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Officially known as the Zuni Tribe of the Zuni Indian Reservation

TESTIMONY
OF
THE ZUNI TRIBE

BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON
FORGOTTEN VOICES: THE INADEQUATE REVIEW AND IMPROPER ALTERATION OF
OUR NATIONAL MONUMENTS

MARCH 13, 2019

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and respected members of the Committee, I am Carleton Bowekaty, the Lieutenant Governor of the Zuni Tribe and the co-chair of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. On behalf of the people of the Zuni Tribe, I want to thank you for holding this oversight hearing on the Department of the Interior's review of certain national monuments, and particularly this Administration's unlawful Presidential Proclamation purporting to shrink the Bears Ears National Monument by some 85%, and split it into two pieces.

The Zuni Tribe has almost 13,000 members, the vast majority of which live on tribal lands in far western New Mexico. Our reservation contains 600,000 acres. However, our aboriginal lands, as well as those of our 18 sister Pueblos in New Mexico and the five tribes that comprise our Coalition, include the lands that comprise the Bears Ears National Monument. The Bears Ears' region is an integral part of our history, traditions, and culture. It was part of our former homelands, along the route of our slow migration through the Southwest that ultimately ended in Zuni, New Mexico. Though we no longer live in the Bears Ears area, certain places within its remarkable landscape are referred to in our oral histories and in our traditional ceremonies, and we periodically make pilgrimages to sites there to honor our ancestors.

The Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and
the Bears Ears National Monument

Zuni has been actively involved in the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition since its inception. It is a unique Coalition, one that has remained focused on our mutual interest in ensuring that the remarkable cultural and natural resources found on the ancestral tribal lands that comprise Bears Ears are protected and preserved. It was therefore entirely appropriate for the 2016 Presidential Proclamation creating the Bears Ears National Monument (the “Obama Proclamation”) to have established the Bears Ears Commission, with representation from each of the five tribes, in order to “provide guidance and recommendations on the development and implementation of management plans and on management of the monument.”

In contrast to the Obama Proclamation’s respect for the tribes’ historical connections to Bears Ears, the current Administration, through the Department of the Interior, conducted a National Monument review that largely ignored tribal interests and concerns. It appears that this so-called review was conducted with a pre-determined objective of justifying executive action -- action which we are now challenging in federal court -- to greatly reduce the area protected by the Bears Ears National Monument so that excluded lands can be available for mineral exploration and development. President Trump’s executive action would also substantially reduce the role of tribes in ensuring the protection of the Monument’s invaluable cultural sites and resources.

Though once inhabited and used exclusively by tribes in the Southwest, Zuni recognizes that the Bears Ears lands are now federal lands, owned by all Americans. And we want its stunning landscape and special places preserved so that *all* of us, including future generations, can enjoy it and learn about its unique past. It cannot be seriously debated that the five tribes have unique connections to, knowledge of, and perspectives on Bears Ears, and our perspectives should be recognized and given meaningful voice. Unfortunately, the expedited planning process that the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service are currently conducting has not included meaningful consultation with us.

I want to avoid repeating the testimony of the tribal leaders from the other Coalition tribes testifying today, but I do want this Subcommittee to know that we stand united, and that Zuni supports

their testimony. I also encourage Committee members and staff to carefully read the Obama Proclamation, as it presents a thorough and compelling justification for the establishment of Bears Ears National Monument, as well as a carefully balanced approach for its management. Though we had frankly hoped for the protection of a significantly larger area, we accepted the reduced area of 1.3 million acres as a compromise. But we are not willing to support proposed legislation that would reduce that area further, or that would diminish our role in its management.

Conclusion

Zuni is not a wealthy tribe and we do not send representatives to Washington often. I am here today because our people care enormously about the Bears Ears National Monument. Together with the tribes represented before you today, along with our sister Pueblos in New Mexico, I respectfully express our collective, adamant opposition to any executive or legislative efforts that would attempt to reduce the area of Bears Ears, or the voice of tribes in how the Monument is managed.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and for your consideration of my testimony on behalf of the people of Zuni.