



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **Navajo Nation Council urges President Obama to support the Bear's Ears National Conservation Area/National Monument proposal**

**WINDOW ROCK** – Members of the Navajo Nation Council continue to support the federal designation of Bear's Ears National Conservation Area/National Monument as President Obama visits the State of Utah on Friday.

"I am pleased that President Obama will be visiting Utah today, and will have an opportunity to learn more about the state land issues, and more specifically, the interests of Native American tribes to protect the Bears Ears region in southern Utah," said Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa), who represents five chapters in Utah.

On March 12, the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyátí' Committee passed a resolution supporting the designation of the 1.9 million acre Bears Ears National Conservation Area/National Monument in San Juan County Utah — ancestral home of many Southwestern Native American tribes.

According to the resolution, the area is the birthplace of Navajo Headman Manuelito. Navajo, Ute, Zuni, Hopi, and other Native American people depend on the land within the region to sustain their traditional livelihoods and cultural practices, such as hunting, gathering, and ceremonial purposes. The Bears Ears National Conservation Area/National Monument proposal would also protect archaeological resources.

"The initiative to protect the Bears Ears area was initiated by local Utah Navajos, however, the combined collective interest of tribes in the region including Ute, Hopi, Hualapai, Zuni, and others only make the proposal more viable. We look forward to making positive progress with leaders in Washington," said Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii), who sponsored the resolution passed by the Naabik'iyátí' Committee.

The resolution also supports the establishment of collaborative management agreements between the tribes and the federal government to improve management and to strengthen the tribes' influence in the long-term management of the region.

The process to protect the region was initiated over five years ago by Utah Diné Bikéyah, a legally recognized non-profit organization in Utah created by a group of elders and traditional practitioners who came together over concerns for the aboriginal lands, particularly limitations placed on uses of the land for traditional and ceremonial uses.

"The Bears Ears proposal is about the land, the plants, the animals, and the relationship we hold to the earth as Native People," said Willie Grayeyes, chair of the Utah Diné Bikéyah Board. "This

landscape is held in such deep regard that it is hard to imagine us failing, but land issues always involve disputes. Fortunately, in this case we have a very strong case in the land itself and in the determination of tribes to see something good for a change."

The legislation sponsored by Delegate Phelps, was supported by resolutions from six Utah Navajo Chapters and supporting resolutions and letters from other tribes.

Utah Diné Bikéyah and the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources continue to work closely with regional tribes to be inclusive of their interests as well.

"Many Tribal Nations share intimate cultural and spiritual ties to the Bears Ears landscape" said Division of Natural Resources director Moroni Benally. "The Navajo Nation has asked the Ute, Hopi, Paiute, Apache, Pueblos, and others to join us in protecting this significant landscape that has nurtured, strengthened, and sustained many of the Indigenous people of the Southwest."

Utah Diné Bikéyah has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Division of Natural Resources to develop a collaborative work plan and long-term regional conservation strategy for the region.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said the initiative presents an opportunity for Utah Navajos and other regional tribes to collaborate in the management of the Bears Ears National Conservation Area and to ensure that the lands will be managed in a manner that protects the Nation's interests in San Juan County.

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