

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Spiritual Leaders Return from Bears Ears National Monument, Calling on Trump Administration to Respect Native American Heritage and Tribal Sovereignty**

*Leaders say it is not too late for the Trump Administration to uphold Bears Ears National Monument*

In the middle of Native American Heritage Month, nearly 30 spiritual leaders converged on a threatened Native American heritage landscape: Bears Ears National Monument. When religious community leaders received news that President Trump intends to make an early December trip to San Juan County to announce he will downsize and diminish conservation protection for Bears Ears National Monument, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, and possibly other public lands, they were compelled to go there to stand with the tribes.



### **Presbyterian Minister and Director of Community Relations for New Mexico**

**Wildlife Federation Rev. Andrew Black** planned the trip in collaboration with a national ecumenical Christian organization, Creation Justice Ministries. In organizing the trip, Rev. Black noted, "Bears Ears National Monument is one of the most unique, picturesque and sacred areas in America. Recognizing this, tribal and spiritual leaders from various faith traditions throughout the West came together to lift up Bear Ears National Monument as a place of great healing, wholeness and spiritual value not only to the region, but to the nation as a whole. For the administration to consider shrinking the monument and fragmenting this pristine landscape is a grave injustice that fails to understand the sacred interconnectedness between the area's land, water, wildlife and people who have been on this landscape for thousands of years." (See Rev. Black's full statement below.)

The Bears Ears National Monument is the first and only national monument with official tribal appointees serving as the primary advisory body for managing their spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage. Yet, the Trump Administration is indicating it does not plan to heed recommendations of the Bears Ears Commission of Tribes, comprised of Hopi, Navajo, Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni appointees. The Commission has urged the Trump Administration uphold the monument. Over 30 tribes

from throughout the nation have ancestral, historical and contemporary ties to Bears Ears and have expressed support for the monument. In supporting the recent visit by spiritual leaders **Davis Filfred, member of the Navajo Nation, Bears Ears Commissioner and U.S. Marine Veteran**, stated, “we encourage all people to come to Bears Ears because there is nothing like it in the world. We want people to come to see the land, how we use the land and how it is sacred to us.”

While visiting Bears Ears, the spiritual leaders met with representatives from the [Utah Diné Bikéyah](#), a local nonprofit actively working to protect Bears Ears and whose mission it is to “preserve and protect the cultural and natural resources of ancestral Native American lands to benefit and bring healing to people and the Earth.”

Calling tribal and religious leaders to come together to protect Bears Ears National Monument as a place of sacredness and healing, **Joseph Brophy Toledo, traditional leader from Jemez Pueblo**, stated, “if you take care of the Earth, the Earth will take care of you. The healing of one is the healing of all. If we express our concerns as one, we can be heard louder. Sacred sites are like our churches, kivas, white house boundaries, and places of great healing and magnetism. As EarthPeople we ask you help us, help you. Our purpose is to help, not hurt, to build, not break.”

**Jeff Swanson, pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** who is also a retired military chaplain and veteran said of the journey “As a veteran of our nation's combat spanning from Vietnam to Iraq, my spirit was calmed at Bears Ears. I departed wanting other veterans and Americans to behold the expansive beauty that will embrace their being.” Fellow Lutheran **Rev. Larry Davis of Trinity Lutheran Church in Farmington, New Mexico** journeyed as a representative of the Rocky Mountain Synod of the ELCA. He said of the experience, “It was very humbling to see all people of faith rally behind the preservation of the Bears Ears National Monument along with holding in awe and reverence the sacred sites. When we fight for creation, creation fights for us.”

**Franciscan Sister and Executive Director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light Joan Brown, OSF's** call to action after the sacred journey was: “As we pray, speak, and act, we stand in solidarity with our indigenous brothers and sisters. Already we have too much polluted land and water from irresponsible and short-term profit extractive industries like uranium, oil and gas. As we enter more deeply into climate change, we must protect these areas for all including future generations.”

**Southwest Conference Minister for the United Church of Christ Rev. Dr. William M. Lyons** described the significance of the journey to him. “Reducing its size will not only reap tragic consequences for the land and the wildlife, but that effort overflows with racism. I hope to lend my voice to the voices of the Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain tribe, Hopi tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and the Ute Indian tribe who are being ignored. Bears Ears National Monument has so much more to offer generations to come. Protecting these sacred lands will allow ones following us to learn from them, to be healed by them, and to reap their abundant blessings.”

In solidarity with the group making the sacred journey, more than 100 faith communities nationwide are praying during Native American Heritage Month for preserving the Native American Heritage landscapes and sacred sites in Bears Ears and other national monuments under threat.

The trip's spiritual and faith leaders would like to especially thank the [Utah Diné Bikéyah](#) for their leadership, hospitality and wisdom during the trip.

