



100 YEARS

FIELDREPORT

Southwest Region • Fall 2019



Pave It and They Will Come

At the end of April, Garfield County paved a 7.5-mile segment of the Burr Trail just outside of the eastern boundary of Capitol Reef National Park in southern Utah. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the long-disputed project on a Friday afternoon, giving the county—who had staged equipment and gravel near the area in anticipation of the decision—the green light to start paving. BLM failed to notify the public until Monday. By Tuesday, two-thirds of the trail had already been paved.

Garfield County has sought to pave the 67-mile motor “trail” from Boulder to Bullfrog for nearly 35 years. Under the Trump administration, their request to chip-seal the last segment that crosses BLM land was approved in less than 30 days, despite repeated denials from previous Democratic and Republican administrations. After the county’s hasty paving in late April, the 9-mile leg of the Burr Trail through Capitol Reef National Park is now the only section that remains unpaved.

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Top: A visitor overlooks changing colors in Canyon de Chelly National Monument. ©Anna Dudko | Dreamstime **Right:** Both NPCA and Grand Canyon National Park celebrated 100th anniversaries in 2019. ©Goldilock Project | Dreamstime

100 YEARS OF PARK PROTECTION

After the National Park Service (NPS) was established in 1916, the founders quickly realized that in order to hold the new agency accountable to its purpose, a citizen advocacy group free from governmental constraints was needed. To protect this fragile new concept of a national commons for all Americans, National Parks Association—known today as the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)—was born in 1919 with an initial donation of \$2,000 from Stephen Mather, the first director of NPS. Robert Sterling Yard, who called the association “the fearless and outspoken defender of the parks,” became the first staff member.

Now, 100 years later, we are the leading voice for national park protection and the only national organization exclusively dedicated to that mission. We have grown from Yard’s one-person, shoestring operation to a national presence with over 150 employees and 27 offices across the country.

Here in the Southwest, NPCA’s recent accomplishments include: stopping a massive development planned near the south rim of the Grand Canyon; advocating for a collaborative plan to protect 450,000 acres of land near Arches and Canyonlands National Parks from oil and gas development;

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FALL 2019

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico & Utah

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New Leadership in the Southwest

After David Nimkin's retirement in March, NPCA selected long-time conservationist and former New Mexico Program Manager, Ernie Atencio, as the new Southwest regional director.

Ernie fell in love with parks and wild places at a young age and has spent most of his career working in and for those places. A cultural anthropologist and writer with deep Indo-Hispano roots in northern New Mexico, he grew up displaced in inner-city Denver. He discovered the larger world—and the outdoors—through an Outward Bound “hoods-in-the-woods” trip, which unexpectedly led him into college and a career leading wilderness trips and environmental education programs. Ernie also spent many seasons as a park ranger at Bandelier National Monument and Grand Canyon and Mesa Verde National Parks and taught for Yosemite Institute for several years.

Eventually coming full circle back to his northern New Mexican homeland, he worked for various conservation organizations, serving as executive director of the Taos Land Trust and coordinator of the Valles Caldera Coalition, in addition to numerous projects through a private consulting business. With a master's degree in applied anthropology and a lifelong interest in remote landscapes and traditional cultures, Ernie has conducted field research and written about sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau, Havasupai oral history, Navajo forestry, cowboy culture, land-based Norteño culture, and community engagement in land conservation.



His work has been recognized with awards from The Wilderness Society and the Quivira Coalition, and his many publications include two books about natural resources and environmental justice in northern New Mexico and features for “High Country News.” Ernie lives next door to the Río Grande del Norte National Monument north of Taos.

Ernie is excited to work with an exceptional team of professionals and to continue building on a legacy of success in the Southwest region. And we wish David Nimkin a wonderful, well-earned retirement.

