The Greater Chaco Landscape

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Chaco Canyon was the center of a thriving society that flourished in the Four Corners region of New Mexico from 850 CE to 1150 CE (Lekson 2006; Reed 2004; Vivian 1990). The Chacoans and affiliated Pueblo groups built hundreds of great house structures across the region and connected many of these places with kilometers of roads and other landscape features (Heitman and Plog 2015; Van Dyke 2007). This extensive, ancient landscape is managed today by a variety of federal, state, private, and Tribal owners. These places have deep spiritual and cultural importance to nearby Pueblos and Tribes that are descendants of the Chacoan people (figure 16.1). In addition, the Chaco region holds great potential to further our understanding of ancient Puebloan culture and human-environment interaction in the past, among other topics.

Many sites associated with ancient Chacoan society are protected within the boundaries of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Chaco Canyon and several outlying great houses are UNESCO World Heritage Sites that preserve the history and culture of the Pueblo people. Furthermore, Chaco Canyon is the ancestral home of Pueblo people, and it is where many of the cultural traditions that are practiced to
this day at Acoma, Zuni, Tesuque, Zia, the Hopi Mesas, Taos, Santa Ana, and other Pueblos in New Mexico emerged. Over more recent centuries the landscape around Chaco was settled by the Navajo people and other groups who have added their own unique traditions to the rich cultural legacy. Federal agencies are also a major, modern-day presence and oversee Chaco Canyon, a national park since 1980, along with important cultural and historic sites across the surrounding landscape.

Despite the protection offered by Chaco Culture National Historical Park, many sites lie outside the park across the Greater Chaco Landscape and are scarcely protected from the ravages of oil-gas development. Increased oil-gas development associated with the Mancos-Gallup Shale play in northwest New Mexico has been threatening fragile Chaco-affiliated cultural resources across a large portion of the San Juan Basin since late 2011 (figure 16.2).

In this chapter I discuss the Greater Chaco Landscape from a preservation and advocacy perspective. I describe the last six years of Archaeology Southwest’s involvement in protection of the ancient Chacoan landscape. Furthermore, I summarize the concerns of a wide variety of interested parties, including the All-Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG), Tribes, a coalition of environmental and preservation organizations, and the interested public. Finally, I provide detailed recommendations to the Bureau of Land
Figure 16.2. Map showing the Greater Chaco Landscape, areas leased for oil-gas development, and the 10 mi. protection zone around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Map by Catherine Gilman, for Archaeology Southwest.
Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) based on participation in this process for the last several years.

**OIL-AND-GAS DEVELOPMENT IN BLM’S FARMINGTON FIELD OFFICE**

In response to increased oil-gas development, and in conjunction with the Navajo Area Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Farmington Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is in the process of amending the 2003 Resource Management Plan (RMP) and draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As part of this process, a variety of Tribal, environmental, preservation, and advocacy groups have offered input and formal comments at various points. This process is projected to be completed by mid-to-late 2021.

Archaeology Southwest’s involvement in protecting the Greater Chaco Landscape dates to early 2014. At that time we were putting together the details necessary to hold a priority planning meeting for the Chaco and Middle San Juan region in Farmington, New Mexico. Our organization has completed these exercises in a number of BLM districts and other geographic locales around the American Southwest. In brief, the planning meetings gather local archaeologists, Tribal representatives, federal archaeologists, and other experts to identify those areas in a district or other locale that are of most concern for preservation. The meeting held in Farmington in May 2014 resulted in the identification of a number of areas that were of great concern to the people gathered. These areas were mapped and converted to GIS shape files and shared with Farmington BLM and other managing agencies in the hope that future development projects, particularly oil-gas related activities, could be managed to avoid impacts to these areas (see figure 16.2).

As we at Archaeology Southwest completed the priority planning exercise in mid-2014, we also made the decision to become involved in the RMP amendment process as an interested party. What followed over the next six years were numerous meetings with BLM, BIA, Tribal officials, state officials, and members of the public.