Participants in the trip included:

1. **Rev. Andrew Black**---*First Presbyterian Church Santa Fe & Director of Community Relations and Education New Mexico Wildlife Federation*
2. **Rev. Lorrie Gaffney**--*Holladay UCC, Salt Lake City, Utah*
3. **Woody Lee**—*Diné (Navajo) Leader and Utah Diné Bikéyah, Sweetwater, Arizona*
4. **Sister Marlene Perrotte**—*R.S.M. Sisters of Mercy, Catholic*
5. **Rev. Dr. William Lyons**—*UCC Southwest Conference Minister (Arizona & New Mexico)*
6. **Joseph Brophy Toledo**—*Traditional Leader Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico*
7. **Rev. Larry Davis**—*Trinity Lutheran Church, Farmington, NM & Rocky Mountain Synod ELCA*
8. **Rev. Karen Winkel**---*UCC Pastor Montrose, Colorado*
9. **Ruling Elder Conrad Rocha**---*Stated Clerk/Executive Synod of the Southwest (PCUSA) (New Mexico & Arizona)*
10. **Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev**—*Scholar-in-Residence, Temple Beth Shalom, Santa Fe*
11. **Jeff Swanson**--*Military Chaplain & Pastor, ELCA—(Alamogordo, NM)*
12. **Eldon Cripsen**—*Kewa/Santo Domingo Pueblo, Mentor Pueblo Pathways Project*
13. **Rev. Norma McCabe**— *Diné Leader, Presbyterian Pastor of 10 Churches on the Navajo Nation; Grand Canyon Presbytery staff*
14. **The Rev. Canon Archie "Chan" Anaya**--*Canon to the Ordinary, Navajoland Area Mission*
15. **Rev. Jim Brown**--*HR Santa Fe Presbytery & Executive Director General Assembly Council (92-96)*
16. **Sister Joan Brown**---*O.S.F., Franciscan Sister & Executive Director NM Interfaith Power and Light*
17. **Rev. Pamela Shepherd**---*Taos United Church of Christ*
18. **Ruling Elder Milinda Benallie**— *Diné (Navajo) leader, Clerk of Session, Kayenta Presbyterian Church*
19. **Rev. Virginia Bairby**---*First Presbyterian Church Taos, New Mexico*
20. **Pastor James Therrien**---*Director Lybrook Community Ministries and Pastor of Tokahookaaddi Church of the Brethren*
21. **Rev. Dr. Harry Eberts**---*First Presbyterian Church Santa Fe, New Mexico*
22. **Jeremy Romero**—*Roman Catholic Layman*
23. **Carol Keeney**—*UCC Parishioner Montrose, Colorado*
24. **Sister Maureen Wild**—*S.C., Catholic Nun*
25. **Donna Swanson**—*ELCA Parishioner, Alamogordo, New Mexico*
26. **Shelley Mann-Lev**—*Temple Beth Shalom*

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**New Mexico Wildlife Federation**---*Founded by conservationist Aldo Leopold over 100 years ago, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation has over 80,000 members consisting of sportsmen and women and outdoor recreationalists. Since 1914 we've advocated for sound wildlife management, access to public lands, and protection of land, water, and wildlife while providing opportunities to pursue the outdoor traditions that helped make America what it is today.*

**Creation Justice Ministries** represents the creation care policies of 38 Christian communions, including Baptists, mainline Protestants, Historically Black Churches, Peace Churches, and Orthodox communions. Learn more at [www.creationjustice.org](http://www.creationjustice.org)

## STATEMENTS AND QUOTES ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TO BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT

### Statement from Rev. Andrew Black

*Organizer of the Spiritual Leaders Trip to Bears Ears National Monument*

*Presbyterian Minister & Director Community Relations and Education New Mexico Wildlife Federation*

“This trip was an opportunity for spiritual leaders from all four corners, from various faiths, denominations and traditions to all come together to protect America’s sacred places. We recognize that an attack on one sacred place is an attack on all sacred places and we have come together to highlight for the nation the moral and ethical implications of such attacks on our land, water, wildlife and the whole of creation.

Bears Ears National Monument is one of the most unique and picturesque landscapes in the southwest. Filled with incredible wildlife and biodiversity, this area provides not only an amazing opportunity for sportsmen and outdoor recreationalists, but is also sacred to many tribes throughout the area who deeply value the land, water and wildlife within the National Monument.

Aldo Leopold once said, ‘we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.’

This trip was first and foremost about being in community with the land and the people who have been on this land for thousands of years. It was about listening, being in relationship and understanding about how we can best be in solidarity with our tribal sisters and brothers. It was about learning from them what message we can take back to our communities and to the nation. It was also an opportunity for spiritual leaders to pray and reflect about the various challenges facing America’s public lands and environment and what role faith communities must play in protecting creation.

With leaders coming together from all four corners of the southwest, we also hope to highlight that Bears Ears National Monument is not only a symbol of tribal sovereignty and a place of great sacredness, but also a place of incredible regional value and national importance.”