Above: Ernie Atencio at the Grand Canyon. ©Elsbeth Atencio

Southwest Regional Staffer | Emily Wolf

This fall Emily Wolf joined the Southwest Regional Office as the New Mexico Program and Administrative Coordinator. Emily studied environmental science and political science at Kalamazoo college in Michigan and earned a masters degree in 2018 from the University of New Mexico's Water Resources Program. For her lab research, Emily focused on nutrient uptake in New Mexico streams using time series analysis of water quality data—which she later expanded for accessibility by a citizen science cohort across the state. Emily has



lived in New Mexico since 2012 and has previously worked with Conservation Legacy restoration crews, federal, private and tribal partners on Rio Puerco watershed restoration projects, River Source and the Santa Fe Watershed Association, and Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. She is passionate about outdoor education and access, watershed-based approaches to conservation, and preservation of wildlife habitat.

Above: In September, Emily Wolf joined the Southwest regional team as the New Mexico Program and Administrative Coordinator. ©Emily Wolf

New Border Wall Through Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument Threatens a Desert Oasis

We might lose a special desert oasis if a proposed 30-foot, lighted wall is built along Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument's southern border.

The monument was created in 1937 to protect its namesake plant and a scenic, biologically rich portion of the Sonoran Desert. One key feature of the ecosystem is a complex of springs in the Quitobaquito Hills that supports a pond and an incredible diversity of desert life.

In an area that receives about five inches of rain per year, these springs are truly desert oases that have provided perennial water for desert-dwelling people, wildlife and migrating animals. This is the only place in the U.S. where endangered Quitobaquito pupfish and rare Sonoyta mud turtles exist, and it is within the historically occupied

range and potential recovery habitat of the endangered Sonoran pronghorn. Botanists have documented 271 plant species from the area, including many locally rare wetland species.

A wall built here would disturb the aquifer that feeds the springs. Reducing the amount of water that flows through this system or modifying its flow would have significant implications for the flora and fauna that depend on these rare habitats. In addition, planned lighting would deter wildlife from nighttime use of these critical water sources. Construction impacts alone would do devastating damage.

Quitobaquito has a deep cultural history. More than a dozen tribes claim cultural affiliation with the area. The land is littered with ancient pottery, shells and other artifacts

and features, and more items lie below the surface. Archaeologists have found that people have lived at or passed through the springs for more than 8,000 years. Quitobaquito figures as part of U.S. frontier history as a critical stop along the Camino del Diablo, along which thousands of U.S. migrants traveled during the California Gold Rush. Digging trenches to build the border wall would disturb or destroy this history.

NPCA joined other groups and a long list of scientists to ask the Department of Homeland Security to exempt this special place from the wall (should current court challenges fail to stop it). Existing vehicle barriers, electronic surveillance measures, and the good work of Border Patrol and NPS law enforcement officers are currently enough to provide needed border security without destroying an important and rare desert oasis.

Below: Quitobaquito Springs is a rare desert oasis threatened by the latest version of the border wall. ©Bill Hatcher



100 YEARS OF PARK PROTECTION

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halting a proposed geothermal energy development on the doorstep of Valles Caldera National Preserve that would have dried up the preserve's hot springs and mudpots; and challenging the shrinkage and unacceptable management of Bears Ears National Monument.

As we enter our second century and grapple with a changing world, our efforts to make parks relevant and accessible to

all people take on more importance. To that end, NPCA has undertaken an ambitious initiative to develop programs consistent with our commitment to issues of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (www.npca.org/justice).

Neither our successes from our first 100 years nor our ongoing work in the next 100 would be possible without the support of people like you who value these special places. Help us keep this visionary experiment alive.

NPS Organic Act

"... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Organizing to Save Southeast Utah

With contractor Amanda Podmore's help, NPCA is engaging the public around the threats posed to ancient archaeological sites and fragile desert habitat by oil and gas leasing near Hovenweep National Monument. Our activities include overflights with stakeholders and community members to get a perspective from the air, working with tribes that have traditional ties to the landscape, and meeting with municipal and county governments. In September we delivered 290 letters from local governments, Utah residents and tribal interests to Utah Governor Herbert requesting that he weigh in on a planned lease sale. Governor Herbert declined to intervene, but we will continue expanding our approach in Utah and throughout the region.



