

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
June 5, 2019**

- **Thank you all for attending this Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on H.R. 1373, the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act, and H.R. 2181, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act of 2019.**

- **I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to Chairman Grijalva and Representative Luján for introducing these bills that preserve the sacred lands of our ancestors and the irreplaceable resources they hold.**

- **I would also like to thank our witnesses, many of whom have traveled great distances to join us today.**

- **Since 2008, Chairman Grijalva has championed the central provisions of the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act.**

- **It was encouraging in 2012 when the Obama Administration acted to protect over 1 million acres surrounding Grand Canyon National Park with a 20-year moratorium on new mining claims.**

- **However, recent actions by the Trump Administration suggest they may be seeking to end this moratorium – exposing tribal communities and Arizonans to the dangerous impacts of uranium mining.**
- **We need to act to ensure that political expediency doesn't undermine these existing protections, which are so essential to the economic and cultural vitality of the region.**
- **It would be especially appropriate to make these protections permanent, on this year, the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of Grand Canyon National Park.**

[Pause]

- **Closer to home for me, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act of 2019 would permanently protect the integrity of sacred sites in and around the Chaco Culture National Historical Park by prohibiting federal oil and gas leasing within a 10-mile radius of the park.**
- **This action would prevent the degradation of cultural resources, preserve the environment, and protect the health of the surrounding communities.**

- Earlier this year, I, along with many members of this committee went ~~out~~ to Chaco Canyon in New Mexico to learn more about this important region, and to better understand the threats nearby oil and gas extraction poses.
- We used cutting edge technology to examine pollution coming off of oil and gas operations, which form ~~the~~ toxic cloud that hangs over parts of northern New Mexico.
- Long before these extractive and polluting industries came to be, this region was the heart of the Chacoan Culture, from 850 to 1250 A.D.
- The sovereign Pueblo nations of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation still have intimate connections with the Greater Chaco Region – recognizing the area as a spiritual place to be honored and respected.
- Over hundreds of years, my ancestors engineered and constructed massive multistory structures that became the ceremonial, administrative and economic center of the region.
- In recognition of the area’s “Outstanding Universal Value,” Chaco Culture was recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987.

- **Today, thousands of ancestral sites are spread across the landscape – both within and beyond the boundaries of Chaco Culture National Historical Park.**
- **With the Trump Administration’s continued push for “energy dominance,” these sacred sites and national treasures are threatened by extraction.**
- **Extraction in this sacred place will only scar our land, contaminate our air and water, and create health risks for our communities.**
- **Earlier this week, Secretary Bernhardt joined Senator Heinrich and tribal leaders on a tour of Chaco Canyon.**
- **Following that meeting, Secretary Bernhardt acknowledge the region’s significance, but committed to only a one-year moratorium on oil and gas leasing within the Chaco landscape.**
- **While I appreciate this gesture, it should be clear to anyone who has visited Chaco that one-year is inadequate to protect the cultural significance of this land.**

|

- **It is my priority, as it should be that of the Trump Administration, to permanently protect this place...in recognition of its significance to our Native American culture, this country's history, the public health of nearby communities, and other's around the world.**
- **It is time for our words to become actions. We must protect both of these exceptional sites—Chaco Canyon and the Grand Canyon--in perpetuity.**
- **I would like to thank the sponsoring Members and witnesses again for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony.**