

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2026

Bureau of Land Management
Farmington Field Office
6251 College Blvd A,
Farmington, NM 87402

**RE: Evaluation of Potential Revocation of Chaco Withdrawal,
DOI-BLM-NM-F010-2026-0002-EA**

To Whom It May Concern:

We are once again writing to express extreme disappointment about the expedited actions the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have taken regarding the revocation of Public Land Order (PLO) No. 7923, which currently protects a 10-mile buffer around Chaco Culture National Historical Park (CCNHP). The expedited procedures that this Department is employing are arbitrary and not conducive to the extreme cultural value of CCNHP.

Chaco Canyon is a sacred cultural landscape central to the identity of Tribes throughout New Mexico. The Chacoan region is a natural and cultural landscape and not represented by isolated individual sites. The value of this living landscape does not end at the park boundary. It stretches for miles throughout the greater Chacoan landscape. The Department has promised an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be completed within 90 days with no guarantee of an open and robust public comment period before the assessment commences. It is outrageous that there is seemingly no plan to open an official public comment period prior to drafting the assessment and that the reversal of the withdrawal rests on only a seven-day scoping period. For context, after the initial proposal for this withdrawal was published in the Federal Register, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) held an extended 120-day comment period and hosted five in-person sessions. The draft EA was not completed until months later, after scoping, public outreach, and robust environmental review. The full process took a year and a half and the proposal for a reversal cannot be rushed.

Further, it is your responsibility under the law to gather meaningful public input when making decisions about public land. This scoping period does not constitute a public comment period. Nor was the scoping period publicly noticed in the Federal Register. Under the Federal Land Management and Policy Act (FLPMA), the Secretary is required to host at least one public meeting after noticing a proposal for a new withdrawal. This typically involves a designated and appropriately long public comment period. This proposal to change the way land is managed around CCNHP is not exempt from FLPMA.

Pueblo communities continue to utilize this landscape for pilgrimages, story sharing, and religious and cultural practices. Opening the 10-mile buffer to oil and gas leasing jeopardizes our ability to preserve the landscape for use by future generations. CCNHP was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of the culture and heritage of Indigenous peoples throughout the southwest. From 850 to 1250 A.D. Chaco served as a major hub for cultural ceremony and trade for multiple Tribes in the region. The importance and significance of the site is not limited to the Park and any oil and gas development in the 10-miles surrounding the hub is dangerous to the existence of generations of sites, artifacts, and religion.

The Department of the Interior itself cited that there are 2,800 documented archaeological sites within CCNHP and an additional 4,730 documented sites within the 10-mile withdrawal radius outside the Park. Each one of these sites is unique, irreplaceable, and represents the vast history of Chaco Canyon. Reversing the withdrawal fully would risk each individual site's integrity and preservation. Further, decreasing the boundary from 10-miles to 5-miles would place 1,900 of those sites at risk. This scoping period is not sufficient to get a full picture as to why the 10-mile buffer is vital to protecting the larger Chacoan landscape.

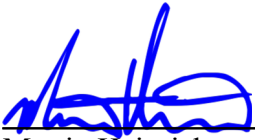
The federal government has a trust and treaty responsibility to ensure that every relevant Tribe, Pueblo, and Nation is consulted before proceeding with this action. Before the House Natural Resources Committee on June 12, 2025, Secretary Burgum committed to sending someone with decision-making authority to conduct in-person, individual Tribal consultation with each Tribe that has an interest in Chaco Canyon. We expect the Department to uphold this commitment. To date, we are aware of multiple Pueblos in New Mexico that have not received an offer to meet for consultation. In addition, opening a seven-day comment period during a week where many New Mexicans are celebrating various cultural and religious holidays and Pueblos are preparing for cultural activities is disrespectful to our constituents. It is further concerning that this Department is only accepting comments through the online portal. It shows a lack of consideration from this Administration for New Mexicans and makes the scoping process inaccessible for many, including many Pueblo elders.

The current protections for the Chaco landscape are popular. Recent polling shows that over 70 percent of voters in New Mexico oppose reversing the withdrawal. Chaco is sacred. We should recognize that there are many other areas for oil and gas development in San Juan County and New Mexico, and it should not occur in a place like this. This Department should not be exchanging development for the destruction of a centuries-old site. 90 percent of this region had already been leased before protections were in place and we have seen significant harm to the cultural landscape, air quality, and integrity as a result. Cultural sites have been destroyed by roads, pipelines, and other oil and gas infrastructure. There is no question that opening the area to additional leasing will cause permanent and irreversible harm.

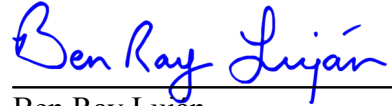
The current withdrawal was thoughtfully crafted and safeguarded a small portion of the Greater Chaco Landscape from the impacts of industries that would disturb the area negatively and permanently. Considering the popularity of the original withdrawal and the value that it brings to

the landscape, the Department should halt all efforts to revoke PLO No. 7923. If you decide to move forward with the evaluation, we respectfully request that you fulfill your duties during review of PLO No. 7923 by ensuring robust Tribal consultation, extensive public engagement, and legitimate environmental and archeological review.

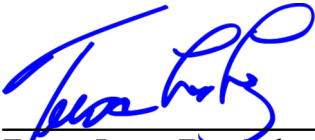
Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



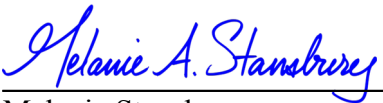
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Teresa Leger Fernandez
Member of Congress



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
The Honorable Kate MacGregor, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior