

## NEWS RELEASE

### **Groups File Suit to Protect Greater Chaco Region From Dangerous Fracking Feds Approving Oil Drilling at Expense of Public Health, Cultural Treasures, Safe Climate**

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*Santa, Fe, NM*—A coalition of local, regional, and national watchdog groups filed suit today to put the brakes on the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s ongoing approval of fracking in the Greater Chaco region of northwestern New Mexico. The suit comes as community members and organizations today are rallying at the New Mexico State Legislature in support of a moratorium on fracking in Greater Chaco.

“Our clean air, pure water, and a safe climate are being fracked away,” said John Horning, Executive Director of WildEarth Guardians. “The Bureau of Land Management has to stop putting the oil and gas industry ahead of our public lands and our future.”

Filed in federal court, the suit challenges the Bureau of Land Management for illegally authorizing a surge of new fracking in the Greater Chaco region. Home to Chaco Canyon, extensive Ancestral Puebloan ruins, and Navajo communities, the region is considered the cultural heart of the American Southwest.

Over the last two years, the Bureau of Land Management has approved more than 130 new fracking proposals, primarily near Lybrook and within 20 miles of Chaco Canyon. This, despite the agency’s acknowledgment that it has never analyzed how this development will impact public health and the environment, and has no plan in place to protect the regions’ air, water, and communities.

“The Bureau of Land Management is not taking serious consideration of the sacredness of the Greater Chaco region and the impacts on surrounding Diné communities as they continue to approve more drilling and fracking,” said Colleen Cooley with Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment. “It’s time to account for what really matters, our health, our environment, and future generations.”

Today's suit also comes as 30 groups, including Navajo, community, environmental, and for-profit energy companies called on New Mexico Senators Udall and Heinrich and Congressman Luján to support a moratorium on oil and gas fracking until the Bureau of Land Management can assure protection of the region.

“The Bureau of Land Management is recklessly leaping before looking, turning its back on our public lands in favor of the oil and gas industry,” said Mike Eisenfeld, New Mexico Energy Coordinator for the San Juan Citizens Alliance. “With all signs that fracking is costing us dearly, it's time to put the brakes on this disaster.”

The fracking approvals have come amidst industry pressure to exploit oil from the Mancos shale using horizontal drilling. An intensively industrial form of fossil fuel development, horizontal drilling has besieged the region with truck traffic, oil tanks, pipelines, flares, and fracking equipment. Dozens, if not hundreds, more fracking permits are slated to be approved by the Bureau of Land Management.

While today's suit targets the failure of the Bureau of Land Management to protect the cultural integrity of the region, including Chaco Culture National Historical Park, the suit also targets the agency's failure to address the global warming impacts of ramped up fracking. A recent study from NASA found the region has the [highest amount of methane emissions in the nation](#) due to extensive fossil fuel development. Methane is not only a valuable product that is being wasted, it's a potent greenhouse gas that creates 86 times more warming than carbon dioxide.

“These are our public lands, not the oil and gas industry's,” said Kyle Tisdell, Climate and Energy Program Director at the Western Environmental Law Center. “With today's lawsuit, all we're asking for is a time-out to ensure that we have the safeguards in place to protect our climate, keep our air clean, and ensure the health of the region. That's not too much to ask.”

The groups filing today's lawsuit include Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, the San Juan Citizens Alliance, WildEarth Guardians, and Natural Resources Defense Counsel. Attorneys from the Western Environmental Law Center and WildEarth Guardians represent the groups.

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