



THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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Faith Groups Respond to Executive Order Attacking National Monuments

Washington, D.C. – In an unprecedented move against national monuments designated under the Antiquities Act, President Trump called for a review of designations since 1996. The Administration’s executive order would review culturally significant monuments such as Bears Ears National Monument, Canyons of the Ancients, and the Sonoran Desert.

These national monuments join the ranks of other culturally significant and diverse monuments such as the Cesar Chavez National Monument, which highlights farm worker history; Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument; and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park.

“Preserving national monuments helps us fulfill our duty to preserve God’s creation and to “love our neighbor” as we lift up diverse and culturally relevant stories as told through the land,” said Cassandra Carmichael, executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. “The designations of places like Bears Ears National Monument in Utah and Freedom Riders National Monument in Alabama faithfully help tell all our stories and any attempts to revoke or change the fabric of national monuments threatens our historical, ecological, and cultural heritage.”

“As stewards of these national treasures we must be ever vigilant against attempts to sell them, transfer them, or weaken their protections,” said Rev. Mitch Hescox, President/CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network. “Last year over 200,000 pro-life Christians called on our elected officials ‘to protect our parks and federal lands, add new ones, and ensure funding so that every American can enjoy the beauty of God’s creation.’ A strong Antiquities Act and respect for past Monument designations is essential for achieving these goals. Therefore, we will oppose any attempts by the Trump Administration to rescind or reduce past Monument designations, and we oppose any legislation that attempts to weaken the Antiquities Act.”

“We value our national monuments where our communities go to learn, play, and pray,” said Shantha Ready Alonso, executive director of Creation Justice Ministries. “They conserve our cultural and natural heritage for future generations.”

Statements on the executive order follow on the heels of several sign on letters articulating support for the Antiquities Act, including an April 19 letter from Jewish leaders that stated, “The Bears Ears National Monument in southeastern Utah – some 1.35 million acres, across an ecologically, culturally, and geologically unique landscape – was requested by a coalition of five Native American tribes, who consider the two buttes at the center of the Monument sacred. . . . Bears Ears is both a cautionary tale about the fragility of current protections on our public lands, and a fine example of how we can preserve the stories of all Americans through monument designations.”

A January 13, 2017, letter from more than 40 state and national religious organizations in support of the Civil Rights Monuments and Antiquities Act stated, “Stewardship of our national public lands and preservation of our historic and cultural heritage is an important part of our responsibility as caretakers of our heritage for the next generation. The Antiquities Act is an important tool in protecting the special places of God’s Creation where we play, pray, and learn.”

The Antiquities Act was the first law to establish that public lands are critical to American heritage. It obligates federal agencies that manage the public lands to preserve for present and future generations the historic, scientific, commemorative, and cultural values of the archaeological and historic sites and structures on these lands. It also authorizes the President to protect landmarks, structures, and objects of historic or scientific interest by designating them as National Monuments. Under the Antiquities Act, only Congress not the President has the authority to reduce or revoke a monument designation.

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment is an alliance of independent faith groups across a broad spectrum of religions including Catholic, Evangelical, Protestant, and Jewish.

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