



**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining
Legislative Hearing
August 22, 2018
Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act (S. 2907)
Written Testimony of the Coalition for American Heritage**

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, and Members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Coalition for American Heritage's strong support for the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act (S. 2907), sponsored by Senators Udall and Heinrich.

The Coalition for American Heritage ("the Coalition") is an organization comprised of heritage professionals, scholars, small businesses, non-profits and history-lovers across the country. Our 300,000 members work together to promote our nation's commitment to historic preservation. Preserving historic resources helps stabilize neighborhoods, attract investment, create jobs, generate tax revenues, support small businesses, and power America's heritage tourism industry.

For several years, the area around Chaco Culture National Historical Park (NHP) has been protected from energy exploration by informal agreements between area stakeholders. However, the Trump Administration's plan, currently on hold, for an oil and gas lease sale close to the 10-mile buffer zone surrounding Chaco Culture NHP that had been unofficially off-limits to energy exploration, demonstrates the urgency of legislative action. Existing informal protections are no longer sufficient.

Increased pressure for oil and gas exploration is threatening one of America's most outstanding historic treasures. The landscape of the Chaco Canyon area is at risk; drill pads, pipelines and industrial access roads will mar the region's natural beauty, alter viewsheds and soundscapes, cause light pollution, and potentially damage artifacts from one of America's most advanced pre-Colombian civilizations.

Greater Chaco is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of only 22 in the United States. It was the center of Puebloan cultural and economic life for over 300 years. Evidence of the Chacoan people's engineering and building achievements is found throughout the area. More than 1.5 million artifacts have been found at more than 4,000 archaeological sites within the park. Many more artifacts are likely to have not yet been identified and studied. In addition to its valuable archaeological record, the Chaco area possesses a historical and spiritual significance to several local tribes. The Navajo, Hopi and Pueblo peoples recognize the Chaco ruins as sacred.

This legislation is necessary to protect the Chaco Canyon area while resource management planning continues. Safeguarding the Chaco Canyon area requires continued commitment to stakeholder input and careful consideration of the region's storied past. We recognize that local and national leaders have been working together in innovative ways to address the concerns of local residents and tribes. We look forward to the upcoming release of the draft plan for Chaco NHP and the surrounding areas. Because the updated plan is the first time that the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Indian Affairs have jointly developed a management plan, we hope that it will reflect the priorities of the surrounding community and area tribes, many of whom trace their lineage back to the Chacoan peoples.

While we appreciate the work that stakeholders have done over several years to informally protect the landscape around Chaco Culture NHP, we believe that a more formal process is warranted. The time has come to ensure that the buffer zone around Chaco Culture NHP is protected by the force of federal law. Therefore, the Coalition for American Heritage strongly endorses S. 2907, which would withdraw from development or leasing the minerals owned by the U.S. Government in a 316,076 acre-area surrounding Chaco Culture NHP. This legislation reflects an evenhanded approach that would not impact existing federal leases. Nor would this bill impact minerals on state, tribal or private lands. In crafting this compromise, Senators Udall and Heinrich have demonstrated that their efforts are based on strong stakeholder involvement, including their work to develop the legislation with the Navajo Nation and the All Pueblo Council of Governors.

Thank you for the opportunity to express out strong support for this important legislation.