



EARTHKEEPERS360



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**Morally Reprehensible—Multifaith and Tribal Leaders Condemn Rushed
Scoping Period on Chaco Canyon During Religious Holidays**

Spiritual Leaders call for respect and meaningful Tribal consultation

Tribal and multifaith leaders from across New Mexico are speaking out against a meager 7-Day Scoping Period to consider a “full revocation” of [Public Lands Order \(PLO\) 7923](#), which protects the Greater Chaco Landscape from future oil and gas leasing on federal lands. This timeline falls during Passover and Holy Week.

The Faith and Tribal leaders say the rushed timeline not only undermines democratic participation but also disregards the spiritual significance of this time for millions of Americans, as well as the sovereignty and voices of Tribal Nations who have stewarded the Chaco region for generations.

“Placing a 7-day comment period in the middle of religious and Tribal holidays is not just cold and calculated, but shows enormous disrespect to New Mexico’s deep religious, cultural and sacred traditions as well as Tribal sovereignty. Chaco Canyon is an area of profound spiritual, cultural, and ecological importance to communities throughout the Southwest that is now being dismissed and treated as a short-sighted economic transaction. The BLM should be ashamed not only for what it is doing to the greater Chaco landscape, but how it is doing it,” said Reverend Andrew Black, Minister at First Presbyterian Church of Santa Fe and Founder of EarthKeepers 360.

This hasty and deficient process stands in stark contrast to the robust public process used to create the withdrawal, which included 150 days for public comment, 7 public meetings, and 1.5 years of careful consideration. In 2022, more than 250 faith leaders from around the nation wrote to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, [urging her to prohibit oil and gas drilling from the 10-mile area surrounding the park](#). In stark contrast, this scoping period only allows digital comment during Passover and Holy Week, shutting out meaningful opportunities for the public, Tribes, and rural communities to participate in a major decision.

*“Passover is a busy time when we retell the story of liberation from enslavement and long journeys through the desert to find our sacred home. One theme is that the people had to rush to prepare to depart and didn’t even have time for their bread to rise. This rush to desecrate an ancient sacred site, which contains ties to the origin stories of the people who lived there, is an insult to all humanity. While the Passover story is one that focuses on ultimate survival, many people died in the course of bringing about liberation. Revoking the 10-mile buffer zone invites modern plagues to permeate and contaminate this treasured site. It demonstrates the lack of respect for humans, wildlife, and policies formed by hardwon consensus,” said **Judy Brown, member of Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque.***

Chaco Canyon has dealt with the consequences of oil and gas drilling through diminished water and air quality, which put local and Indigenous communities at risk for developing illnesses, such as asthma and cancer. Revoking the protections would undo the public health benefits and put at risk roughly 350,000 acres of wildlife habitat and thousands of archaeological and cultural sites. This land has been historically, spiritually, and ecologically significant to Indigenous communities for hundreds of years, and its protection is critical.

*"Faith traditions across the world understand and affirm that desecration of sacred sites is immoral and unjust. The Greater Chaco Canyon landscape has been held as sacred for more than a thousand years and it is an egregious violation of both tribal sovereignty and spiritual sanctity to allow so little time to account for the irreversible impacts of oil and gas leasing and drilling on protected areas," said **Rev. Clara Sims, Assistant Executive Director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light.** "We stand in solidarity with the ancestors and present generations who will continue to resist the needless sacrifice of what is sacred."*

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Chaco Canyon contains the most sweeping collection of Native American cultural sites in the United States and was a major ceremonial, economic, and cultural center for Ancestral Puebloans more than 1,000 years ago. Irreplaceable archaeological sites, like the remains of stone pithouses, great houses, kivas, and other artifacts, can be visited throughout the park. It remains an important part of Indigenous heritage, with many Pueblo, Hopi, and other Tribes descended from Ancestral Puebloans considering the area their sacred homeland.

“Chaco Canyon has been a sacred site to Pueblo people since time immemorial. To give only 7 days for input on reversing the decision to protect this remarkable area while Jemez Pueblo and many others prepare for our feast days, shows the administration's disregard for Tribal sovereignty and input. Rushing the process to drill for oil and gas across the greater Chaco landscape is not only disrespectful to Pueblo culture and our value of the area's wildlife, but also shows the administration's lack of care for the sacred sites found throughout the region. Revoking the 10-mile buffer violates the trust between the federal government and Tribal nations built over decades of careful consultation and collaboration,” **said Joseph Brophy Toledo, Flowerhill Institute and Member of Jemez Pueblo.**

Faith and Tribal leaders are calling on the U.S. Department of the Interior keep Greater Chaco protections in place and to extend the public comment period, hold in-person hearings, and ensure Tribal Nations and affected communities have adequate time and access to meaningfully engage.

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