



Opening Statement
Hearing on the Potential Impacts of Large-scale Monument Designations
Chairman Mike Lee
July 27, 2016

Good afternoon. Welcome. Thank you all for being here and thanks to San Juan County High School for hosting us today.

It's an honor to be here in Blanding, on the edge of Utah's canyon country – one of the most spectacular places on earth. Every year people travel from all over the world to have their breath taken away by the sight of the canyons and the natural bridges, the rivers and the lakes, the valleys and the cliffs – and of course the Bears Ears buttes – sitting in your backyard. But as everyone here knows, there's much more to this part of our state than its natural beauty.

For the people of the Navajo Nation who live here in San Juan County and whose forefathers first settled these canyons hundreds of years ago, this corner of the world known as Bears Ears isn't just the place you call home – it's a sacred ground. It's a source of meaning and sustenance, where you meditate, gather firewood, collect medicinal plants, and connect with Mother Earth through prayer and ceremony. And it's what unites the generations of families and tribes, forming an organic and permanent bond that connects past, present, and future.

Taking care of ancestral land – protecting and preserving it for the next generation – isn't optional for many Native Americans; it's a sacred duty. The same is true in my own church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which teaches that the earth is a divine creation that belongs to God. This means that human beings have a spiritual responsibility to be wise stewards over the earth – to conserve it for our children and grandchildren.

The people of the Navajo Nation living in San Juan County have always faithfully fulfilled this responsibility in the Bears Ears region. Caring for their homelands – and respecting it as their forefathers did – is the cultural lifeblood of the Navajo people of Southeastern Utah. Take away their access to the land – restrict their stewardship over the earth's bounty – and it won't be long before their culture begins to fade away.

Yet that's exactly what the Obama administration is contemplating with the potential national-monument designation of the Bears Ears region.

I would like to put forth four goals that I believe are shared by everyone in this room, by the people of San Juan County, and even by the White House:

1. Protect Bears Ears for future generations;
2. Continue in perpetuity Native American use of the land that has spiritually and physically sustained them for hundreds of years;
3. Establish Native American co-management of the Bears Ears region;
4. Preserve multiple-use of lands where doing so does not conflict with conservation goals;

Now, if these are our goals, history proves that they can't be achieved by the president designating Bears Ears a national monument. The Antiquities Act, which the president would use to make a national monument designation, simply does not allow for the inclusive, grassroots-based land management required by these shared goals.

That's the bad news. But the good news is that there's a better way. It's called the Public Lands Initiative (PLI), which is a piece of legislation that has been written to achieve what a monument designation can't.

Instead of simply hoping that current and future land managers will cooperate and work equitably with the people of San Juan County, the PLI would codify into law clear and fair land-management guidelines that ensure the Native Americans and residents of San Juan County will be actively involved in the preservation of Bears Ears. The PLI requires no leap of faith.

Before we introduce today's witnesses, it is worth acknowledging who is *not* present: officials from the United States Department of the Interior and the United States Forest Service, as well as members of the group that calls itself the Bears Ears Coalition. They were all invited, but they declined to participate in today's hearing. This is proof that we did not try to "stack the deck" with our panel of witnesses. We would have preferred to have witnesses with opposing views. That's why we began scheduling this hearing over a month ago – to give everyone, from all sides of the issue, enough time to plan to be here as we try to find consensus. But I force the Administration or the Bears Ears Coalition sit down and speak with you today.

While I was pleased that Secretary Jewell and other federal officials visited Utah last week, Governor Herbert and the federal delegation were unable to join her because of the voting schedule of the United States House of Representatives, the United States Senate, and the official business of the National Governors Association. I had hoped that today's hearing, which Secretary Jewell has known about for over a month, would have served as an opportunity for at least someone the Administration to engage with those of us unable to make the trip last week and to those of you who tried to attend but were unable to do so due to space constraints.

Sadly, their absence here today seems to fit a long-standing pattern. After members of the PLI requested a meeting with the Bears Ears Coalition to discuss updates to the Initiative, representatives of the Bears Ears Coalition responded and said "we respectfully decline your invitation. We are satisfied that a Bears Ears National Monument proclaimed by President Obama under his authority granted by the Antiquities Act presents the best opportunity to protect the Bears Ears landscape and assure a strong Native American voice in monument management."

But the debate over the future of Bears Ears is far from finished – everyone here today proves it.

So we hope that the Bears Ears Coalition will reconsider and meet with us to discuss how best to preserve Bears Ears. My door is always open.

As a matter of housekeeping, I would like to remind everyone that this Field Hearing today is the same as a hearing in the United States Senate. We are here to gather information from witnesses and examine a very important issue near and dear to our hearts, the impact of large-scale monument designations. The regular rules that would apply to Senate hearing will apply here.

In order to allow for time to answer questions and have a bit more dialogue with everyone who took the time to travel here today, we will transition to a town hall format immediately following the conclusion of the hearing. Governor Herbert, Chairman Bishop, and I will answer questions about PLI or a national monument. I invite audience members advocating for a national monument to join this conversation. To ensure all perspectives are heard, time will be evenly divided between opponents and proponents of a national monument.

Before introducing our esteemed witnesses who have generously joined us today, I would like to take a moment to thank Principal Bob Peterson and the entire staff of the San Juan County High School for graciously allowing us to use today.

It is now time to hear from our great panel of witnesses joining us here today. As a reminder to each of the witnesses, you will each have minutes to present your oral testimony. Any additional written testimony will be accepted for the record for two weeks following the hearing.

After all witness provide their testimony, we will follow with a round of questions before finishing the hearing and moving on to the town hall.

Our first witness is The Honorable Gary Herbert, the current Governor of the State of Utah. I would like to thank you Gov. Herbert, for taking the time out of your schedule to be with us here in Blanding today.