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Mayor Emily Niehaus, Mayor Ann Leppanen and Chief Commissioner Mary McGann:

As elected officials in southeastern Utah, we commend President Biden for acting on behalf of tribes and all Americans.



(Zak Podmore | The Salt Lake Tribune) Louis Williams, a Diné guide who runs Ancient Wayves River and Hiking Adventures in San Juan County, looks up at an inaccessible ancestral Puebloan cliff dwelling in Bears Ears National Monument on April 16, 2021.

By Emily Niehaus, Anne Leppanen and Mary McGann

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Our communities, nestled in the Southeastern corner of the state, sit among the grandeur of the American Southwest. For miles in any direction, we are surrounded by sweeping landscapes, the kind many only see on postcards or Western movies. We are lucky to live here, and proud to serve our neighbors as local elected officials.

The Town of Bluff, City of Moab, and Grand County are adjacent to Bears Ears National Monument, established in 2016 by President Obama. We are grateful to President Biden for recently restoring protections to Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments after protections were stripped away by the previous administration. We appreciate Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland traveling to Utah to meet with diverse stakeholders to inform the administration's decision. As local elected officials who live near these remarkable monuments, it was an honor to meet her and share that these national treasures have been at risk of great harm and that restoration of protections was necessary.

Bears Ears is unique because it is the first national monument that came about because of the efforts of five sovereign Tribal Nations — the Navajo Nation (Diné), the Hopi Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute, the Ute Indian Tribe, and the Zuni Tribe. Indigenous nations advocated strongly for the restoration of Bears Ears National Monument as they depend on the land within the region, as they have since time immemorial, to sustain their traditional livelihoods and cultural practices, such as hunting, gathering, and ceremonies.

Holding everything from baskets and tools, to art and ceramics, to stories and living histories, this land holds the rich traditions and cultures of many Tribal nations. In addition to being living cultural landscapes, Bears Ears and Grand Staircase are home to extensive and irreplaceable fossil sites and treasured natural resources throughout. These places exemplify the very intent of the Antiquities Act and are among the best examples of lands that national monuments were designed to protect. We're thankful that protections have finally been restored for these priceless cultural, historic, and natural treasures.

That's why we and over 150 local elected officials from across the West, including Utah mayors, council members, and county commissioners, joined with these tribal leaders and nations in our support of the restoration of protections for these important national monuments. We hope that now that the monuments have been restored, adequate funding and proper and robust collaborative management will be developed with Tribes at Bears Ears to fiercely protect the place and cultural resources.

Places like Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments are part of the fabric of Western communities. In Utah alone, 13 U.S. presidents, both Republican and Democratic, have used the Antiquities Act 24 times to establish or expand national monuments in our state. Some of our most cherished lands, like Zion, Arches, Bryce Canyon, and Capitol Reef national parks, were first established as national monuments.

Far from being a federal "land grab," it's important to note that these lands protected as national monuments are already public lands owned by the American people. The law used to create national monuments, the Antiquities Act, does not give the President the authority to take land from private landowners or from states; it simply increases the level of protection given to the invaluable cultural and scientific resources found within the boundaries of national monuments.

We thank President Biden for acting in the best interest of Tribal nations and our local communities - you have our gratitude for your actions, and future generations will no doubt appreciate you as well.

Mary McGann is chair of Grand County Commission. Emily Niehaus is mayor of Moab. Ann Leppanen is mayor of Bluff.



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