



Greater Chaco Region Threatened by Broken Promises, More Fracking

Trump Administration Plan Would Open Door for More Than 3,000 New Oil and Gas Wells

A Trump plan for managing public lands and minerals in northwestern New Mexico's Greater Chaco area would sacrifice the region's cultural integrity, endanger communities, and jeopardize clean air, water, and the climate.

A Need for Change

After a surge in fracking, in 2014 the U.S. Bureau of Land Management announced it needed to update a 2003 management plan for the Farmington Field Office. The Office encompasses part of the Greater Chaco Landscape, home to Chaco Culture National Historical Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and ancestral pueblo kivas and dwellings. Pueblo people maintain a living and spiritual connection to the landscape and Navajo communities live in the region.

Promising to be accountable to Tribes and the public, the Bureau of Land Management, together with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, committed to strengthening safeguards to protect cultural values and health.

From October 2016 to February 2017, the agencies held 10 public meetings and received thousands of comments to guide the development of the new plan.



Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon, the heart of the Greater Chaco Region.

In response, the agencies released a [“scoping report,” promising the new plan](#) would address [climate change, water and soil resources, environmental justice, the “Chaco Cultural Landscape,” public health and safety, Tribal interests, truck traffic and road conditions, wildlife, and other issues](#) impacted by fracking.

Only Thing Draft Plan Promises is More Fracking

In March 2020, the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs released their draft management plan. Sadly, the plan opens the door for more fracking and stands to leave the cultural integrity and health of the Greater Chaco region more vulnerable than ever.

Under the various alternatives, the agencies project [between 2,345 and 3,101 new oil and gas wells in the Farmington Field Office](#). While the agencies' “preferred alternative” claims that “human health and the environment” are among chief objectives, this plan still proposes 3,068-3,085 **new** wells. The plan would also make nearly a million acres available for lease to the oil and gas industry for more extraction. Many of these lands are in or near Navajo communities.

Greater Chaco Region Needs Relief

The proposed plan comes on the heels of rampant fracking and lack of accountability to cultural protections, health, and communities.

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Since 2013, the Bureau of Land Management has permitted more than five hundred fracking wells in Greater Chaco. A [federal court in 2019 ruled these permits were illegal](#). The agency continues to approve more drilling.

This drilling has utterly transformed and degraded the landscape, fueling more air pollution, more safety concerns, more truck traffic, and more industrial development where there previously was none. In the meantime, the [Navajo Nation and All Pueblo Council of Governors](#), [National Congress of American Indians](#), [15 Navajo Chapter Houses](#), the [New Mexico Legislature](#), the [New Mexico State Land Office](#), and over 500,000 people have called for restraint, and for meaningful protections for the people and places of Greater Chaco.

Our Chance to Speak Out

The Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs are asking for public comments on their proposed plan. This is an opportunity to register our objections and defend the Greater Chaco region.

E-mail your comments by May 28, 2020 to the agencies at blm_nm_ffo_rmp@blm.gov with the subject line, "Comments on Draft Resource Management Plan." Here's a sample letter you can send, but please also personalize your comment:

Dear Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs:

I am writing to comment on the Draft Resource Management Plan (Plan) and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

I object to the Plan and EIS as they fail to protect the cultural integrity of the Greater Chaco Landscape, would allow levels of air and water pollution that exceed health limits, do not protect communities, and do not safeguard our climate. Importantly, the Plan and EIS do not live up to your promise to protect the Landscape and the people who depend on it. Specifically, the Plan and EIS:

- Fails to consider an alternative that prohibits new leasing of public lands for oil and gas extraction and an alternative that constitutes a legitimate No Action Alternative, where fracking is no longer approved.
- Fails to consider landscape-level protections for cultural resources and in particular fail to ensure adequate protection of Chacoan cultural sites beyond a 10-mile buffer around Chaco Culture National Historical Park.
- Fails to provide any assessment of the current impacts of fracking to human health and communities in the region.
- Fails to account for cumulative impacts of fracking to the climate and in particular fails to account for greenhouse gas emissions resulting from fossil fuel development on public lands in other parts of New Mexico and in the American West.
- Fails to use the best available science to analyze and assess climate, air quality, health, and cultural impacts.
- Fails to consider joint cultural management in the Greater Chaco region, where the agencies authorize Navajo, Pueblo, and other Tribal involvement in the identification, protection, and management of cultural resources in the region.