

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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December 29, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

On December 28, 2016, President Obama designated the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah and the Gold Butte National Monument in Nevada pursuant to his authority under the Antiquities Act.¹ Advocates for this action touted it as a means to establish a co-management agreement for Bears Ears between the federal government and a group of Native American tribes.² In fact, in the press release announcing these new national monuments, the White House recognizes the importance of tribal participation in the management of the land and asserts this action serves as a tool to achieve co-management.³ Co-management of public lands, however, requires the approval of Congress.⁴ Advocacy organizations, federal agencies, and the White House have all put out differing opinions on co-management, and it is important to clarify the bounds of the President's authority. I am writing to obtain more information about how and why the President exercised his authority in this case.

¹ *Rumors point toward possible December 23 designation. Anxiety builds over possible national monument*, SAN JUAN RECORD, Dec. 13, 2016, available at http://www.sjnews.com/view/full_story/27329673/article-Rumors-point-toward-possible-December-23-designation--Anxiety-builds-over-possible-national-monument-?instance=home_news_left.

² Amy Jol O'Donoghue, *Native American chairman says Jewell order lacks equality for tribes*, DESERET NEWS, Oct. 21, 2016, available at <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865665388/Bears-Ears-coalition-leader-says-Jewell-order-lacks-equality-for-tribes.html?pg=all>.

³ FACT SHEET: President Obama to Designate New National Monuments Protecting Significant Natural and Cultural Resources in Utah and Nevada, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/28/fact-sheet-president-obama-designate-new-national-monuments-protecting>.

⁴ See *U.S. Telecom Ass'n v. FCC*, 359 F.3d 554, 565-66 (D.C. Cir. 2004) (“[S]ubdelegations to outside parties are assumed to be improper absent an affirmative showing of congressional authorization When an agency delegates authority to its subordinate, responsibility—and thus accountability—clearly remain with the federal agency. But when an agency delegates power to outside parties, lines of accountability may blur, undermining an important democratic check on government decision-making. Also, delegation to outside entities increases the risk that these parties will not share the agency’s “national vision and perspective”). See also *High Country Citizens’ Alliance v. Norton*, 448 F. Supp. 2d 1235, 1246-1247 (D. Colo. 2006) (similar, citing *U.S. Telecom*).

The President has exercised his authority under the Antiquities Act to create or expand at least 25 national monuments—more than any other president in history.⁵ His sweeping application of the Antiquities Act raises questions about the Administration’s commitment to transparency and consultation with local stakeholders with respect to designating national monuments. It also raises serious questions about whether these designations are limited to the, “smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the objects to be protected.”⁶ The Antiquities Act “was designed to protect federal lands and resources quickly” in response to concerns about “theft from and destruction of archaeological sites.”⁷ In most cases, however, the processes outlined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) are most appropriate because they require environmental studies, a review of the public purpose, and an opportunity for public participation before any federal agency action.⁸ The NEPA and the FLPMA processes provide for a more thoughtful determination, whereas the Antiquities Act was meant to be reserved for emergency scenarios.

Until yesterday, the Administration’s actions with respect to Bears Ears more closely resembled the NEPA and FLPMA process. In anticipation of the Bears Ears designation, the Department of the Interior took on a large role in gathering input and coordinating planning.⁹ You, Secretary Jewell, visited the potential site for a listening session.¹⁰ In fact, during a hearing before the Subcommittee on the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Neil Kornze testified that BLM and the White House have been coordinating.¹¹ It is therefore unclear why the President opted to designate a massive national monument in Utah via the Antiquities Act in the waning days of his presidency, and to ignore federal environmental and procedural laws enacted to ensure stakeholders and other affected parties have a meaningful role in determining the outcome.

Similarly, the President’s actions with regard to the Gold Butte National Monument designation bypassed Congress and the public. Located in Clark County, Nevada, the Gold Butte National Monument spans nearly 300,000 acres.¹² Such a large designation, made unilaterally, deprives the American people and their elected representatives a collaborative discussion on how best to protect the land for all to enjoy. Large designations such as Gold Butte Monument are the type of major federal agency action envisioned by our federal environmental and procedural laws.