Meet Our Southeast Utah Energy Organizer

Amanda Podmore is a part-time contractor working with our regional team to protect the cultural landscape of southeast Utah from the impacts of energy development. She is a conservation professional with a passion for creative and inclusive solutions to public land challenges in the West. With a masters in Natural Resource Law from the University of Denver and a B.A. in Environmental Policy from Colorado College, she spent the last four years on the Bears Ears campaign. Before that she researched responsible mining issues, worked in watershed education and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Rwanda. When not working, you can find her in the garden or exploring a desert canyon near her home in Bluff, UT.

Above: Amanda Podmore in Bears Ears National Monument. ©Amanda Podmore

Saving a Sacred Cultural Landscape



In response to persistent advocacy from tribes, NPCA, other conservation groups and the public, the entire New Mexico congressional delegation cosponsored legislation to permanently withdraw federal lands surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from further oil and gas development. The Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act (H.R. 2181/S. 1079) would prevent the BLM from continuously offering lease sales within a proposed protection zone of about 10 miles surrounding the park. The bill would not apply to tribal lands or private parcels in this checkerboard of jurisdictions, preserving some local economic development opportunities in these low-income communities.

Heeding the opposition to development around Chaco, the New Mexico State Land Commissioner placed a moratorium on oil and gas leasing on an additional 72,776 acres of state land within the protection zone through 2023. And in a surprising move, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt placed a one-year moratorium on the leasing of public lands in the protection zone while the federal legislation moves forward, a welcome change from the rampant leasing he has overseen.

This bill is currently one of just a few proactive pieces of federal legislation aimed at permanently protecting land surrounding a national park from the impacts of extractive industries, and the momentum to save this particular landscape just keeps building.

The legislation acknowledges that the Greater Chaco Landscape encompasses an area beyond the boundaries of the park. The archaeology, sacred sites and tribal communities that define the cultural landscape surrounding Chaco in fact extend throughout the Four Corners region, far beyond the 10-mile protection zone. In addition to prohibiting new leases, the bill would terminate existing leases that are not currently producing. It also recognizes the need for additional studies and protective measures to address health, safety and environmental impacts on communities and tribes.

NPCA has long advocated for preventing the important cultural legacy at Chaco from becoming an island in a sea of development. We commend the entire New Mexico delegation for placing the interests of the public and local tribes above that of private industry, which is more focused on the revenues generated from short-term mineral extractions than the health of the lands and the people nearby. We hope this legislation is just the first step in greater protections for the region.

Above: Kin Kletso in Chaco Canyon National Historical Park. ©Jaahnlieb | Dreamstime

Clearing the Air

Much of the Southwest suffers from a serious and growing air pollution problem, and some parts of the region consistently fail to meet federal air quality standards, putting national parks and people at risk.

NPCA's latest report on air quality, *Polluted Parks: How America is Failing to Protect Our National Parks, People and Planet from Air Pollution*, documents this problem. The report found that 96% of the 417 national parks reviewed suffer from the effects of climate change and unhealthy air. This pollution harms nature, the visitor experience and surrounding communities.

Parks in the Southwest significantly harmed by pollution include:

- **Dinosaur National Monument** (CO, UT)
- **Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument** (CO)
- **Grand Canyon National Park** (AZ)
- **Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve** (CO)
- **Montezuma Castle National Monument** (AZ)
- **Rocky Mountain National Park** (CO)
- **Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site** (CO)
- **Timpanogos Cave National Monument** (UT)
- **Tonto National Monument** (AZ)
- **Tuzigoot National Monument** (AZ)

See the full report at www.npca.org/pollutedparks, including several personal stories and our solutions for clean air and a healthy climate.



Meanwhile, as this crisis continues across the country, the Utah Air Quality Board approved a plan in late June that will allow Utah's oldest and dirtiest coal plants, Hunter and Huntington, to continue to dump thousands of pounds of preventable nitrogen oxide pollution into the air each hour, on the doorstep of some of our most precious landscapes including Arches, Canyonlands and Capitol Reef National Parks. That pollution contributes to haze that muddies stunning views and dark night skies, makes it harder to breathe, stresses sensitive species and habitats, and drives climate change. The Utah Board previously approved two plans nearly identical to this one, but those plans were rejected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during prior administrations as being too weak to achieve air quality improvements.

