

April 19, 2017

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, a widely-representative group of American Jewish leaders, call on you to help protect the Bears Ears National Monument and other monuments designated under the Antiquities Act.

This may seem like a small thing, with so much going on all around us – but it’s something about which we, motivated by Jewish values and history, feel strongly.

The land itself (*adamah / erez*), and in particular the wilderness (*midbar*) and open spaces, have always been central in the Jewish tradition. The land played a vital role in the spiritual journeys of our people, from the ancestors in Genesis to the 40 years in the wilderness, and beyond. Protected natural lands are also an essential part of our natural surroundings, which we understand as Divine creation. Such places supply blessings of sustenance, provide critical habitat, and offer us natural space for prayer, spiritual renewal, and awe. In addition, many of these monuments celebrate cultural diversity, a key hallmark of our great nation.

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. There are an estimated 100,000 archeological sites across the Monument, plus natural wonders galore. Most Utah residents support its protection, even as others wish it undone. 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.

The Jewish community has long advocated for clean water, clean air, and protection of our lands as part of our stewardship of God’s creation -- and as our moral responsibility *l’dor vador*, to future generations. We are also committed to caring for all of God’s people, respecting cultural diversity within the human family, and faithfully preserving the history of our collective stories.

You put forth in your Inaugural Address the need for unity, stating that we share one heart and one home. This sentiment is truly manifest in the diversity of our public lands—parks, monuments, and living classrooms that showcase the variety of stories that unite us.

National monuments such as the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad, Bears Ears, Belmont-Paul Women's Equality, and Cesar Chavez are each vital reflections of our country’s heritage and history. These historic sites join other important designations made by previous U.S. Presidents, courtesy of the Antiquities Act, which are critical to our heritage. Together, our national parks and monuments honor our continued struggle as a nation toward equality for all.

Stewardship of our national parks, monuments and other public lands and preservation of our historic and cultural heritage is an important part of our moral responsibility as caretakers of God's creation for the next generation. The Antiquities Act is an important tool in protecting the special places within that Creation where we play, pray, and learn. The Act authorizes every President to proclaim "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" as national monuments.

Regardless of our race, religion or heritage, these stories of courage, conviction, and fortitude are reflections of each of us. These monuments document a journey toward justice – which itself is a core component of our own faith story.

We urge you to advocate for the protection of Bears Ears, and other national monuments – and to help advance other monument designations of cultural significance. Among them, we look forward to such as a national monument showcasing Jewish culture and tradition – alongside those monuments sacred to other groups who, with us, comprise the great American melting pot.

Sincerely,

David Bernstein
President and CEO, Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin
Jewish Sustainability Coalition

Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb
Chair, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Rabbi Art Green
Rector, Hebrew College Rabbinical School and Irving Brudnick Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Religion

Rabbi Steve Gutow
Immediate past President and CEO, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and Chair, National Religious Partnership for the Environment

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

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