragile resources would be safeguarded from the harms associated with mineral development by establishment of the Proposed Chaco Protection Zone identified in the bill. Chaco Culture NHP is the center of a broad, authentic, cultural landscape that spans the San Juan Basin, as acknowledged in the Chacoan Outliers Protection Act (1995). This landscape includes hundreds of internationally and nationally significant cultural resources, including prehistoric roads, communities and shrines, many of which are related to the resources found in Chaco Culture NHP. While a number of the sites included in the broader Chacoan network lie as many



as 100 miles away, a significant number of them are concentrated within the immediate area surrounding the park.

Scenic qualities contribute significantly to the visitor experience of Chaco Culture NHP, as they do to other sacred, cultural sites within the broader core protected area. Visible evidence of the infrastructure required for oil and gas development, such as road building, drill pads and rigs, and haul trucks from the vantage of these sites would diminish the important visual characteristics of this remote, largely undisturbed landscape.

Further, the pristine, dark night sky visible in and around Chaco Culture NHP is considered one of the best places for stargazing in the world and is an important resource to protect. The park established a night skies protection initiative and interpretive program in 1991 and was certified as an International Dark Sky Park in 2013 – one of only four in the United States. Flaring, transport, artificial lighting, and other activities from energy development on lands in close proximity to the area would produce light pollution, disrupting night sky activities in and around the park.

We are very grateful to Assistant Speaker Lujan and the entire New Mexico delegation for supporting protection of the amazing cultural resources of the Greater Chaco Landscape, as well as their ongoing engagement in the efforts to plan for management of the broader landscape, which has brought the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and stakeholders together.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Drew McConville".

Drew McConville
Senior Managing Director of Government Relations
The Wilderness Society