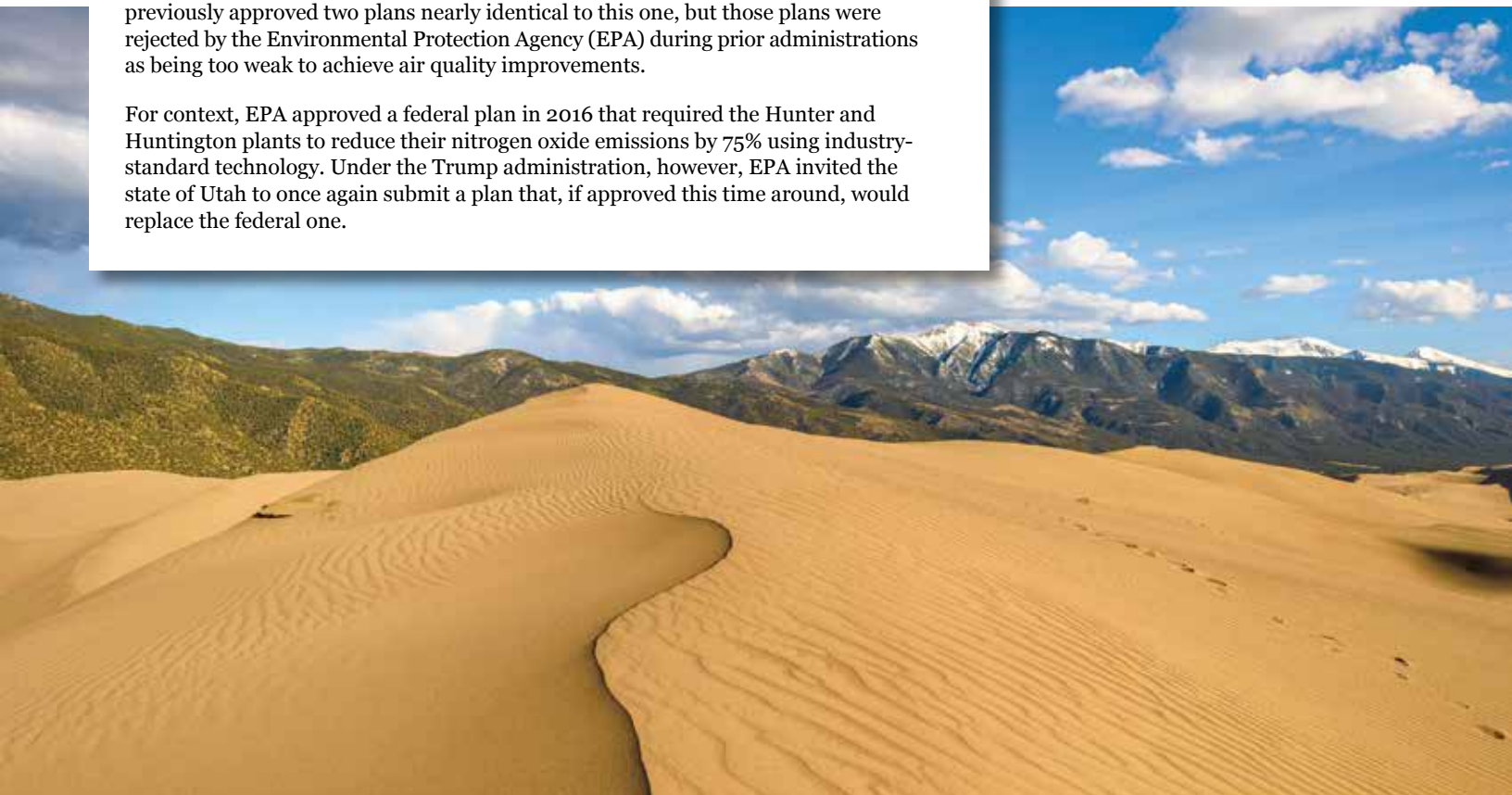
For context, EPA approved a federal plan in 2016 that required the Hunter and Huntington plants to reduce their nitrogen oxide emissions by 75% using industry-standard technology. Under the Trump administration, however, EPA invited the state of Utah to once again submit a plan that, if approved this time around, would replace the federal one.

