

# **An Archaeological Reconnaissance of Chaco's 10-Mile Zone of Protection**

Paul F. Reed, Archaeology Southwest

September 2020

## *Executive Summary*

To better understand the nature and extent of cultural resources in the 10-mile protection zone, Archaeology Southwest undertook a reconnaissance project focusing on the northwest, north, and northeast portions. The approximately 700,000-acre area encompassed by the zone contains roughly 4,200 known archaeological and historic sites (see map). The 2019 House bill (HR 2181) and pending Senate companion bill, known as the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act, offer permanent protection for these areas.

The 4,200 sites speak to episodic use of the area by diverse cultural groups (Paleoindian, Archaic, Puebloan, Navajo, and others) from about 10,000 BCE to the present. Because less than 20 percent of the area enclosed by the 10-mile zone has been surveyed, the actual site count is undoubtedly much higher. In addition, little recent ethnographic work has been undertaken with any Tribal groups, aside from the Pueblo of Acoma's 2018 project with Archaeology Southwest. Dozens of traditional cultural properties (TCPs) were revealed during the Acoma Project, indicating that there are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of TCPs and other Tribal cultural sites as yet unidentified across Greater Chaco.

A primary goal of this project was to identify or confirm cultural communities in the 10-mile zone, with the main criterion being spatial proximity. In several cases, the mix of sites across time periods was substantial. For these areas, the geographically proximate sites were not described as discrete communities, but as site clusters. Further work will allow greater parsing of spatial and other data to delineate additional temporally and culturally distinct communities.

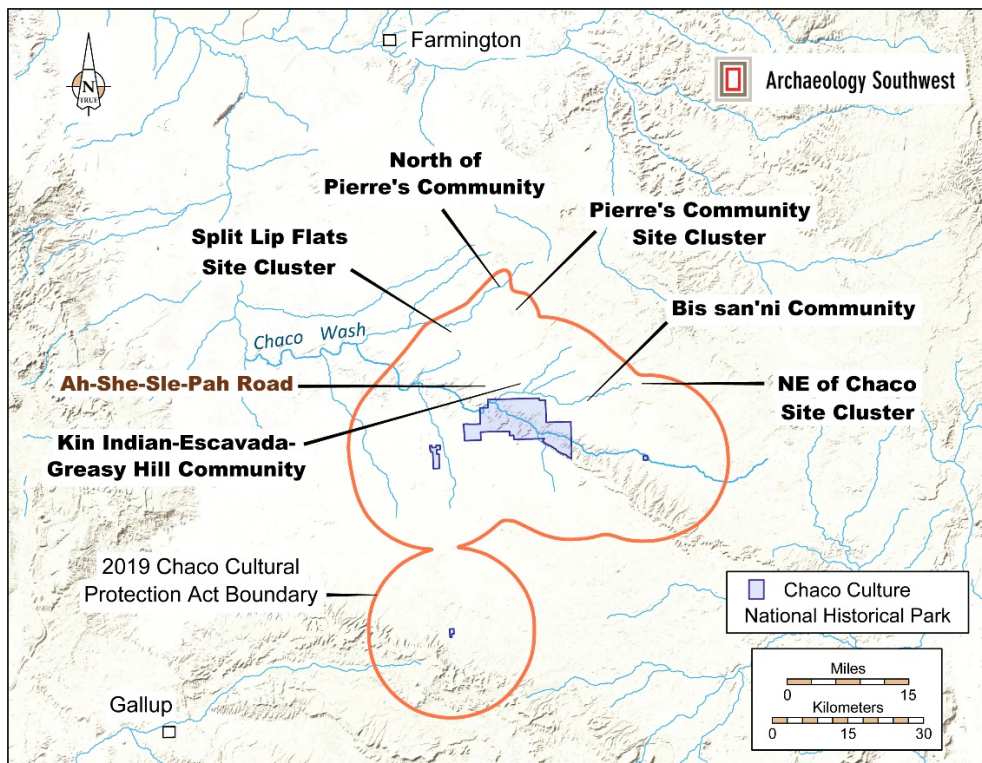
A larger objective in this work is connected to the ongoing Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) planning process undertaken by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This goal involved looking at the Greater Chaco Landscape at a different scale than is usually pursued by the Agencies. Although the Agencies' primary avoidance policy has spared many cultural resources from outright destruction, it has resulted in a fragmented cultural landscape across the Greater Chaco Landscape. A better perspective considers cultural sites not in isolation, but as pieces of larger communities on the landscape—a community- or landscape-based approach. This can be implemented to protect communities and site clusters that have not yet seen impacts.

Six site clusters or communities were assessed during this project: Pierre's Community, North of Pierre's cluster, Split Lip Flat and Ah-She-Sle-Pah road cluster, Kin Indian-Escavada-Greasy Hill Community, Bis san'ni Community, and Chaco Northeast site cluster (see map). The communities at Pierre's and Bis san'ni are well known archaeologically. The other four areas are not well known. These six areas represent a sample of the clustered sites and communities within the 10-mile zone and across Greater Chaco, and they clearly

illustrate the high density of sites directly adjacent to Chaco Culture National Historic Park.

These findings affirm our assertion that the 10-mile zone of protection is not arbitrary. The 10-mile zone contains irreplaceable ancient and historic sites and communities that merit greater protection than BLM and BIA policy and regulations currently provide. The project continues beyond the RMPA-EIS planning process deadline and this preliminary report. Ultimately, Archaeology Southwest will propose formally that BLM should create additional zones of protection around cultural-historic communities and site clusters across Greater Chaco.

I urge the Agencies to adopt Alternative B-1, which provides for a 10-mile zone of protection and would protect most of these sites and communities. I also encourage the Agencies to use the NMCRIS site database to identify areas where cultural and historic sites do **not** occur in high frequencies and densities, and where modern Navajo families are **not** living, to prioritize these areas for any future leases. These areas could then be vetted by interested Pueblos and Tribes, and cultural resource concerns could be addressed early in the process, rather than after oil companies have purchased lease parcels and are committed to specific locales.



Map of Greater Chaco showing site clusters and 10-mile protection zone.