In 2015, Archaeology Southwest convened a series of public forums to discuss impacts to the Greater Chaco Landscape and get public input on the best approach to preservation and protection. I organized and chaired the events held at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, Cortez, Colorado; at the University of New Mexico–Hibben Center; and at the main office.
of the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, DC. Panel members included then-governor Fred Vallo of Acoma Pueblo, Ora Marek-Martinez (Navajo Nation tribal historic preservation officer at the time), Tim Menchengo (of the Pueblo of Santa Ana), Dale Davidson (former BLM archaeologist in Utah), and David Fraley (private citizen in Cortez, Colorado). All of these events were well attended, and we gathered useful public input.

In 2016 Archaeology Southwest, with support from several partners, produced a handout brochure on the Greater Chaco Landscape (Archaeology Southwest 2016). The goal was to summarize the key issues for the general public and interested parties and make more information readily available. We distributed thousands of brochures between 2016 and 2018 and have increased awareness of the issue and the choices before the American public as oil-gas development continues to threaten Greater Chaco and other fragile ancient landscapes.

Following on the heels of the NPS-sponsored conference at Crow Canyon, of which this volume is one product, Archaeology Southwest organized a telephone press conference with media to discuss concerns about protecting the Greater Chaco Landscape (Reed et al. 2017). This event generated nationwide interest and resulted in articles in major newspapers (e.g., the Washington Post). A group of scholars and advocates wrote short essays highlighting their research and concerns about oil-gas development across the Greater Chaco Landscape.

**DETAILED FEEDBACK TO THE AGENCIES ON PROTECTING THE GREATER CHACO LANDSCAPE**

Archaeology Southwest and our partners—Audubon New Mexico, Coalition to Protect America’s Parks, Izaak Walton League, National Audubon Society, National Parks Conservation Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, the United States Committee for the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the Wilderness Society—have provided detailed comments to BLM and BIA at various points over the last several years. Most recently, in September 2020, we prepared comprehensive comments during the final period of public review as the agencies finish the draft RMP amendment and EIS documents (Archaeology Southwest et al. 2020). Because of the importance of those planning documents for the protection of Chaco’s resources, below I reiterate, in some detail, the most relevant comments provided to the agencies in September 2020.
1. BLM and BIA must include a robust role for the National Park Service (NPS) in future oil and gas management decisions.

I encourage BLM and BIA to improve interagency coordination and give the NPS a more active role in planning the decisions that affect the visitor experience at Chaco Culture National Historical Park (NHP). Regular and frequent consultations among the agencies are necessary to give the NPS a strong role in the decision-making process for oil-gas development on Chaco’s boundary.

In addition, NPS staff possess unique expertise that can be beneficial to the agencies as they evaluate future proposals. Not only does NPS coadminister the Chaco Archaeological Sites Protection System, along with BLM and the Navajo Nation, but it also possesses expertise in managing night sky, viewsheds, and soundscape values in and around units of the NPS. The National Park Service has already provided BLM with some information on night skies around Chaco Culture NHP as part of recent oil-and-gas-leasing proposals. This role should be formalized and broadened as part of the BIA-BLM planning process.

Furthermore, working with NPS, I recommend that BLM and BIA sponsor and conduct a comprehensive viewshed and soundscape analysis from Chaco Culture NHP (see Van Dyke 2017). In addition, stipulations should be developed to protect Park Resources, including a requirement for NPS consultation before development can proceed near the park. In the planning documents adopted by BLM and BIA, I urge the agencies to ensure that there is a robust, ongoing role for NPS in future oil and gas management decisions.

2. The Agencies must do a much better job consulting with the Pueblos and Tribes who are the descendant communities to the ancient sites and landscapes across the Greater Chaco Landscape and the primary residents of the region subject to oil-gas development.

In addition to their interagency coordination obligations, BLM and BIA share important Tribal consultation and public engagement duties. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and a number of executive orders require notice and outreach to Tribes, allottees, residents, and the public at various stages of the oil and gas development process. BLM Manual 1780 and Handbook 1780-1 have also set the Interior Department on an important new path to improving relationships and coordination with Tribes and allottees.

