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NCAI Resolution Calls for Immediate Action to Preserve Greater Chaco Region from Energy Development Threats

ACOMA PUEBLO, N.M. – Pueblo of Acoma Governor Charles Riley today announced the adoption of a critical National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) resolution calling for the defense of federal protections for the Greater Chaco Region, including the continuation of Public Land Order (PLO) No. 7923 that safeguards sacred ancestral lands from new oil and gas development.

Governor Riley, who carried and advocated for NCAI Resolution #CT-25-012 at the organization's Mid-Year Convention, emphasized the urgent need to protect this irreplaceable cultural landscape that holds profound spiritual significance for Pueblo peoples across the Southwest.

"Over a thousand years ago, our Pueblo ancestors called Chaco Canyon and the Greater Chaco Region home, creating one of the most magnificent civilizations in North America," said Governor Riley. "Today, we stand at a crossroads where we must choose between short-term energy profits and the permanent preservation of our most sacred ancestral homeland. The choice is clear – we cannot allow the desecration of this [World Heritage Site](#) for minimal energy gains."

Defending Hard-Won Protections

The 2023 Public Land Order No. 7923 withdrew approximately 336,404 acres of federal land within a 10-mile buffer around Chaco Canyon from new oil and gas leasing for 20 years. This protection was the result of decades of government-to-government consultation between Tribal Nations, the federal government, and the State of New Mexico.

"This withdrawal represents years of collaborative advocacy between the Pueblos and the Navajo Nation," Riley explained. "It was carefully designed to protect our sacred sites while respecting existing lease rights and Navajo Nation sovereignty. Any attempt to rescind these protections would be a betrayal of this good-faith partnership."

Minimal Energy Impact, Maximum Cultural Protection

According to Bureau of Land Management data cited in the NCAI resolution, revoking PLO No. 7923 would result in only a 0.5% reduction in annual gas production and 2.5% reduction in annual oil production in the

San Juan Basin – minimal impacts that pale in comparison to the irreparable cultural harm that expanded development would cause.

"Over 90% of the San Juan Basin is already leased for energy development," noted Governor Riley. "The remaining unleased lands have primarily low development potential and sit dangerously close to Chaco Canyon itself. We're talking about sacrificing our most sacred places for negligible energy benefits."

Emergency Action Needed

The NCAI resolution declares an immediate emergency due to renewed federal policy focus on rescinding public land withdrawals, including recent Executive Order 14154 and Secretarial Order No. 3418 that direct review of all withdrawn public lands. The resolution also responds to pending federal legislation and lawsuits seeking to overturn the Chaco protections.

"The current administration's energy policies threaten to undo decades of careful collaboration and consultation," said Governor Riley. "We call on Secretary Burgum and the Department of Interior to honor the trust responsibility to Tribal Nations and maintain these essential protections."

"For the Pueblo of Acoma, and sister Pueblos and Tribes that maintain ongoing connections to Chaco Canyon, this fight is about our identity, our spirituality, and our responsibility to future generations. We will not stand by while sacred places are sacrificed for corporate profits." concluded Governor Riley.

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Contact: Tribal Secretary Ardell Concho, tsecretary@poamail.org

Attachment: NCAI Resolution



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The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #CT-25-012

Title: To Urge Immediate Action to Restart the Chaco Resource Management Plan Amendment, Defend Federal and State Land Withdrawals, and Pass the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act in Response to Escalating Threats to the Greater Chaco Landscape

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the Greater Chaco Region, encompassing Chaco Culture National Historical Park and surrounding cultural landscapes, holds profound spiritual, historical, and cultural significance to many Pueblos and Tribal Nations in the Southwest; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, NCAI adopted Resolution #MKE-17-008, calling for a moratorium on oil and gas leasing and permitting in the Greater Chaco Region to protect traditional cultural properties and sacred sites until proper studies and planning processes could be completed; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, the U.S. Department of the Interior issued Public Land Order (PLO) No. 7923, withdrawing approximately 336,404 acres of federal land from new oil and gas leasing within a 10-mile buffer around Chaco Canyon for 20 years; and



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WHEREAS, PLO No. 7923 represents the culmination of years of government-to-government consultation among Tribal Nations, the federal government, and the State of New Mexico; and

WHEREAS, PLO No. 7923 explicitly does not limit development of valid existing rights on federal lands, including existing leases, and it does not withdraw state, private, or tribal trust or allottee land; and

WHEREAS, approximately 71,000 acres of land subject to valid existing leases and approximately 16,000 acres of land subject to tribal allottee leases exist within the 10-mile buffer created by PLO No. 7923 and are not withdrawn by PLO No. 7923; and

WHEREAS, the New Mexico State Land Office also withdrew state trust lands within the same buffer from future leasing, creating a cooperative, balanced framework that preserved this landscape while recognizing valid existing rights, including those of Tribal Nations and tribal allottees, and allowing for necessary infrastructure development; and

WHEREAS, the ongoing lack of an updated Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the region presents a growing risk, as oil and gas development continues under a 2003 plan that does not account for horizontal drilling, cumulative impacts, changing development patterns, and the BLM's previous effort to update the RMP was terminated without completion; and

WHEREAS, the failure to restart and complete the RMP creates an urgent regulatory vacuum, exposing cultural resources, air and water quality, and nearby tribal communities to unmanaged harm from extractive development; and

WHEREAS, the Project 2025 policy agenda expressly targeted PLO No. 7923 for rescission; and

WHEREAS, on January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an Executive Order 14154, titled "Unleashing American Energy", which directs the Secretary of the Interior to reassess all public land withdrawals for potential revision; and

WHEREAS, on February 3, 2025, Secretary of the Interior Burgum issued Secretarial Order No. 3418, titled "Unleashing American Energy", which directs the review and potential revision of all withdrawn public lands consistent with existing law; and

WHEREAS, a lawsuit filed in federal court and pending federal legislation, the Energy Opportunities for All Act, both seek to overturn the withdrawal under PLO No. 7923; and



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WHEREAS, the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act has been reintroduced in Congress to make the withdrawal permanent, but has not yet passed, despite growing threats to the current protections.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) declares an immediate emergency exists due to the renewed federal policy focus on rescinding all public land withdrawals, including PLO No. 7923, the absence of a valid land management plan, and the failure to secure permanent legislative protection for the Greater Chaco Region; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI calls upon the U.S. Department of the Interior to immediately restart and complete the Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) for the Greater Chaco Region, incorporating robust tribal consultation, ethnographic data, and modern environmental science to ensure responsible and culturally sensitive development; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI urges the Secretary of the Interior to defend and fully implement Public Land Order No. 7923, and encourages sustained cooperation with the New Mexico State Land Office and tribal governments to preserve the landscape's cultural integrity; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI calls on the United States Congress to immediately pass the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act, making permanent the 10-mile buffer around Chaco Canyon and codifying the federal withdrawal to safeguard it from future executive rescission; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI calls on the United States Department of the Interior to engage in meaningful government-to-government consultations with all Tribal Nations that may be affected by a land order reviewed pursuant to Executive Order 14154 and Secretarial Order No. 3418 prior to any final determinations; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.



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CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted unanimously by the NCAI Executive Committee on June 17, 2025, following recommendations of adoption by the relevant Committees and referral from the General Assembly at the 2025 Mid Year Convention of the National Congress of American Indians, held June 8-11, 2025, in Mashantucket, CT.

Mark Macarro, President

ATTEST:

Leonard Fineday, Recording Secretary