



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council members meet with Obama Administration to advocate for a Bears Ears National Monument



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Council Delegate Walter Phelps, Council Delegate Davis Filfred, Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition members, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, Senior Advisor to President Obama Brian Deese, Managing Director at the White House Council on Environmental Quality Christy Goldfuss, and staff members with the Obama Administration in Washington D.C. on July 6, 2016.

WASHINGTON D.C. – Last Wednesday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Council Delegate Davis Filfred, and Council Delegate Walter Phelps accompanied the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition delegation to key high level meetings in Washington D.C. to continue petitioning the Obama Administration to designate the Bears Ears area as a national monument.

“We had several productive meetings this past week, and were able to share with high level federal officials why the Navajo Nation firmly supports a Bears Ears National Monument designation,” said Delegate Filfred, who represents the majority of Navajo Utah chapters.

Council members were also pleased to learn of the announcement on Friday, that U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, will be hosting a public meeting in Bluff, Utah on July 16. The public meeting coincides with the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Summer Gathering on top of the Bears Ears from July 15 to July 17.

“We were thrilled to learn that Secretary Jewell and Under Secretary Robert Bonnie accepted our Coalition’s invitation to visit the Bears Ears,” said Filfred. “They will be able to hear from our Navajo people in San Juan County who overwhelmingly support a designation. Navajo leadership is also looking forward to having federal officials learn about the interests of Native American tribes to protect the Bears Ears region in southern Utah.”

The landscape within the national monument proposal is the ancestral home of many southwestern Native American tribes. It is also 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 ceremonies.

“The Bears Ears region faces urgent threats from looting, vandalism, and energy development. Protection for this important cultural landscape cannot be delayed any longer,” said Delegate Phelps, who sponsored legislation in support of the national monument designation, which was unanimously approved by Council members in 2015.

The resolution supports the designation of the 1.9 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument in San Juan County, Utah. Initially, the Nation was hopeful this area could be protected through the Public Lands Initiative as a National Conservation Area; however, the Utah congressional delegation did not give serious consideration to the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition proposal.

A final PLI has not been produced by the delegation for the Navajo Nation’s consideration, or input. Last year, the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition formally broke away from discussions with the Utah congressional delegation on their long-delayed Public Lands Initiative.

“The five tribes have come together around a vision of collaborative management for the Bears Ears to ensure that these lands will be managed in a manner that protects our interests in San Juan County,” said Speaker Bates. “Federal agencies will also benefit from tribal contributions to planning and management due to more diverse input to inform decision-making, and increased resources for management and enforcement. We are hopeful that the Obama Administration is giving serious consideration to our request as five unified tribes.”

The Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition encourages Bears Ears supporters to attend the upcoming public meeting at the community center in Bluff, Utah at 1:00 p.m. on July 16.

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