



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

June 18, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Haaland,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) wishes to thank you for conducting a thorough and careful review of the situation concerning the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. It is our understanding that your report to the president is complete, and that your recommendation is to restore the Monuments to their original boundaries.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With nearly 7,000 members, SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at Tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector.

Restoration of the Monuments is a goal that SAA and its members have pursued both in Congress and the courts since 2018. The previous administration's decision to reduce Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante not only defied the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the public—more than 95% of comments received by the Department of the Interior during the Trump White House's 2017 review of large National Monument designation supported leaving them intact—it greatly undermined the legislative and regulatory framework put in place to protect cultural heritage resources in the public interest, and to uphold the government-to-government consultation process with sovereign tribal governments.

As we pointed out in our amicus brief in support of the plaintiffs in the Bears Ears legal proceedings, restoring the Monument to its original boundaries will once again secure the highest level of protections for tens of thousands of archaeological sites and places of significant spiritual and cultural importance to tribes for generations to come. Because there is also opportunity for natural and cultural resources tourism, boundary restoration will also restart the process of creating non-extractive economic opportunities in the area.

The SAA looks forward to working with you in the months ahead in developing new management plans for the Monuments that will both preserve their irreplaceable natural and cultural resources, and stimulate the sustainable economic growth that the nation requires.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Nichols". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Deborah Nichols, Ph.D., RPA
President