

Lewis J. Singer  
Native Navajo/Retired Educator  
No Bears Ears Monument Organization

## No Bears Ears Monument

Thank you Senator Lee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for holding this hearing on an issue that is very important to the Blue Mountain Dinè and the people of San Juan County.

The Bears Ears Coalition has recommended that 1.9 million acres of San Juan County land be designated as a national monument. On the land that is being proposed for a monument, the Native people and the local people have been able to hunt, gather wood and traditional medicine herbs, and hold traditional ceremonies. National monument status will restrict access to the land, require payment of entrance fees, and may restrict or prohibit traditional activities such as hunting, gathering wood, picking pine nuts, acquiring medicinal herbs, and performing ceremonies on the land.

Secret meetings have been held by supporters of a national monument to encourage Native Americans to believe that a monument will help them reclaim land that they lost. Opponents of the monument have been denied access to these meetings because they were not invited or admitted. Similarly, brochures have been developed and passed out among the Native people in an effort to get their support for a monument. These brochures declare that the Native people will still be allowed to access the land and conduct their traditional activities. But the restrictions that will be enforced once the land becomes a national monument will not allow for these activities.

The Navajo can tell you that this is the truth based on their experiences with the Wupatki and Canyon de Chelly National Monuments in Arizona. In Wupatki, generations of Navajo sheepherding has almost completely disappeared due to the National Park Service limiting access to lands that Navajo families had managed since the 1870s. Now all that remains of a once thriving Navajo community is a Navajo elder woman whose home will be claimed by the National Park Service when she dies.

In Canyon de Chelly, the federal government has removed more than 300 sacred tribal relics and human remains from Navajo property. Navajo Nation never would have agreed to a monument designation if they had known that the park service would remove these sacred objects.

The Navajo people have given up enough of their tribal lands for National Monuments. 1.9 million acres is many times more land than many other National Monuments. How can we as a Native people trust the United States Government when they provide reservations and then come back and claim them as National Monuments?

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We ask the Secretary of the Interior to extend consideration of this action and complete more review of the negative consequences that a national monument will put upon the local people and especially the Native Americans who have fought for America even after the degradation that they have experienced at the hands of the federal government. My father and uncle were code talkers. My nephew fought in Afghanistan and Iraq along with many other Navajo soldiers for the American people. My brothers served in the military. Taking away access to land which they and their families use and honor and which was established as tribal lands such as Canyon de Chelly and Wupatki by the federal government doesn't seem like gratitude for their sacrifices and services.