



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253  
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174  
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918  
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

## Navajo Nation Council applauds designation of Bears Ears National Monument by President Obama

**WASHINGTON D.C.** – The 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council commended President Obama's designation of the Bears Ears National Monument under the Antiquities Act of 1906 on Wednesday.

“This is a historic victory for tribes and this is an initiative that the Navajo Nation Council has supported through resolution, lobbying efforts, and numerous meetings that were held and we are grateful that our voices were heard,” said Speaker LoRenzo Bates, who also thanked his Council colleagues, particularly those representing Utah Navajo communities for their strong support and advocacy.

The landscape within the Bears Ears National Monument 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.

“Today marks a significant victory for Utah Navajo people and the entire Navajo Nation and we thank President Obama for supporting our efforts and for listening to our people,” said Council Delegate Davis Filfred, who was an outspoken advocate for the national monument designation



**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.**

throughout the process. “With today’s action, our ancestral homelands in the Bears Ears area will be protected and preserved for future generations.”

The Navajo Nation was one of five tribes that formed the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition that also included the Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute, Hopi Tribe, and Zuni Tribe.

In 2015, members of the Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved a resolution sponsored by Council Delegate Walter Phelps supporting the designation. Since then, Council members along with the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition have met on numerous occasions with officials from the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Obama Administration to advocate for the national monument designation.

“I wholeheartedly support today’s announcement by the Obama Administration. Together, as tribes we sought a resolution that required the support of the highest levels of government and together we did it – this truly exemplifies the power of tribes when we unite,” said Delegate Phelps.

In recent years, tribal leaders have called for the protection of the 1.9 million areas known as Bears Ears, located in southeastern Utah, as the land base and sites face threats from looting, vandalism, and energy development.

“We as Navajo people are always looking in the best interest of mother Earth and after careful research and conversations with our medicine people, I understand how important it is for us to preserve the Bears Ears landscape. This is about taking care of the land, the plants, the water, and most importantly it's about preserving the sacred sites and medicine that our people have used since time immemorial,” stated Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown, who also represents several Utah Navajo communities.

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