



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253  
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174  
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

### Council members address misinformation regarding Bears Ears initiative

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Oct. 15, an unprecedented coalition of five tribal governments hand delivered a formal proposal to the Obama Administration to designate 1.9 million acres of land known as Bears Ears as a national monument. Copies of the proposal were also delivered to U.S. Reps. Rob Bishop (R-Utah) and Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah).

Since then, San Juan County officials in the State of Utah have stated that local community members and Utah Navajo Chapters are opposed to the Bears Ears proposal. They have also been quoted in the media as stating that Native Americans support the county's proposal.

Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa), who represents five chapters in Utah, said the statements are unfounded and misleading.

“Seemingly false statements are being made to the media that the Bears Ears proposal is not supported by local chapters and local people,” said Delegate Filfred. “This is not accurate. There has been, and continues to be, support from six of seven Utah chapters and the overwhelming support of local Navajo people for the Bears Ears proposal.”

On March 12, the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyátí' Committee unanimously passed a resolution in support of the federal designation of Bears Ears — ancestral home of many Southwestern tribes.

In July, a coalition of five federally recognized tribes – Hopi, Navajo, Ute Mountain Ute, Zuni, and Ute Tribe of the Uinta and Ouray Reservation – organized as the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition was established to move forward a strong vision of protection through the creation of the proposal that outlines goals for land protection and collaborative management agreements between the tribes and the federal government.

Despite opposition from a small handful of individuals in San Juan County, Bears Ears support from the Navajo Nation has remained united and strong.

The proposal has also been formally endorsed by nearly 300 tribes through resolutions, and is supported by a resolution from the National Congress of American Indians. Within the Navajo Nation, there is only one chapter house, out of seven Navajo chapters in Utah, which supports the San Juan County's proposal.

“Some officials are misinforming the public by stating that the proposal is not supported at the local level and this could not be further from the truth,” said Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa’tsis’Áán, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin). “The reality is that there is strong support from the grassroots, local level, to the top tribal level.”

The process to protect the region was initiated over five years ago by Utah Diné Bikéyah, a non-profit organization in Utah established 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.

In April 2013, Bears Ears became one of the first proposals to be put forward by the Navajo Nation in the Public Lands Initiative process, however, it has never been adequately recognized by elected officials in Utah.

Before San Juan County initiated its public comment period for local residents in 2014, the Navajo Nation and Utah Diné Bikéyah were assured by the county that the Bears Ears proposal would be included on the list of county-identified alternatives. However, one week before the first open house, the county excluded the Bears Ears proposal even though it was developed locally and represented the views of nearly half of San Juan County’s population.

Despite the Bears Ears proposal not being listed as an alternative, county residents overwhelmingly endorsed Bears Ears, which received 64-percent of the local comments of support.

San Juan County’s records show that the anti-conservation, pro-development "Alternative B" received just two comments of support — less than 1 percent. Yet this Alternative B – along with an “energy zone” to facilitate mining and drilling in the heart of the Bears Ears area – was officially endorsed by the San Juan County Commissioners as their preferred alternative in August 2015.

For more information regarding the Bears Ears proposal, please visit

<http://www.bearscoalition.org/coalition-releases-monument-proposal-at-dc-press-conference/>.

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