

Spiritual leaders call on Trump Administration to protect Bear Ears

Written by Staff Reports

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Leaders say it is not too late for the Trump Administration to uphold Bears Ears National Monument

SAN JUAN COUNTY, Utah – In the middle of Native American Heritage Month, nearly 30 spiritual leaders traveled to a threatened Native American heritage landscape: Bears Ears National Monument. When religious community leaders received news that President Trump intends to make an early December trip to San Juan County to announce he will downsize and diminish conservation protection for Bears Ears National Monument, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, and possibly other public lands, they were compelled to go there to stand with the tribes.

Presbyterian Minister and Director of Community Relations for New Mexico Wildlife Federation Rev. Andrew Black planned the trip in collaboration with a national ecumenical Christian organization, Creation Justice Ministries.

In organizing the trip, Black said, “For the Administration to consider shrinking the monument and fragmenting this pristine landscape is a grave injustice that fails to understand the sacred interconnectedness between the area’s land, water, wildlife and people who have been on this

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landscape for thousands of years.”

The Bears Ears National Monument is unique in that official tribal appointees serve as the primary advisory body for managing their spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage. Yet, the Trump Administration is indicating it does not plan to heed recommendations of the Bears Ears Commission of Tribes, comprised of Hopi, Navajo, Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni appointees.

The Commission has urged the Trump Administration to uphold the monument. Over 30 tribes from throughout the nation have ancestral, historical and contemporary ties to Bears Ears and have expressed support for the monument.

In supporting the recent visit by spiritual leaders, Davis Filfred, member of the Navajo Nation, Bears Ears Commissioner and U.S. Marine Veteran, said, “we encourage all people to come to Bears Ears because there is nothing like it in the world. We want people to come to see the land, how we use the land and how it is sacred to us.”

While visiting Bears Ears, the spiritual leaders met with representatives from the Utah Diné Bikéyah, a local nonprofit actively working to protect Bears Ears and whose mission it is to “preserve and protect the cultural and natural resources of ancestral Native American lands to benefit and bring healing to people and the Earth.”

Calling tribal and religious leaders to come together to protect Bears Ears National Monument as a place of sacredness and healing, Joseph Brophy Toledo, traditional leader from Jemez Pueblo, said, “If we express our concerns as one, we can be heard louder. Sacred sites are like our churches, kivas, white house boundaries, and places of great healing and magnetism.”

The trip’s spiritual and faith leaders would like to especially thank the Utah Diné Bikéyah for their leadership, hospitality and wisdom during the trip.

STATEMENTS AND QUOTES ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TO BEARS EARS
NATIONAL MONUMENT

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Jeff Swanson, pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); retired military chaplain and veteran:

As a veteran of our nation's combat spanning from Vietnam to Iraq, my spirit was calmed at Bears Ears. I departed wanting other veterans and Americans to behold the expansive beauty that will embrace their being.

Rev. Larry Davis of Trinity Lutheran Church in Farmington, New Mexico journeyed as a representative of the Rocky Mountain Synod of the ELCA:

It was very humbling to see all people of faith rally behind the preservation of the Bears Ears National Monument along with holding in awe and reverence the sacred sites. When we fight for creation, creation fights for us.

Sister Joan Brown, OSF, Franciscan Sister and Executive Director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light:

As we pray, speak, and act, we stand in solidarity with our indigenous brothers and sisters. Already we have too much polluted land and water from irresponsible and short-term profit extractive industries like uranium, oil and gas. As we enter more deeply into climate change, we must protect these areas for all including future generations.

Rev. Dr. William M. Lyons, Southwest Conference Minister for the United Church of Christ:

Reducing its size will not only reap tragic consequences for the land and the wildlife, but that effort overflows with racism. I hope to lend my voice to the voices of the Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain tribe, Hopi tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and the Ute Indian tribe who are being ignored. Bears Ears National Monument has so much more to offer generations to come. Protecting these sacred lands will allow ones following us to learn from them, to be healed by them, and to reap their abundant blessings.

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*Since 1914 the **New Mexico Wildlife Federation** has worked on behalf of New Mexican sportsmen and women, youth, and outdoor enthusiasts to protect our public lands and wildlife.*

Creation Justice Ministries represents the creation care policies of 38 Christian communions, including Baptists, mainline Protestants, Historically Black Churches, Peace Churches, and Orthodox communions. *Learn more at www.creationjustice.org*