Colorado Air

Analysis from the EPA shows Colorado's air quality is worsening. EPA estimates that Colorado youth suffer more than 32,000 asthma attacks each summer linked to the oil and gas industry's smog pollution. The American Lung Association ranks Denver 12th (out of 228 metropolitan areas throughout the U.S.) for high ozone days. Meanwhile, the oil and gas industry has expanded its influence in the state as the size and scope of development, primarily on Colorado's Front Range, continues to grow. The same sources of pollution that harm health, wildlife and landscapes also drive climate change, a grave threat in the arid West, transforming ecosystems in sensitive alpine zones like Rocky Mountain National Park.

NPCA is committed to working with leadership in Colorado and our allies to create effective change for cleaner park air and a healthier climate. These efforts include taking a lead role on the state's upcoming second round of comprehensive regional haze planning, advocating for cleanup of oil and gas pollution, and ensuring our members and supporters have a voice in the stakeholder process. Stay tuned for more.

Below: Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve—pictured here on a clear day—is one of hundreds of parks impacted by air pollution. ©Maomaotou | Dreamstime



Pave It and They Will Come

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Mile by mile, Garfield County has chip-sealed the Burr Trail up to the boundaries of Capitol Reef National Park with clear intent to continue right through the park, up the iconic Burr Trail switchbacks to the other side. Maintaining unpaved access to the Waterpocket District of the park is critical for NPS to uphold its commitment to manage this area for its solitude, natural quiet, and sense of backcountry adventure and discovery. With more than 15 million visitors drawn to Utah national parks each year, paving these areas will surely lead to significant increases in traffic, taking away from what makes these wild lands so special.

NPCA joined The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and The Wilderness Society in filing a lawsuit challenging BLM's faulty process and bad decision.



Above: The Burr Trail Switchbacks lie in a rugged and remote part of Capitol Reef National Park. The section of the Burr Trail that runs through the park is now the only unpaved section of the motor "trail" remaining, and we are working to make sure they don't pave this paradise. ©Sumikophoto | Dreamstime

In Her Own Words | An Advocate Story

My name is Heba, which means "a gift" in the Arabic language. Egypt is where I originally stem from; however, my roots also reach to the nation of South Sudan (located on the northeastern side of Africa). I haven't been back since my arrival in the States years ago, but I think about my motherland every day.

I taught myself very young that if I wanted to be stable here in America and free of

any distress, I had to seek opportunities that expanded my world and prepared me to defend my views. NPCA is one of the opportunities that I was fortunate enough to come across.

The National Parks Conservation Association was an organization that I was not familiar with less than two or three years ago. Even after getting involved, if you asked me why it was important to know about national parks I wouldn't have had an answer for you because I had no clue why. I just knew that I liked the way the parks made me feel.

I'm happy to say that this is no longer the case. The journey with NPCA has led me to

many first-time destinations, both locally and out of state (most recently to lobby for the national parks to representatives in Washington, D.C.). These experiences have not only exposed me to the wonders of the natural world but also to the dangers it faces.

I've learned how to use my voice as a vessel to help preserve these lands so that they are still around for generations to come. I laugh now, but it genuinely frightened me to express how I felt about the things that I cared about a few years ago. My perspective has changed, and this is a passionate fight for me—one that I don't plan to quit anytime soon.



Above: Heba on her first visit to Washington, D.C. in April. ©Cassidy Jones **Right:** Heba and fellow advocates at the Utah State Capitol. Heba testified in support of the Every Kid Outdoors Initiative during Utah's 2019 legislative session. ©Cassidy Jones



Ambitious Federal Legislation Protects More Public Lands in the Southwest

We've heard for months that Washington, D.C. isn't getting anything done. Congress is gridlocked with each chamber controlled by a different party. But the one issue that momentarily brought the House of Representatives, the Senate and the President together was protecting our national parks and public lands.

