



All Pueblo Council of Governors

Officers:
Governor J. Michael Chavarria, Chairman
Governor Wilfred Herrera, Jr., Vice-Chair
Governor David M. Toledo, Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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All Pueblo Council of Governors Request Extension and Reassessment of Deadlines on DOI's Plan for Greater Chaco Region

(Farmington, New Mexico) – Last month, the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Land Management Farmington Field Office and Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Regional Office released a draft Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) with a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), triggering a 90-day public comment period ending May 28th.

The growing COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reduced the ability of the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG), its member Pueblos, other Tribes, and other stakeholders to fully engage in Chaco protection efforts. Despite the growing health emergency, DOI has not provided updates as to how it will adjust its RMPA deadlines, and it has continued to hold scheduled calls associated with its RMPA process.

Last week, APCG issued a letter to DOI Secretary Bernhardt requesting DOI act immediately to reassess tribal consultation and public involvement timetables and deadlines associated with the RMPA. In the letter, APCG urged DOI to take the following actions:

- 1) Extend the 90-day public comment period for the draft RMPA and associated environmental impact statement by at least 120-days and postpone any related meetings or calls set to take place in the near future;
- 2) Extend deadlines set related to the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Process, in particular the completion of the draft programmatic agreement, and postpone any related meetings or calls set to take place in the near future; and
- 3) Reevaluate deadlines in light of any additional changes to federal and state public health orders and guidelines regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this request, APCG asked DOI to acknowledge the detrimental impact the health emergency is having on Pueblos' and other Tribes' ability to meaningfully engage in tribal consultations. APCG also noted the health emergency's impact on public involvement opportunities at RMPA meetings, including limitations caused by state and federal implementation of mitigation strategies like "social distancing."

"APCG and our member Pueblos play a critical role in the RMPA process, and meaningful consultation is required by multiple federal statutes and executive order. Currently at the direction of the President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America and the recommendation of New Mexico Executive and Public Health Orders, many Pueblos and Tribes have closed



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non-essential tribal government operations and redirected time and resources to providing critical emergency and community services. For many, this means staff who would be directly working on federal administrative processes related to the RMPA, including our Tribal Historic Preservation Officers and environmental department staff, are not available.” – Chairman J. Michael Chavarria, All Pueblo Council of Governors

Acoma

Cochiti

Isleta

The New Mexico Congressional Delegation and other environmental and archaeological conservation groups sent similar letters calling for extension of the comment period by at least 120-days.

Jemez

Laguna

"Decisions on the fragile historical sites and the entire cultural landscape in and around Chaco Culture National Historical Park deserve the full input from the tribes with deep connection to this place. I would urge Secretary Bernhardt, the Interior Department, and the Bureau of Land Management not to rush this process, especially in light of the extra challenges tribal governments are taking on to care for their communities in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Extending the comment period is the responsible thing to do in order to allow all stakeholders fair participation and to get this management plan right. I will continue to stand with tribal leaders who are calling for preservation of the integrity of Greater Chaco's irreplaceable resources." –Senator Martin Heinrich

Nambe

Ohkay Owingeh

Picuris

Pojoaque

Sandia

San Felipe

San Ildefonso

Santa Ana

Santa Clara

Santo Domingo

Taos

Tesuque

Ysleta del Sur

Zia

Zuni