

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW,
Washington, DC 20240

Dear President Trump and Secretary Zinke,

In 2016, religious communities strongly supported the establishment of the Bears Ears National Monument, as recommended by the five tribes in the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. People of faith attended stakeholder meetings, wrote support letters, spoke to the media, and spread the word to our respective communities.

Our religious communities welcomed and followed the leadership of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition as a step toward rectifying injustice and healing historical trauma. The United States' history of oppressing Indigenous Peoples is deeply painful. In the past, government and religious institutions systematically tried to suppress Indigenous spiritualities, cultures, and histories. Many religious communities now confess and repent for complicity in this oppression.

The establishment of Bears Ears National Monument was a milestone as we seek to move away from a history of oppression toward justice. The tribes have a compelling vision for using the Bears Ears National Monument to share the spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage that is part of our nation's larger story. We celebrate the Bears Ears National Monument because it is the first and only national monument that primarily focuses on Indigenous Peoples. The monument contains more than 100,000 archeological sites significant to the spiritual and cultural life of tribes. The stories of Indigenous Peoples of the United States are imbued in the land. Faith communities welcomed opportunity to learn from tribal leaders' own telling of the national significance of the Bears Ears region. Together, we can learn from them, and take steps toward healing.

Where there is no common memory, there can be no healing. Creating common memory requires deep listening.

The Bears Ears Commission of officially appointed tribal leaders has come together as an official advisory body for management of the Monument. We believe it is a moral imperative for your Administration to spend substantial time meeting with this Commission on-site at Bears Ears National Monument, to receive their perspective on the decades of work toward conserving their heritage in the region, as well as their recommendations on care of the Monument.

Although Secretary Zinke visited Utah for several days, he spent little more than an hour with official tribal leaders in a room. Furthermore, the official comment period was only 15 days, and only online. Without public hearings, people who primarily communicate through the oral tradition are left out. According to the Federal Communications Commission, more than 78 percent of Navajo people impacted by these monument decisions lack internet access. This failure to sufficiently engage stakeholders is unacceptable. As the review moves forward, this Administration must show greater respect for the sovereign tribal nations that have called for the protection of Bears Ears, and all stakeholders who care about this monument's fate.

For these reasons, we strongly urge your Administration to extend the comment period, host public stakeholder hearings, spend much more significant time meeting with the Bears Ears Commission on site, and to follow the Commission's original recommendation to uphold the existing boundaries of the Bears Ears National Monument.

With hope,

African Methodist Episcopal Church – Social Action Commission

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Alliance of Baptists

American Baptist Churches Creation Justice Network

Arizona Faith Network

Chavurah B'Yachad

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Creation Justice Ministries

Disciples Center for Public Witness

Earth Ministry

Eco-Justice Ministries

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Franciscan Action Network

Green Chalice Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

GreenFaith

Justice and Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ

Mennonite Central Committee

Mormon Environmental Stewardship Alliance ("MESA")

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Presbyterians for Earth Care

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers):

Albuquerque Monthly Meeting

Committee on Maine Public Policy

Friends Committee On National Legislation

Indian Affairs Committee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting

York Monthly Meeting
The Episcopal Church
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Voices for Justice of Washington State
United Methodist Caretakers of God's Creation
United Methodist Women
Wyoming Association of Churches

Cc:

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
House of Representatives
H-232, US Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

