

## Attacking one sacred place is an attack on all sacred places

By Nahum Ward-Lev and Andrew Black

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We just returned from a visit to the Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah in the company of nearly 30 faith and tribal leaders. Our group undertook the journey to stand in solidarity with the indigenous tribes that have held this land sacred for millennia, and to raise a moral voice for the importance of the protection of indigenous sacred sites and public lands that are endangered by the Trump administration's determination to diminish some of our national monuments.

On our journey to Bears Ears, we were moved by the way that the sacred land brought our group together spiritually. Coming from many faith and spiritual backgrounds, we were united as one by the joy and renewal that the beauty of the land brought to our hearts. We stood in awe before grand, multi-colored canyons. Delight rippled through our group when we saw wild turkeys ambling through the woods and when a large buck turned his antlered head toward us and held us in his gaze. Each of us felt the healing and rejuvenating power of the land as we witnessed a mother mountain lion and her kittens cross a dirt road in a flourishing forest.

Each of our national monuments is a unique treasure handed down from our ancestors, a treasure that we must protect for our descendants. Both Woody Lee, a Utah Diné Bikéyah leader, and Joseph Brophy Toledo, traditional leader of Jemez Pueblo, reminded us that Bears Ears National Monument is uniquely the work of five indigenous tribes to preserve their heritage, the land where they go to hunt, gather medicinal herbs and seek healing. Their work is now a gift to the American people, an awesome and beautiful expanse of land where people from every walk of life can go to be filled with the wonder of God's creation.

The sacred land of Bears Ears is now under threat. Instead of preserving

the entire complex ecosystem at Bears Ears, the Trump administration decided to rescind the national monument status of almost 85 percent of the original design, splitting the remaining 15 percent into two separate sections containing many, but by no means all, of the 100,000 religious ruins and artifacts in the national monument (“Trump drastically slashes two Utah monuments,” Dec. 5). This leaves 85 percent of the original monument open for use by the extraction industries. This misguided plan highlights exactly why it is vital to protect all of Bears Ears.

The monument stands as a living testimony to the interconnected nature of the natural world. The streams, forests, bears, deer, elk and mountain lions are all flourishing in Bears Ears because the complex web that gives them life has not been broken. This web of relations is what drew us to Bears Ears. What happens at Bears Ears happens to us, our families and our communities. This beautiful land that is sacred to more than 30 indigenous tribes is sacred to us, both because of its flourishing beauty and because an attack on one sacred site is an attack on the sanctity of all sacred sites, including the churches and synagogues where we go to be in community, to pray and to heal. We intend to support the five indigenous tribes in their legal and spiritual efforts to defend the original designation of Bears Ears National Monument and urge you to do the same. Our own religious communities and the American people need and deserve that Bears Ears and the other national monuments be left whole and healthy for future generations.

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