



Chaco Advisory Newsletter

Winter 2018

The wildlands and cultural treasures of the Greater Chaco Region are under threat from oil and gas extraction and resulting habitat fragmentation. We need your help!

The THREAT

This March, the Bureau of Land Management is proposing to lease parcels of public land to oil and gas development within 10 to 20 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park, reneging on a commitment BLM made to defer leasing during the ongoing Resource Management Planning process. BLM has been deferring leases in this zone since 2009, in response to pressure from New Mexico Wild and our partners. Recent directives from the Trump Administration are pushing development ever closer to Chaco. Many Chacoan sites exist outside the Park's official boundaries, so lease sales by BLM in the surrounding area almost always results in the loss of wildlands and habitat as well as artifacts, history, and dark skies. The intensity of development is also a serious health concern for those primarily Native communities in the area.

The FACTS

Chaco Culture National Historical Park preserves a major prehistoric center of ceremony and trade and continues to be sacred to Pueblo, Navajo and other Southwestern tribes today. The Greater Chaco Region contains the main park and expands across the Four Corners Region with ties to other well-known cultural sites such as Mesa Verde, Canyon of the Ancients, Bears Ears, Hovenweep and Aztec Ruins. Chacoan roads, greathouses, villages, and sacred sites are scattered across this larger landscape, the majority outside of the park boundaries and therefore largely unprotected. The extensive and well-preserved cultural history found here earned its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

The natural landscape of the Greater Chaco Region is as unique as its cultural landscape. In the Bisti/De-na-zin Wilderness north of the park, petrified logs and stumps are scattered across colorful badlands and discoveries of significant dinosaur bones have provided scientists a glimpse into the region's biological history. The nearby Ah-shi-sle-pah Wilderness Study Area spans over 6,000 acres of hoodoos and badlands, preserving habitat for grassland species like elk and mule deer.



Extractive industry is right on the doorstep of Chaco National Historical Park. Photo by Joelle Marier

Despite the region's rich cultural heritage, its world-class archeological resources and its sensitive natural landscapes, development in the San Juan Basin continues to threaten special cultural and natural areas both within and outside of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Technological advances in extractive industry, such as fracking, enable industry to viably expand development to lands that were previously not cost-effective to tap. Some of these lands surround Chaco or its outliers, while others help create a connective corridor spanning from the Park to the Ah-shi-sle-pah Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and Bisti/De-na-zin Wilderness.

Oil and gas development on state, BLM lands, and tribal lands near the park have already impacted the Greater Chaco Landscape. Infrastructure such as roads, powerlines, pipelines, pump jacks, tanks, generators, and processing plants fragment wildlife habitat and impact the cultural landscape, while flaring of oil and gas wells results in air pollution and impacts the dark night skies Chaco currently boasts. Intense land fragmentation from industrial development has left few areas of BLM lands roadless, and health issues associated with pollution are on the rise in nearby native communities.

WHAT WE ARE DOING ABOUT IT

The Greater Chaco Region is under threat from unchecked oil and gas development. New Mexico Wild is a key partner in stopping destructive extraction activity.

