



Utah Diné Bikéyah
- a non-profit supporting Native Tribes working together to **Protect Bears Ears** -

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UDB's Honor Keeler appointed to Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee

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SALT LAKE CITY – Honor Keeler, assistant director for Utah Diné Bikéyah, has been appointed to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke.

In a [news release](#) issued Tuesday, the Department of Interior announced that Keeler, along with John Beaver and Barnaby V. Lewis, will join the committee, which is tasked to monitor, review and assist in the implementation of certain requirements of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. Congress recognized the importance of repatriating Native American Ancestors and cultural items and passed NAGPRA, a law that partially addresses this issue.

“The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee exists because of a dark period in U.S. history when the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples was not obtained, and the graves and funerary objects of their families and Ancestors were disturbed and stolen,” said Keeler, who cited ongoing looting issues happening at Bears Ears National Monument.

More than 12 cases of looting and vandalism of sites inside of Bears Ears National Monument were reported in 2016. As a result of this ongoing issue, Keeler submitted [written testimony](#) to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that focused on how looting and grave-robbing at Bears Ears National Monument is a human rights violation. Keeler’s work in repatriation is known internationally. In addition to working with Native Nations in the United States, she works with communities on repatriation in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and South America.

“Repatriation is important and difficult work. It involves bringing forward injustice and intergenerational trauma for many tribes. And for many institutions, the repatriation process causes a deep reflection of institutional history and current practices,” Keeler said.

With UDB, she is working to implement a looting prevention strategy that will address looting and grave-robbing. “I am honored to now serve as a member of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee,” Keeler said, before adding, “Thank you to my colleagues for the nomination.”

Willie Greyeyes, board chairman for UDB, said that Keeler’s appointment is important to the work UDB does, especially when it comes to the culturally, resource-rich Bears Ears National Monument.

“Honor’s expertise helps us protect the earth and all people. We are talking about grave robbery and Indigenous people’s Ancestors and cultural items that are being taken, have been taken and are still being taken from their appropriate resting places. These objects need to come back physically and ceremonially. That is very significant and I think it reflects a very important appointment,” Greyeyes said.

Members of the seven-person committee are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior to serve two- to four-year terms. The nominations come from Indian tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, Native American cultural, religious leaders, national museum and scientific organizations. The committee is chaired by Armand Minthorn, of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

In a prepared statement, Secretary Zinke said that Keeler, Beaver and Lewis “have important work to assist in dispute resolution and advising me on making respectful decisions on Native American human remains and cultural items.”

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