



## **Tribal Concerns Ignored by Bishop's Public Lands Bill** *Statement from the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition*

**Monument Valley, UT** (July 14, 2016) – Today Congressman Rob Bishop released a legislative draft covering many federal public lands in Utah. The draft, a product of the Public Lands Initiative (PLI), is alarmingly unbalanced and falls woefully short of the comprehensive proposal put forth on October 15<sup>th</sup> by the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. These are some of the bill's many weaknesses:

- The PLI divides the proposed Bears Ears conservation area in half and leaves large areas with important cultural and archeological resources unprotected. Boundaries that were proposed by the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition for a Bears Ears National Conservation Area or National Monument were developed through detailed conversations with Elders, this bill does follow not their boundary recommendations.
- The Bears Ears National Conservation Area in the bill provides fewer protections than other National Conservation Areas (NCA) passed by Congress and contains loopholes that would make it impossible for land managers to adequately protect cultural and natural resources. The bill requires *all* historic uses of the area be continued – even those that have damaged cultural areas. With this provision included in the bill, the NCA would not provide any meaningful protection for Bears Ears. This bill is far below the coalition proposal in terms of environmental protection.
- Damage from ATVs to cultural resources would be exacerbated under this bill.
- Tribes are not given an adequate say in the management of the proposed Bears Ears NCA. The PLI falls far short of true collaborative management.

Last year, administration officials asked us to meet with the Utah delegation to see whether a compromise might be possible. The hope was that the delegation would be willing to incorporate much of our proposal into the delegation's Public Lands Initiative, a process that has been ongoing for several years. We did meet with the delegation and gave it our best efforts. Nonetheless, it became apparent to us that no meaningful progress was possible as the delegation simply did not take us or our values seriously. We detailed the various incidents during those discussions in [our letter of December 31, 2015](#).

Unfortunately, this was the same pattern that we had seen in previous attempts to participate in the Public Lands Initiative process. For years, we made presentations and proposals to no avail. The delegation shunted us off to the San Juan County commission. The Commission announced that our members from outside of Utah would not be permitted to participate. These are public lands, open to all—certainly Native Americans!

When it came time for the Commission to make a recommendation, we submitted a proposal that received, by an overwhelming margin, the greatest support. Instead, the Commission unilaterally adopted a proposal that received only a handful of votes.

Over the past several months, the situation has, if anything, gotten worse. Members of the Utah delegation have:

- Supported an investigation of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition by the state legislature;
- Stated that we are a “self-appointed” coalition, wrongly implying that we are not a tribally-created coalition and that we don’t represent the views of our Tribal governments;
- Falsely claimed that no one within five hours of the Bears Ears supports a national monument designation despite having received strong and continuing support directly from Tribal governments and people who live in the region;
- Traveled directly to the Bears Ears to denounce a national monument and then refused to allow us to present our views;
- Issued a steady drumbeat of statements, intending to create the impression of conflict within the Native American community, that a majority of Navajos oppose the monument when all reliable evidence proves that the Coalition’s proposed monument has overwhelming support from Navajos, Coalition Tribes, and Tribes regionally and nationally as well; and
- Completely excluded us from any input into the version of the PLI released today by providing drafts only to a small number of people that did not include us.

For these reasons, we are satisfied that the Public Lands Initiative is not a fruitful process that we can engage in. A Bears Ears National Monument proclaimed by President Obama under his authority granted by the Antiquities Act presents the best opportunity to protect the Bears Ears landscape and a strong Native American voice in monument management.

We continue to believe that our monument proposal will establish one of the greatest of all national monuments and parks. The natural landscape – red rock, and gentle forest – are striking. The ancient civilizations of our Native people are evident everywhere. This monument will be one of the most distinctive and revered of all federal land units. The Coalition’s collaborative management proposal will assure that our Native voice, our vibrant cultures, and our traditional knowledge will be heard and seen at Bears Ears forever.

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*The Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, a Partnership of the Hopi, Navajo, Uintah & Ouray Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni Governments, was formed in July 2015 with the mission to protect and preserve the Bears Ears region, to which they have ancestral and contemporary ties. The Bears Ears National Monument proposal is named for the Bears Ears buttes – two prominent landforms at the center of a landscape rich in antiquities, with more than 100,000 archaeological and cultural sites that are sacred to dozens of tribes.*

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**Photos available:** The full proposal, timeline, B-roll, photos and other media resources can be accessed at: <http://www.bearscoalition.org/media-resources/>