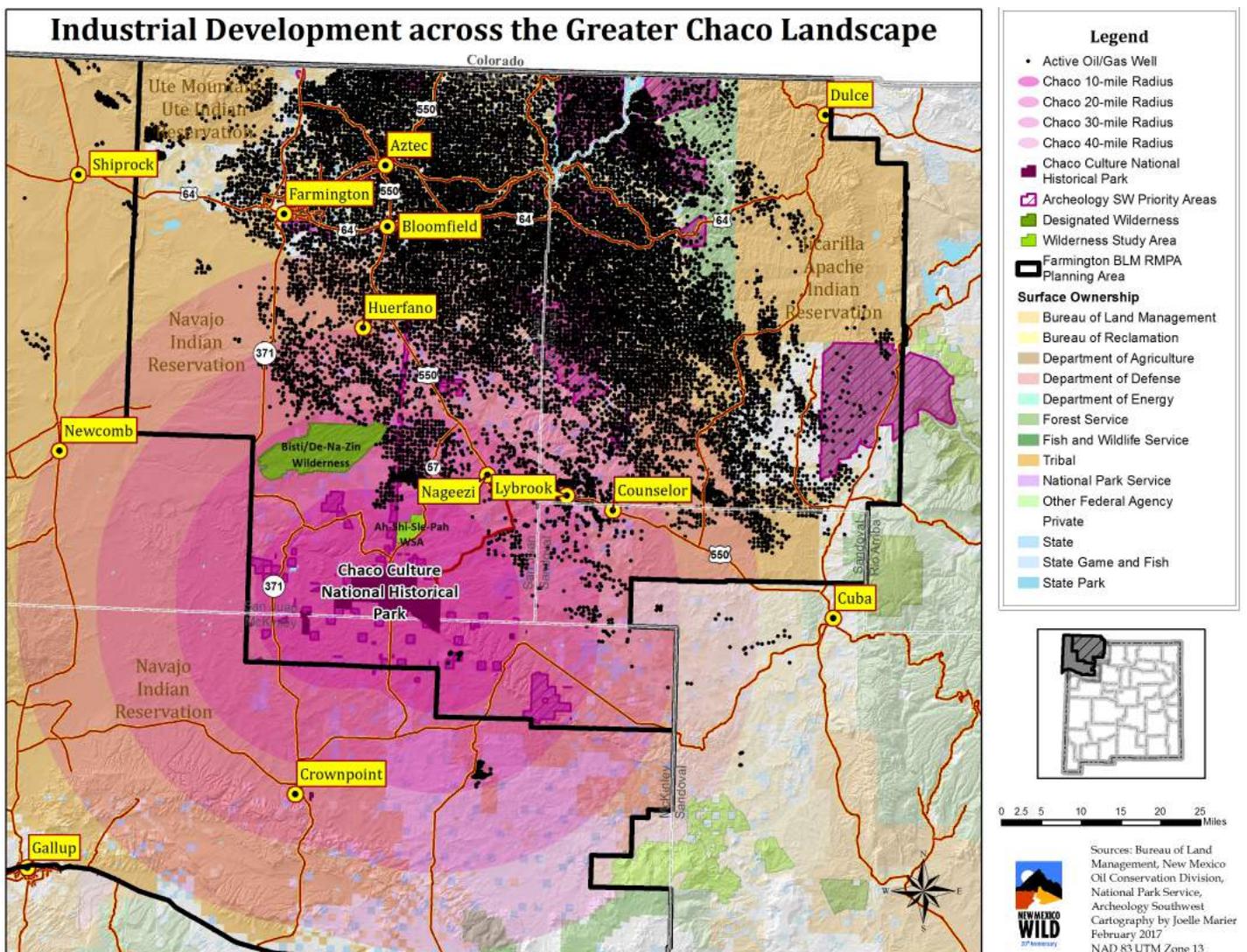
Our work includes:

- Protesting the upcoming lease sale in partnership with several other conservation organizations and tribes. In fact, the BLM received 120 protests in January, which is the highest number of protests ever received in New Mexico about a single lease sale.
- Advocating for 31,000 acres of “Lands with Wilderness Characteristics” within the Greater Chaco Region planning area.
- Advocating for a moratorium on leasing near the park during the administrative planning process.
- Consulting with tribal and interagency partners to influence management decisions.
- Working with New Mexico senators on a permanent withdrawal of mineral extraction in the Chaco region.
- Advocating for permanent protection of wildlands by designating the 7,242-acre Ah-shi-sle-pah Wilderness Study Area as Wilderness, and adding 2,250 acres to the existing Bisti/De-na-zin Wilderness.

Last year a historic meeting took place between the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) and leaders of the Navajo Nation – President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez – to talk about how tribal nations in the Southwest can work together to protect sacred sites and traditional uses of the Greater Chaco Region. The APCG has been meeting for over 400 years, but the meeting of these leaders was the first of its kind. Because of this meeting, an intertribal workgroup consisting of Pueblo and Navajo tribes was formed to ensure a strong, united voice from the native community is heard and considered in decisions that impact sacred sites and the Greater Chaco landscape. **New Mexico Wild stands in solidarity with tribal interests to support and encourage their leadership.**

Our goal is for the Chaco of tomorrow to be a place where future generations can still experience intact cultural and natural landscapes across the Greater Chaco Region. Your support will allow us to meet persistent and new threats.

Help us protect the Chaco Region from oil and gas extraction threatening historic sites and natural habitat. Please use the enclosed donation form to contribute to New Mexico Wild.



The impacts of extreme development are evident in severe habitat fragmentation, gas flares, commercial infrastructure and industrial traffic. Approximately 16,000 oil and gas wells blight the landscape, as do more than 15,000 miles of industrial access roads. A methane “hot spot” the size of Delaware has been identified over the region. Nearby communities have reported elevated levels of air quality-related health issues and contamination of water sources from fracking operations.

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