In February, Congress overwhelmingly passed Senate Bill 47, the John Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act. This one piece of legislation included more than 100 national park and conservation bills that had languished in Washington for years. Many in Congress fought for their bills to be included in this legislative package; it was their encouragement and persistence that helped make the final piece of legislation a success.

NPCA had much to celebrate in the bill. In the Southwest, noted accomplishments include:

COLORADO

- Most of the Colorado delegation worked to adjust the boundary of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument to allow for a donation of nearly 300 acres in the western portion of the park, a move that improves wildfire mitigation efforts and expands hiking trails.

... one issue that momentarily brought the House of Representatives, the Senate and the President together was protecting our national parks and public lands.



Above: New Mexico's Valles Caldera National Preserve is an example of a landscape added to the National Park System using the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF was permanently authorized in February. ©Michael Rooney | Alamy

- Senators Bennet and Gardner sponsored the Amache Special Resource Study Act, which begins the process of potential NPS designation for the Granada War Relocation Center (otherwise known as Amache), a location that preserves the stories of the more than 7,000 Japanese Americans unjustly incarcerated during World War II.

NEW MEXICO

- The New Mexico delegation collectively added over 241,000 acres of designated wilderness to the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, over 21,000 acres of wilderness to the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and over 9,400 acres of wilderness in San Juan County near Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

UTAH

- Senator Hatch and Representative Curtis worked with local communities to provide new protections for over 1 million acres of federal land and 60 miles of the Green River in Emery County.
- Representatives Bishop, Curtis and Stewart sponsored a section to honor the 150th anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad at

Corrections

We deeply apologize for excluding these new members of Congress from our last field report. We have enjoyed working with all of these offices!

- Deb Haaland representing the greater Albuquerque region in New Mexico's 1st District
- Martha McSally representing Arizona in the Senate (formerly of Arizona's 2nd congressional district from 2015-2019)
- Joe Neguse representing Fort Collins and Boulder communities in Colorado's 2nd District
- Greg Stanton representing Tempe and the greater Phoenix region in Arizona's 9th District

Promontory Point by re-designating Golden Spike National Historic Site as a National Historical Park and establishing the Transcontinental Railroad Program.

- Utah members supported the establishment of the Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area and the John Wesley Powell National Conservation Area, totaling over 200,000 acres of protected lands.

NATIONAL PROVISIONS

- Many Southwest delegation members supported the permanent authorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund—a program that provides funding to purchase and ensure access to public lands and helps protect parks and public lands from incompatible development within their borders.
- Representatives DeGette and Tipton and Senator Heinrich championed a section to ensure the continuation of the widely popular Every Kid Outdoors program.

NPCA commends Representatives Bishop and Grijalva, as chairman and ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee, and all members of the Southwest delegation for their efforts to get this legislative package signed into law.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED


Marjory Stoneman Douglas Award Presented to New Mexico Tribes




NPCA was proud to honor the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) in June with the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Conservation of the Year Award for 2019. APCG received the award in recognition of its outstanding leadership in protecting the landscape surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park and other areas in the region from industrial development and pollution associated with rampant oil and gas leasing. The Council represents the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico and the Pueblo of Ysleta del Sur in El Paso, Texas, all of which have ancestral ties to the Puebloan sites in the Four Corners region.

APCG actively opposes oil and gas development near sacred sites in the Southwest, and—in a historic collaboration with the Navajo Nation—promoted the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act to secure permanent protections surrounding the park. The Council’s leadership helped shape a new narrative for these lands, recognizing the importance of a contiguous cultural landscape connecting all of the Ancestral Puebloan park sites throughout the Southwest. This larger vision of an interconnected ancestral landscape has led to a more comprehensive approach to conservation in the region.

“The All Pueblo Council of Governors is honored to accept the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Award graciously presented from our partners at the National Parks Conservation Association,” said E. Paul Torres, chairman of the All Pueblo Council of Governors.

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Above: Representatives of the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico and the Pueblo of Ysleta del Sur in El Paso, Texas. ©All Pueblo Council of Governors

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