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Delegate Filfred and tribal leaders voice stance of Bears Ears National Monument to Secretary Zinke

Photo: Council Delegate Davis Filfred and tribal leaders meet with U.S. Sec. of Interior Ryan Zinke regarding Bears Ears National Monument in Salt Lake City, Utah on May 7, 2017.

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – On Sunday, Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tółikan, Red Mesa), Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation attorney general Ethel Branch, and tribal leaders met with U.S. Sec. of the Interior Ryan Zinke, to discuss the recent Executive Order issued by President Trump that directs the U.S. Department of the Interior to review recent national monument designations and to recommend changes to the designations, including the Bears Ears National Monument.

Throughout the hour-long meeting, Delegate Filfred and tribal leaders emphasized the importance of the designation of the Bears Ears National Monument and requested Sec. Zinke to strongly consider the stance of the tribes, while noting that Sec. Zinke has already met with the Utah congressional delegation and Utah officials to discuss their opposition to the national monument designation earlier in the day.

“Secretary Zinke needs to meet and discuss with the equal amount of time with tribal leaders regarding the Bears Ears National Monument with the Utah delegation and officials. It is not right that Secretary ZInke contributes more time with the Utah delegation and officials to discuss the opposition of the designation of Bears Ears. I hope that Secretary Zinke highly considers the tribe’s input and recommendations,” stated Delegate Filfred, who serves on the Bears Ears Tribal Commission as the representative of the Navajo Nation.

Other tribal leaders who participated in the meeting included Pueblo of Zuni tribal councilman Carleton Bowekaty, Ute Mountain Ute chairman Harold Cuthair, and Ute Indian Tribe Business Committee chairman Shaun Chapoose, who all serve on the Bears Ears Tribal Commission.

The tribal leaders requested Sec. Zinke to consider and respect the cultural significance and sacred sites within the designation during his 45-day review period and during his tour of the monument on Monday.

“The Navajo Nation Council has passed two resolutions to support the monument designation and to oppose any attempts to reverse or undo the designation. Public hearings were conducted to preserve and protect Bears Ears. Today, many people are worried and concerned because the Executive Order is an attack on the tribe’s way of life,” stated vice president Nez.

The tribal leaders indicated that the Bears Ears National Monument is the first-of-its-kind that engages tribes to advise, recommend, and assist in the co-management of the monument along with federal land managers.

“The tribal leaders stand firm on the designation of the Bears Ears. We have the right to protect our cultural and sacred lands. Secretary Zinke has a 45-day review period to consider the designation and he needs to consider our concerns because his department is the tribe’s trustee. He is in the position to support on the behalf of the tribes within the Nation. I hope that Secretary Zinke delivers a positive report to the Trump administration with the tribe’s recommendations and input,” added Delegate Filfred.

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