

PROTECT BEARS EARS

DEFEND PUBLIC LANDS

This project was created by senior students in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Boulder

HISTORY

Learn the history behind the national monument

IMPORTANCE

Examine issues of sacred land and Land Acknowledgement

PREVENTION

Understand the issues to prevent further destruction

ACTION

Ideas and resources to help educate & act to protect & acknowledge land

HISTORY OF BEARS EARS

Bears Ears is a 1.35-million-acre national monument in southeastern Utah where many Native Americans built civilizations, and lived for centuries. Today, this historical landmark contains numerous artistic markings and clues left behind from previous generations. Native Americans continue to visit to learn and pay respects to their ancestors. Bears Ears is a cultural landscape where Native Americans travel to collect firewood, medicinal, and ceremonial herbs; celebrate their ancestors and native culture by hosting ceremonies; hunting; and visiting sacred sites. With over 100,000 cultural and archaeological sites, Bears Ears is one of the most significant unprotected areas in the United States ([Bears Ears Coalition](#)).

While exploring the Lime Ridge Clovis site, archaeologists discovered evidence of past Paleoindian residence from as early as 11,000 B.C. The Clovis site is one of very few to have some of the earliest evidence of North American occupation ([Bears Ears Coalition](#)). These discoveries are important to ongoing research and scientific studies. From these artifacts, we can visualize how cultures centuries ago lived and how this shapes our present-day culture and history.



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IMPORTANCE OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

How would you feel if one day a foreign power came into your home unannounced, took over your territory, treated you, your family, your friends, and everyone you know in dehumanizing ways and outlawed or diminished your ways of life? For centuries native populations have practiced their own unique culture and lived their lives with vibrant traditions, religions, ceremonies—and they continue these practices in present day. The majority of the United States fails to acknowledge that prior to colonialization, the land we live on was inhabited and cared for by Native Americans. We often lack historical knowledge of the land we live on and do not even know the name of the tribe(s) who used to reside there. This is due in large part to a lack of education about “land acknowledgement” within the American curriculum, the U.S. public school system and most common textbooks portray Native Americans and their lands, cultures, and histories as only a thing of the *past*. Thus, resulting in a seemingly forgotten, underrepresented, and historicized sense of Native lands and peoples. Our lack of cultural awareness is detrimental to society. There are unique, special histories to the land we live on, as well as lands that are sacred to living Native peoples—unfortunately, society often fails to acknowledge either. Knowing the history about a specific place enriches the experience of the environment and makes society begin to respect both the land and those who lived there before us.

Society continues to disrespect sacred lands and is becoming increasingly ignorant of its history. “Within Native studies, land has been theorized as the living entity that enables indigenous life. Not surprisingly, Native lands are targeted for resource extraction and continue to be subject to colonial expropriation” (Teves et al, 2015). Bears Ears in particular is being destroyed by bulldozers, miners, off-road vehicles, and by people stealing artifacts from the area. This issue became apparent and Native tribes came together to prevent their ancestral remnants and history from becoming eternally destroyed. In 2015, the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition was formed by the Mountain Ute, Zuni, Hopi, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah Ouray, and Navajo governments to seek out additional protection of these territories.



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On December 28, 2016, President Obama issued an act to protect Bears Ears National Monument. However, shortly after President Trump took office, he reversed Obama's hard work to protect the land on April 26, 2017. By radically reducing Bears Ears by as much as 1.1 million acres (85 percent), Trump's motive is to build roads and pipelines which will be used for mineral extraction, at the expense of sacred lands and villages ([Travis, 2017](#)). The Federal Government overreached its power and its legal claims to public land by granting use to the private sector and disregarding indigenous people and their sacred ties to the land. These sites are home to many indigenous populations with sacred value and centuries of history attached to them.

Taking one's land away where many Native Americans identify with and call home is disrespectful and also unconstitutional. The U.S. government policy will also have negative environmental impacts on these lands, and will be especially harmful for indigenous people and their relationships with this place. It is especially troubling since "the inclusion of Native American knowledge and opinions has never been done in the history of public lands management in the United States" ([Jacka, 2017](#)).

"This place is a part of the history of all the Native peoples in this region. It's like a book for us, and when many tribes have a chapter in this book, it tells us a lot about why we are the way we are. But it's also part of the history of the peoples of the United States and the world. I believe that tribal peoples of this region shouldn't be the only ones to take responsibility for protecting the cultural resources; they belong to everyone, and everyone should take responsibility for protecting them."

– Jim Enoté, Pueblo of Zuni

While this land is sacred to many indigenous communities, Bears Ears is also enjoyed by many other groups of people who visit for recreation such as hikers, bikers, photographers, painters, etc. It is also home to many forms of wildlife (such as bobcats, bighorn sheep, golden eagles, and mountain lions) and agriculture (such as aspen, Engelmann spruce, prickly pear, and yucca). This land is famous for its beautiful views, unique cliff dwellings, rustic canyons, lush and vibrant meadows, and stunning variance of color. Trump's decision to move forward with the land decimation has angered the public, instigating five different lawsuits. One legal challenge was brought by Patagonia, a well-known outdoor clothing and gear company. Patagonia is spreading information about protecting land like Bears Ears through emails, social media, advertisements, and even text message notifications to its patrons. A prominent example was a bold message appearing on Patagonia's website stating: "The President Stole Your Land. In an illegal move, the president just reduced the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. This is the largest elimination of protected land in American history" ([Patagonia](#)). Only 12 percent of United States public lands are protected leaving around 88 percent open to gas and oil development ([Protected Planet](#)).

