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In the Wake of Zinke Utah Visit, Leaders of Tribal Organization Ask Interior to Listen to Tribes *Utah Diné Bikéyah Share Filmed Statements for Interior Secretary Zinke*

(SAN JUAN COUNTY, UTAH)—In the wake of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke’s visit to Bears Ears National Monument on Monday, Utah Diné Bikéyah (UDB) leaders, top stakeholders in the effort to preserve Bears Ears National Monument, have issued video statements from members and elected leaders of local Tribes describing their personal experiences at Bears Ears, their ancestral ties to the land, and why they support the monument. Even though UDB spearheaded the Bears Ears proposal for the past 7 years, UDB was denied a meeting with the Secretary. See the following links for statements from [Elouise Wilson](#), [Hank Stevens \(President, Navajo Mtn Chapter of the Navajo Nation\)](#), [James Adakai \(President of the Oljato Chapter of the Navajo Nation/ Bears Ears Commissioner\)](#), and [Woody Lee](#).

In one of the filmed statements, Elouise Wilson, a local Tribal member, notes, “When you’re up there, it’s like you’re blessed from your feet on up to your feathers...That’s why we want that place to be protected. It’s not just our land, it’s a public land. It belongs to everybody.”

Under Monument provisions, Tribes collaborate with federal agencies to oversee the management of the Bears Ears National Monument in a first-of-its-kind partnership. Additionally, the area’s national monument status is intended to:

- Provide additional resources for law enforcement to more closely monitor the land to prevent looting of Native American artifacts
- Improve the ability to secure resources for repairing damage to land and ancient structures caused by illegal activities
- Improve the ability to secure resources for strengthening the area’s ecological resiliency
- Ensure collaborative, proactive land management by the tribes, Forest Service, and BLM moving forward.

The Bears Ears National Monument protections reflect a long process of compromise and negotiation between the tribes and federal, state, and local governments. As a result of the negotiation, not all important burial and sacred sites were included in the Monument. The monument provisions also honor existing commercial use and permits within the borders of Bears Ears National Monument.

Utah Diné Bikéyah Board Chair Willie Grayeyes stated, “A tip of the hat—in the form of a one-hour meeting with Tribal leaders—is a start, but insufficient to provide Secretary Zinke with the depth of information he needs to make his appropriate decision. 60% of San Juan County residents live south of Blanding, yet he only set foot in the wealthy, non-Native, anti-monument portion of the county. It is a whole different world down here. As the local, on-the-ground experts on the ecological and cultural value of the Bears Ears, we believe elders and reservation community perspectives in Utah deserve to be heard.”

Today, the Monument enjoys widespread popularity across Utah, and in the past few months, more than 10,000 people have signed a [petition](#) or sent postcards asking Secretary Zinke to “leave the Bears Ears National Monument boundary alone.”

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