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Secretary Haaland Protects Chaco Canyon From Oil, Gas Drilling

Advocates Call for Protecting Entire Greater Chaco Landscape, Climate

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.— In response to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland’s decision today to prohibit new federal oil and gas leasing within 10 miles of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park, members of the [Greater Chaco Coalition](#) called on the Biden administration to end all new federal fossil fuel leasing across the country.

The coalition also called on the administration to do more to live up to its promises to [develop a landscape-level approach](#) for resource management in the Greater Chaco region and address the climate crisis.

By Interior’s own estimates, the mineral withdrawal around Chaco Park will have [minimal impact](#) on oil and gas drilling. Meanwhile, Diné communities living outside the 10-mile buffer face [growing threats](#) from oil and gas pollution.

Under the Biden administration, the United States continues to be the biggest producer of oil and gas in the world. Biden approved [more drilling permits](#) on public lands in his first two years in office than Trump. The administration rubber stamped [Trump-era leases](#) in the Greater Chaco Landscape and recently approved the massive Willow project in Alaska amid widespread opposition.

In breaking with Biden’s promise to end new oil and gas leasing, the Bureau of Land Management is planning to auction more than [half a million acres](#) of public and ancestral lands for oil and gas drilling by the end of 2023. The agency continues to permit new extraction in the Greater Chaco region despite federal appeals court rulings in [2019](#) and [2023](#) that the Bureau’s chronic failure to account for the cumulative air, water and climate harm from fracking violates the National Environmental Policy Act.

The coalition continues to call for an end to fossil fuel leasing and development across the entire Greater Chaco Landscape and the country, uplifting [longstanding demands](#) for environmental justice, meaningful Tribal consultation and community consent, and an end to extractive colonialism.

Coalition members issued the following statements:

“Protection of Chaco Canyon is a great first step, but protections for the Greater Chaco Region, where there are living communities of Diné relatives, wildlife, and plant life, including countless sacred sites throughout the region are just as critical and should be a priority for the Biden administration,” said Robyn Jackson, executive director of Diné C.A.R.E. “The toll of oil and gas drilling has led to harmful community health impacts and serious climate impacts, as evidenced by the methane plume documented in the region. We cannot ignore the devastating impacts that oil and gas have on our climate, region, culture, living communities, and future generations. The Biden administration must phase out fossil fuels, clean up and remediate orphaned oil and gas wells in the region, as well as support a renewable and sustainable economy. Our Indigenous communities deserve environmental justice.”

“We acknowledge the efforts of the Department of the Interior’s Secretary Haaland as a step forward in future landscape management practices that protect culturally significant places,” said Julia Bernal, executive director of Pueblo Action Alliance. “The Greater Chaco Landscape has endured generations of legacy oil and gas extraction therefore full landscape management to phase out new and existing oil and gas development is a necessary next step. The Greater Chaco coalition will continue to advocate for the end of the fossil fuel economy, and the remediation and clean up of historic oil and gas infrastructure, and the implementation of environmental justice principles for future land management practices that center frontline community voices.”

“I sure hope that BLM listens and follows the secretary's announcement instead of coming up with the excuse that no one has contacted them about the announcement,” Samuel Sage, Counselor Chapter community services coordinator. “I am glad that this will be done. The frontline communities need relief from all the extraction activities.”

“For the past two years, Native Organizers Alliance has worked to support the Greater Chaco Coalition in their call on the Biden administration to protect the Greater Chaco Landscape,” Judith Le Blanc of Native Organizers Alliance. “Today's announcement to prohibit new federal oil and gas leasing in Greater Chaco is a positive step forward. Now is the time for the federal government to respond with urgency to the acceleration of threats to our sacred places from climate change and fossil fuel extraction. We must move from consultation to fortifying our constitutional guaranteed treaty rights to the international standard of prior and informed consent from our Tribes and Native communities. President

Biden's commitment to environmental justice and Tribal sovereignty must be at the forefront of transitioning to a cleaner, more sustainable future for all."

"This is a welcome first step, but the Biden administration needs to follow up by ending all fossil fuel leasing on public lands and phasing out extraction," said Soni Grant, New Mexico campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity. "It's high time that Biden lives up to his promise to end the fossil fuel era, and it's critical that the entire Greater Chaco Landscape is protected. Today's decision just isn't enough to give our communities a fighting chance against the climate emergency."

"For too long the fossil fuel industry has run roughshod over Greater Chaco," said Jeremy Nichols, climate and energy program director for WildEarth Guardians. "Finally, the Biden administration is mending the Bureau of Land Management's legacy of broken promises to protect the region. We hope the path ahead will undo the harm of decades of sacrifice by addressing the existing impacts of oil and gas on climate and communities."

"The Greater Chaco Landscape's culturally important areas extend far beyond the borders of Chaco Culture National Historical Park, and it is an excellent first step that Secretary Haaland is recognizing that fact with today's decision," said Ally Beasley, an attorney with Western Environmental Law Center. "More than 90% of Greater Chaco is already either industrialized by oil and gas extraction or promised to industry for more drilling in the future, even as we recognize this activity's impacts on the area's communities and the climate. We will continue to push for an end to oil and gas drilling on all public land in the U.S. so we may all enjoy a healthy, livable future in which our leaders prioritize environmental justice."

"Protecting 10 miles around Chaco Culture National Historical Park is an important step forward, but more must be done to ensure landscape-level safeguards for the Greater Chaco region and communities living there," said Miya King-Flaherty, organizing representative for the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter. "Now is the time for the Bureau of Land Management to restore the balance in the region, beyond a 10-mile buffer around the park, and to phase out and end new oil and gas drilling that continues to harm public health and safety and air and water quality."

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