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“The demise of ranching, mining, petroleum development, and logging has left many people blaming public lands and the federal government for the dire economic circumstances that face many western communities” (Jacka, 2017). In November 2018, these changes are unfolding and government officials are still trying to propose new bills for further reduction of public lands. The Trump administration’s land reduction policy would destroy both Bears Ears National Monument and threaten the tribes’ centuries-long history and connection to this place; despite all of this the tribes who founded the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition continue working to protect their sacred lands. It is important to listen to what these groups are saying, to respect their calls for action, and take our own meaningful steps to protect places like Bears Ears.

“Bears Ears National Monument is a victory not just for Native Americans, but for all who love and whose lives are intertwined with this remarkable place.”

– Alfred Lomahquahu, vice chairman of the Hopi Tribe

There is so much we can gain from land acknowledgement. Learning about, listening to, and respectfully engaging with other cultures and their histories and present-day issues expands our horizons to understand different ideas. Bears Ears destruction will result in further disconnection from the vibrant history and ongoing connection that Native peoples have with these sacred lands. Protecting public lands is necessary, and land acknowledgement is one way to take action by remembering and honoring the ancestral homelands of Native populations, respecting their traditions, and understanding the powerful, interactive, and sacred elements of these places. Reducing the size of Bears Ears is a also sign of disrespect and is an act against natural wonders.

“Bears Ears National Monument, through its protection of our traditional knowledge systems and our cultures, is actually a way for Indian and non-Indian people to understand each other.”

– Shaun Chappoose, chairman of the Ute Indian Tribe Business Committee

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PREVENTION OF FURTHER LAND REDUCTIONS

While land acknowledgement is important, it will not solve this issue on its own. Our society has a moral obligation to protect public lands and indigenous communities, therefore we need to unite and take action. Most of the population is uninformed that “colonization is an ongoing process. Indigenous people are still here, and their lands are still occupied. In learning to acknowledge this, we can take a first step on the long road toward reconciliation” (Friedler, 2018). A prime example of educational ignorance is how modern-day academia still teaches children that Christopher Columbus discovered a “New World” when the reality was that myriad indigenous tribes had already inhabited the land and lived there for centuries prior to Columbus’s “discovery.” Columbus is illuminated in a heroic light, yet many of his actions were questionable and led to violence and destruction, many of these traumas still impact indigenous populations today.



“Acts of conquest varied in degrees of violence and Indian culpability, as differing ideas of property and land ownership came into conflict, causing many lands to be unknowingly transferred to non-Indians via treaties based on Western law” (Teves et al, 2015). The depiction and representation of early colonial settlers as “heroes” needs to be changed, and the truth behind their tyrannical acts toward indigenous populations needs to be addressed through education. We need to come together to educate, advocate, and to act ensure that our public lands are protected and restored for future generations to enjoy. There are many ways to act and use our rights and privileges to defend and protect these lands. Here are a few ideas to start:

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IDEAS TO START: EDUCATE, LISTEN, COMMUNICATE, DONATE, ACT

- ❑ **Educate Yourself, Research and become informed** – Always do your own research and make sure you have evidence from credible sources to back up your claims. Learn about the full history of the land you live on, the Native culture, and the story of colonization, oppression, and privilege. There is always something new to learn, so keep expanding your knowledge. Also, seek information from sources who are part of the communities working and connected to these places.
- ❑ **Listen, Respect Native perspectives**– Native populations are continually underrecognized, and their voices are often unheard. They are one of the best resources to gain information from and back up your claim since Native populations have experienced these injustices and are continuously on the frontlines working to protect their ways of life and their sacred lands.
- ❑ **Educate the Youth, Land Acknowledgement is one way to start**– Start teaching children accurate history behind colonization and dedicate a portion to teaching about “land acknowledgement” and its significance as an act of respect and a commitment to places where we live, work, and play. This is one step toward changing the education system and can also be spread onto theatres and other public areas.
- ❑ **Communicate, Spread the word & persuade about Bears Ears and Native Lands** – Speaking to your government officials about issues you care about is your right as a constituent. Other ways to be heard are talking to friends and family, public speaking, creating a political campaign, crowdfunding, and reaching out to the media. Use your networks to communicate and practice ethical persuasion methods.

Send an email to your Senators [here](#) and ask them to defend Bears Ears National Monument from oil and gas development.

Click [here](#) to sign up for updates about Bears Ears and take action to protect the monument.

- ❑ **Donate to the cause** –Any contribution helps raise funds for campaigns to increase awareness and strengthens the cause for protection. This could be donating your time, funds, or other materials, see the resources below for links to groups who you may support.
- ❑ **Act Peacefully**– Nonviolent direct action through peaceful protests have been very effective ways to get attention and communicate the importance of these issues from sacred land to environmental destruction that is threatening Bears Ears.

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LEARN MORE ABOUT LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Below is a list of tools and resources to explore to help educate yourself and others about land acknowledgement and indigenous land issues.

- ❑ [Territory Acknowledgement Panel Talk](#) – Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, *University of British Columbia*, October 18, 2016
- ❑ [Know the Land: Territories Campaign](#) – LSPIRG
- ❑ [Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements](#) – Chelsea Vowel, September 23, 2016
- ❑ [What is the Significance of Acknowledging the Indigenous Land We Stand On?](#) – (CBC News), Ramna Shahzad, July 15, 2017
- ❑ [What does 'I Am Indigenous' mean to you?](#) – (CBC News), June 21, 2017
- ❑ [Making Coast Salish Territorial Acknowledgements Matter](#) – Coast Salish Cultural Network, November 25, 2016
- ❑ [Land Acknowledgement: Native American and Indigenous Initiatives](#) – Native American & Indigenous Peoples Steering Group, Northwestern University
- ❑ [Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.](#)
- ❑ [National Association of Friendship Centres \(NAFC\)](#)
- ❑ [Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory](#)

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- “United States of America, North America.” *Protected Planet*, www.protectedplanet.net/country/US.