



Chaco Canyon Faith Leaders Letter

June 23, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary, Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

As religious and spiritual leaders from across New Mexico, we write to urge you to maintain all existing protections provided by the 20-year administrative withdrawal of federal lands and minerals within the 10-mile buffer surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

Our faith traditions teach us that the earth is a sacred trust, not merely a resource to be consumed. We are called to care for creation, protect places of cultural and spiritual significance, and stand alongside communities whose voices have too often been overlooked. The Greater Chaco landscape embodies these values. It is a living sacred landscape that has been home to Indigenous peoples of the Southwest since time immemorial and remains deeply connected to the spiritual, cultural, and communal life of Tribal Nations today.

The mineral withdrawal was the result of decades of collaborative work among Tribal Nations, elected officials, Indigenous and frontline organizations, local communities, and many other stakeholders. It represents a thoughtful and hard-won effort to balance economic interests with the protection of irreplaceable cultural, spiritual, and

environmental resources. We believe this achievement should be upheld rather than dismantled.

We are deeply concerned that the current process to revoke the withdrawal has failed to provide meaningful opportunities for public participation. The initial seven-day scoping period for public comment was scheduled during one of the holiest times of the year for many faith traditions, overlapping with Easter, Passover, and traditional Pueblo observances. Now, the public is being given only fourteen days to review and comment on the draft Environmental Assessment. Such abbreviated timelines do not allow for adequate consultation, thoughtful engagement, or meaningful consideration of the communities most affected by this decision.

Allowing additional oil and gas leasing in the Greater Chaco region would exacerbate already severe cumulative impacts. Communities in the area continue to face concerns related to poor air quality, risks to groundwater, industrialization of culturally significant landscapes, and disproportionate environmental burdens on nearby Indigenous communities. Expanding development threatens not only the health of people and ecosystems but also the integrity of sacred sites and cultural resources that cannot be replaced once damaged.

The withdrawal protects far more than archaeological sites. It safeguards community health, supports sustainable economic development, respects Tribal sovereignty, and honors the cultural and spiritual heritage of Indigenous peoples. Importantly, the withdrawal does not alter existing land ownership and does not affect Tribal allottee rights to develop their lands for oil and gas. These protections represent a balanced and reasonable approach that recognizes both cultural preservation and property rights.

We are encouraged that the withdrawal is supported by the All Pueblo Council of Governors, representing the 20 Pueblo Nations, and by the National Congress of American Indians, the oldest, largest, and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the United States. We have been proud to stand in solidarity with the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the National Congress of American Indians, Tribal Nations, frontline communities, and Indigenous leaders who have worked tirelessly to protect this sacred landscape.

As people of faith, we believe that how we treat sacred places reflects our moral character and our responsibility to future generations. We therefore respectfully urge the Department

of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management to maintain the Chaco mineral withdrawal and reject efforts to weaken or revoke these essential protections.

Protecting Greater Chaco is an act of stewardship, justice, and respect. It is a commitment to honoring Indigenous sovereignty, preserving cultural heritage, safeguarding public health, and caring for a landscape that holds profound significance for countless people. We ask that you uphold these protections for the benefit of present and future generations.

With Gratitude,

[Faith Leaders of diverse faiths]