⁵ H. Sterling Burnett, *Obama’s Dangerous Use of The National Monument law*, FORBES, Oct. 12 2016.

⁶ Antiquities Act of 1906, 54 U.S.C. §§320301-320303

⁷ Carol Hardy Vincent, “National Monuments and the Antiquities Act,” Cong. Research Serv. (2016) (R41330).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Amy Jol O’Donoghue, *Bears Ears Controversy Ramps Up With Jewell’s Visit; Bishop’s Planned Legislation*, KSL NEWS, July 13, 2016, available at <https://www.ksl.com/?sid=40632616&nid=148&title=bears-ears-controversy-ramps-up-with-jewells-visit-bishops-planned-legislation>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Examining BLM Public Lands Leasing Hearing Before the Subcomm. on the Interior of the H. Comm. on Oversight and Gov’t Reform*, 114th Cong. 14 (2016) (statement of Neil Kornze, Director, Bureau of Land Management) (Mr. Kornze: “I am talking about looking at the country and figuring out where would this be appropriate, where would it not?” Mr. Gosar: “So there is some conversation going on between the White House and BLM and agencies in regards to antiquities withdrawal?” Mr. Kornze: “Yes.”).

¹² *See supra* note 3.

Furthermore, in a letter dated March 29, 2016, this Committee, along with the House Committees on Natural Resources and on Appropriations, requested information related to use of the Antiquities Act of 1906.¹³ After receiving an inadequate response, a follow up letter was sent on May 11, 2016.¹⁴ As outlined in both letters, the Committees are interested in the Administration's process for using the Antiquities Act. Specifically, the Committees requested documents and communications from the Council on Environmental Quality and the Department of the Interior (DOI) referring or relating to the selection or designation of national monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906 by the President from January 1, 2015, to the present.

To date, DOI has only provided a very limited response to the Committee that largely consisted of public statements and news clippings. If the Department does not produce these documents voluntarily, the Committee will be required to obtain them through compulsory measures.

Please immediately provide the documents requested in the Committee's March 29th and May 11th letters. In addition, please produce the following documents as soon as possible, but not later than January 13, 2017:

1. All calendars, including all meetings and attendees, for all DOI employees involved or referenced in any discussions related to any national monument selection or designation.
2. The daily schedules and call logs for Secretary Jewell, Tommy Beaudreau, Nikki Buffa and Neil Kornze from April 21, 2013, to present.
3. All communications between any DOI employee and White House staff, including but not limited to Senior Advisor Brian Deese, between January 2015 and present.
4. All documents and communications referring or related to the selection or designation of national monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906 by the President from April 21, 2013, to present.
5. All documents and communications related to the reduction in size, limitation, or repeal of a national monument from January 20, 2009, to present.

Additionally, please make available for transcribed interview the following three DOI officials as soon as possible, but not later than January 20, 2017: Bureau of Land Management Director Neil Kornze; your Chief of Staff Tommy Beaudreau; and DOI employee Nikki Buffa.

¹³ Letter from Hon. Jason Chaffetz, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Gov't Reform, Hon. Rob Bishop Chairman, H. Comm. on Nat. Resources, and Hon. Harold Rogers, Chairman, H. Comm. on Appropriations, to Hon. Sally Jewell, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior (Mar. 29, 2016).

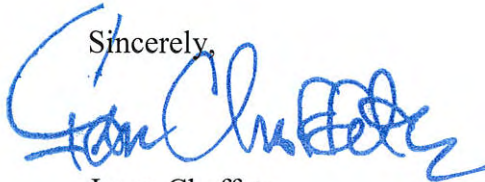
¹⁴ Letter from Hon. Jason Chaffetz, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Gov't Reform, and Hon. Cynthia Lummis, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Gov't Reform Subcommittee on the Interior, to Hon. Sally Jewell, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior (May 11, 2016).

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The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

Please contact Chris Esparza of the Committee staff at (202) 225-5074 to schedule the interviews, or with any questions about this request. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jason Chaffetz". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Jason Chaffetz
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Minority Member