

Testimony of Benjamin Nuvamsa
Tribal Heritage and Grizzly Bear Protection Act (H.R. 2432)
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife
May 15, 2019

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife. My name is Benjamin H. Nuvamsa. I am a member of the Hopi Tribe of Arizona; and a member of the Hopi Bear Clan of the Village of Shungopavi, on Second Mesa. I am also former Chairman of the Hopi Tribe.

I am honored and humbled to come before you today as an elder of the Hopi Bear Clan; and as a practitioner of our traditional ceremonies, to explain the importance of the Grizzly Bear to the culture, traditions, and the lifeways of the Native people of the United States and Canada. I also come before you in support of the Tribal Heritage and Grizzly Bear Protection Act (H.R. 2432), a law when passed, will provide permanent protection for our Uncle, the Grizzly Bear.

The Grizzly Bear, “*Hoonaw*”, as we call him, is held in high esteem, not only in our Hopi culture, but by other Native people in the United States and Canada. He is a Healer; and a Medicine Man. He plays a central role in the traditions, ceremonies; and the sovereignty of the Native people. I do not recall if there is a tribal nation that does not hold the Bear in high regard.

It was the most powerful of Bears that guided and protected my ancestors to arrive at *Tuuwanasavi* (“Center of the Universe”), as we call the place where we live today. The Bear, from which my ancestors took their name, gave rise to other important clans at Hopi. Today, the Bear Clan continues to as traditional leaders; and an influential clan in the Hopi culture and Hopi way of life.

During the pre-contact period, much of the ancestral Hopi lands was inhabited by Grizzly Bears. From a Hopi perspective, Hopi land, Hopi culture, and Hopi religion are inseparable; and it is that connection which defines *Hopitutsqua* (*Hopi Lands*) and *Hopii Katsi* (*Hopi Way of Life*). Other tribes have the same teachings and beliefs.

In a biological sense, the Grizzly Bear, as a wildlife species, plays an important role in the ecological chain and thus, contributes immensely to the ecological balance. To remove the Grizzly from the ecology would have devastating effect on other wildlife species in the region. These species depend on each other for survival. That is why H.R. 2432 is so important in that it will not only provide protections for the Grizzly Bear, but it will provide protections for other wildlife species in the region.

The Yellowstone National Park is one of the last remaining vestiges of natural beauty in America, with unmatched beauty and an abundance of wildlife. This is critical habitat for the Grizzly Bear and other wildlife species. At one time, the Grizzly Bear and other wildlife species inhabited our ancestral lands. But for many decades now, our lands and our people have been denied the experience of knowing the Grizzly Bear because of the pressures of overpopulation in its habitat, and pressures from sports hunting and ranching. There is a reason why there is a Threatened and Endangered Species Act; and why the Grizzly Bear was placed on the Threatened & Endangered Species List. Had it not been for this listing, the Grizzly would have just been another species that is now become extinct.

I propose that representatives of Indian Country be involved in the policy development and implementation of the Tribal Heritage and Grizzly Bear Protection Act. I encourage that tribal nations, as sovereign nations, be afforded full and meaningful consultation as you set about to shape how H.B. 2432 will be implemented. Our people have traditional and scientific knowledge about nature and all living things, that their participation will be invaluable. This is our sovereign right.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am humbled and honored to have this opportunity to present to you and your committee, why the Grizzly Bear is important, not only to the Native peoples of this great continent, but to all people of the United States; and people from other countries. I am available if you should have any questions.

Kwak'wha! Pailolmani!.