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Navajo Nation Backs President Obama's Decision To Create Bears Ears National Monument

WINDOW ROCK, ARIZ. – Today, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice-President Jonathan Nez congratulated President Barack Obama on his decision to designate the Bears Ears National Monument under the Antiquities Act of 1906.

The new national monument honors and protects the heritage of Native people and respects the efforts of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, a formal partnership of the Hopi, Navajo, Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni governments.

“President Obama has been consistent in his commitment to work with Tribal governments, and this historic designation builds on his legacy,” said Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. “We are particularly pleased that the designation affirms tribal sovereignty and provides a collaborative role for Tribes to work with the federal government in maintaining the land and ensuring that the Tribes will have a seat at the management table.”

President Begaye said that through this designation, a commission will be created so that Tribes may provide direct input to the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. The Commission shall consist of one elected officer each from the Hopi Nation, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah Ouray, and Zuni Pueblo, designated by the officers' respective tribes.

“This is unprecedented and sets a new standard at the national level for effective government to government relations,” President Begaye said.

Today's designation has overwhelming support from grassroots Utah Navajos through formal resolutions, and is endorsed by 30 regional Tribes and more than 250 additional Tribes across the U.S. through the National Congress of American Indians.

“Because Tribes will help manage this land, it reaffirms President Obama's fundamental commitment to human rights and equity in voice,” said President Begaye. “Furthermore, while the land will be protected, our Utah-based tribal members will continue to have access to the land to gather traditional plants and food.”

Vice-President Nez noted the critical efforts of former Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) Executive Staff Assistant Eric Descheenie who co-chaired the Bears Ears Coalition while working for OPVP.

“Descheenie brought a lot of attention to the need to designate the Bears Ears as a National Monument,” he said. “The foundation that was laid by the Coalition cannot be understated and we appreciate their tireless efforts.”

President Begaye and Vice-President Nez would like to recognize the Navajo Nation Council's support and we would like to thank Council Delegate Walter Phelps and Council Delegate Davis Filfred for their efforts on this initiative.

Featured prominently in many Diné creation stories and prayers, the Bears Ears landscape serves as the hub of many traditional Diné cultural sites, burials, medicines, and the origin of some Diné clans that thrive in today's Navajo society.

The region contains hundreds of thousands of cultural and archaeological sites and unmatched natural wonders, and holds immense significance for Native peoples of the region. The land has always been a place of sacredness and fortitude for our people. Now it will be preserved for all future generations.

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