

San Juan Record - Classifieds, Events, Businesses in Monticello, San Juan County, Utah

 sjrnews.com/view/full_story/27152945/article-Bears-Ears-National-Monument-designation-disastrous-for-Utah-grassroots-Navajos

Bears Ears National Monument designation disastrous for Utah grassroots Navajos

by Rebecca M. Benally, San Juan Cty Commissioner

Trusting the federal government has historically resulted in broken promises for Native Americans.

As a Diné/Navajo woman, a resident of San Juan County and Commissioner, I speak in behalf of my constituents – the Grassroots Utah Navajos.

We strongly oppose the Bears Ears National Monument designation in San Juan County on our sacred and spiritual grounds.

Having hunted, gathered and raised our families in and around the Bears Ears buttes near Utah's Navajo Nation, we do not agree with Native American tribes outside of Utah cutting deals with environmental groups.

While we local grassroots Navajo have to bear the consequences of these decisions, we must stand up and speak for ourselves.

We depend on these lands for our basic living, to gather medicinal plants, hunt, gather wood, gather piñon nuts and perform our cultural traditions.

We do not support any movement to convert our sacred lands to a monument that will ultimately be controlled by bureaucrats unfamiliar with our history and traditional ways.

The federal government has proven repeated broken promises of trust responsibilities and broken treaties, again and again and again for the last 200 years.

Environmental groups trying to sell the idea of a Bears Ears monument purport that the government will agree to allow both a continued access to our sacred lands and management by a Native American Advisory Council.

While the lure of a potential job managing the monument may be appealing to some Navajo, empirical evidence would suggest we should not be so quick to believe these promises.

Environmental groups have used the divide and conquer tactics among the Utah Navajos and other Native American tribes.

The federal government's history of managing national monuments on sacred lands should serve as a reality check.

Native Americans got a raw deal with both the Canyon De Chelly National Monument and the Wupatki National Monument designations.

In Canyon De Chelly, the National Park Service removed more than 300 sets of remains and other cultural artifacts.

The Navajo Nation has been tied up in a lawsuit since the 1990s trying to regain custody of those remains at the National Park Service (NPS), and Department of Interior (DOI) continues to defend the action.

Likewise, Navajo in Arizona's Little Colorado River Valley saw their access to generational homesteads slowly disappear after the Wupatki National Monument was designated in 1924.

After generations of herding sheep in the area, Navajo were told by NPS that environmental group concerns took priority over their access to lands their families had managed since the 1870s.

Over time, NPS sought to limit both shepherding and private property ownership.

By 2014, what was once a thriving community of hundreds of Navajo had become a series of abandoned homesteads and home to a single Navajo elderly woman, whose home will revert to federal ownership upon her death.

Despite promises that hunting and gathering will still be permitted and religious freedoms preserved in Bears Ears, we need to only look at the experience of the nearby Hopi Tribe at Wupatki.

After the federal government prosecuted tribal members of illegally taking golden eagles for religious ceremonies, the tribe must now apply for a limited number of federal permits to perform traditional ceremonies.

As Navajo who use the lands in and around the Bears Ears buttes every day, we deserve a voice in the management and future of the lands our families have called home for many generations.

While we recognize the allure of deep-pocketed environmental groups with their promises and potential jobs on a Native American Advisory Council, we reject the notion that groups outside of San Juan County should dictate the future of these lands or pretend to speak for us and have our best interest, but we know better.

We can speak for ourselves. Environmental groups, do not insult our intelligence.

We believe the long-term best interests of our community are best served by maintaining our existing access to the Bears Ears buttes, as we preserve and protect our sacred spiritual lands.

similar stories

The San Juan Record welcomes comments on our stories. Please be civil, respectful, focused and humane. Postings are not edited and are the responsibility of the author. You agree not to post comments that are abusive, threatening or obscene. Postings may be removed at the discretion of sjnews.com