

Secretary David Bernhardt
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC

February 10, 2020

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

As religious organizations representing a broad spectrum of the faith community, we oppose the Bureau of Land Management's finalized plans to permit drilling, mining and grazing in areas that had once been protected as national monuments: Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments.

The BLM management plan is inadequate to protect the sacred sites and ecological value of the originally designated national monuments.

The Bears Ears National Monument was designated at the request of a coalition of five Native American tribes who consider the two buttes at the center of the monument to be sacred. The national monument was designated to protect sacred artifacts contained within the originally designated boundaries. The original designation gave the Hopi Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Navajo Nation and the Ute Indian Tribe a voice in the management of the historically significant and sacred lands. As defenders of religious liberty, we are concerned that the religious practices of Hopi, Navajo, Zuni and Ute tribes, who all hold the land in Bear Ears as sacred, as well as the voices of leaders from dozens of additional tribes, have been ignored.

All of the major faith traditions lift up care for creation as religious imperatives. Stewardship of our public land and preservation of our historic and cultural heritage is an important part of our role as caretakers. The designation of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante is an example of such stewardship.

Protecting public lands is essential in our efforts to steward God's creation. Protecting sacred spaces is equally as important as we honor religious liberty. The integrity of these lands must be protected while the legality of boundary adjustments is being challenged in court.

Sincerely,

Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Maryknoll Sisters Eastern Region
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Justice Team
Union for Reform Judaism

UU Ministry for Earth