

# The Greater Chaco Region

## Protecting Cultural Resources from Oil and Gas Development Impacts

### Background

The Greater Chaco Region describes a vast and sacred landscape containing archaeological, cultural, and natural features of critical importance. The Greater Chaco Region extends throughout the San Juan Basin and the Four Corners Region to the existing Pueblos and Tribes of today. Central to this region is Chaco Canyon, where between AD 800–1200 ancestral Pueblo people lived, flourished, and stewarded Chaco Canyon. The descendants of those that lived at Chaco Canyon, the Pueblo and Tribal people, still maintain deep connections with this sacred place. These connections, while similar, are entirely unique. For many, it was an important place along their ancestral journey before migrating outward into their present-day homelands of today's Pueblos and Tribes —like spokes moving away from the eye of a wheel. Chaco Canyon and the Greater Chaco Region is an extension of our ancestral homelands.

### Challenges

Today, this landscape is threatened by oil and gas development which has overwhelmed the Region. Throughout the Greater Chaco Region are cultural resources, utilized by Pueblos and Tribes as part of ongoing cultural practices. These important cultural resources are relied upon in order to ensure the continuation of cultural practices and ways of life. Unchecked oil and gas development directly impacts and threatens these resources, jeopardizing the history, culture, and people of Pueblos and Tribes who remain connected to this sacred landscape. The Greater Chaco Region as a living landscape, containing cultural resources depended upon as a vital part of Indigenous identity, and Pueblos and Tribes continue to interact with the Greater Chaco Region through active pilgrimage, story, song, and prayer. It is critical that this sacred landscape be protected.



## Greater Chaco Region Protection Approach:

The All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) maintains a two-part approach towards protecting Chaco Canyon and the Greater Chaco Region:

1. Seeking withdrawal of federal land from future mineral development in an especially critical approximately 10-mile withdrawal area surrounding Chaco Canyon and including its outliers; and
2. Seeking sufficient tribally-led cultural resources studies and tribal consultation preceding all other development, including lease sales, in the Greater Chaco Region.

### The Pueblos are engaged in multiple concurrent strategies to protect the Greater Chaco Region, including:

- BLM/BIA's Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA/EIS), in the making since 2012, which aims to guide land management decisions while considering cultural and environmental factors;
- National Historic Preservation Act Section 106, initiated with Tribes in 2021 and since shifting to a Programmatic Agreement (PA), to ensure cultural resources are considered and impacts mitigated;
- Federal legislative efforts like the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act, began in 2017, seeking to establish permanent protections for the region's cultural resources;
- The Chaco Heritage Tribal Association (CHTA) comprised of member Pueblos (Acoma, Jemez, Laguna, and Zuni with supporting Tribes San Felipe, Santa Clara, Tesuque, and Zia) since 2018 has been conducting a Tribally-led ethnographic study to document cultural significance and inform federal decision-making processes; and the
- Honoring Chaco Initiative, a DOI proposal for a broader assessment of the Greater Chaco Region so that it could ensure land management better reflects the sacred sites, stories, and cultural resources of the region.

## Current Status:

As part of the 2022 White House Tribal Nations Summit, the Biden Administration announced a 20-year administrative withdrawal of federal oil and gas minerals 10-miles surrounding the Chaco National Park, and announced the Honoring Chaco Initiative.

The CHTA has completed the Tribally-led ethnographic study of the Greater Chaco Region and has submitted the over 1,000-page report along with a set of recommendations to DOI. The CHTA is continuing to meet and lead this effort.

On December 22, 2023, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) announced the RMPA/EIS would halt due to:

- BLM/BIA seeing reduced interest in oil and gas development in the San Juan Basin;
- Increased interest in renewable energy;
- The withdrawal of 336,404 acres from mineral entry around the Chaco Culture National Historic Park;
- Navajo and Pueblo ethnographic studies for the region have been completed;
- The Honoring Chaco Initiative was created; and
- Interest in outdoor recreation has increased

BLM has proposed that APCG and CHTA guide the Honoring Chaco Initiative to complete the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement with Pueblos.



Please contact Sovereign Energy if you would like Tribal-specific recommendations on action items and next steps for this project or if your Tribe has any questions about federal energy-related projects impacting traditional cultural landscapes or Tribal interests,

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