By joining as co-lead agencies and expanding the planning area, BLM and BIA have already taken initial steps toward improving Tribal engagement and public outreach around Farmington and northwest New Mexico, but much more needs to be done. The new scoping process, which began in the fall of
2016, saw BLM and BIA representatives meet directly with Tribal representatives and residents at community centers and Navajo Chapter Houses and brought a critical set of stakeholders to the table. It set the stage for an inclusive planning process with robust Tribal engagement and consultation, but, again, more needs to be done.

I urge BLM and BIA to be sure that this type of outreach and engagement continues after the current planning process is complete. The agencies should view the completed RMP Amendment and EIS documents as the start of an ongoing relationship and open dialogue with Tribes, allottees, and the public about oil- and gas-planning decisions in Farmington. Residual impacts to Tribal communities from expanded oil and gas development can include distortions in labor markets, housing prices, public infrastructure, and disruptions in social systems. This ongoing relationship should both monitor and implement outreach programs to help communities adjust to changes.

Thus, I recommend that in the joint planning documents, a permanent, interagency BLM-BIA-NPS working group be established that meets regularly with Tribes, allottees, State of New Mexico personnel, and the public to discuss and provide recommendations on ongoing minerals management decisions. Additionally, to increase transparency, I urge the agencies to make all NEPA documents (including categorical exclusions) for federal, Tribal, and allotted mineral development decisions (e.g., leasing, permitting, right-of-way, suspensions, etc.) available online for public review.

3. The joint planning documents should manage the 10 mi. radius cultural protection zone around Chaco Culture NHP in a proactive manner, designed to maximize protection of cultural resources.

The first area that BLM and BIA should manage under common allocations, stipulations, and development conditions is the checkerboard of federal, Tribal, New Mexico State Trust, and allotted lands within 10 mi. of Chaco Culture NHP (see figure 16.2). This area is less leased and developed than surrounding areas and thus has retained much of its cultural integrity and natural characteristics. It contains many undisturbed cultural sites and is critically important to preserving the resources and visitor experience within Chaco Culture NHP, as well as the homes, ranches, and traditional lifestyles of the Navajo people who live near the park. It also contains at least twelve Chacoan great houses and associated communities.

In October 2019 the US House of Representatives passed bill HR 2181—the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act. This bill will withdraw the
minerals owned by the US government—and only the US government—from future leasing and development that are located within the Proposed Chaco Protection Zone (figure 16.3), which surrounds the Chaco Culture NHP.
act will withdraw 316,076 acres of oil, natural gas, coal, and other minerals owned by the US federal government. A companion bill to HR 2181 died in committee in the US Senate but should be reintroduced in 2021. This one bill will not solve all of the issues surrounding protection of the Greater Chaco Landscape, but it is an important step.

The state of New Mexico elected a new land commissioner in November 2018. Commissioner Stephanie Garcia-Richards recognized the need to protect the 10 mi. zone around Chaco Canyon and indicated full support for the Senate bill. To protect state trust lands within the 10 mi. protection zone, Garcia-Richards issued an executive order that created a moratorium on new oil-gas leasing on state trust lands in the area until December 31, 2023 (State Land Office 2019). Coupled with the proposed federal legislation, this is a huge step toward protecting the most sensitive archaeological and cultural zone around Chaco Canyon.

Archaeology Southwest recently completed a reconnaissance project in the area (Reed 2020). The primary finding of the project is that the 10-mile zone contains numerous clusters of sites, some of which form discrete spatially temporal communities that merit greater protection than currently exists under federal law. The project focused on locales in the north, northwest, and northeast portions of the 10-mile zone and identified six site clusters or communities, including Pierre’s and Escavada (figure 16.4).

These areas represent just a sample of the site clusters and communities that exist in the 10-mile zone and for which adequate assessment of indirect and cumulative effects has not been completed. This leads logically, then, to the next point—the Agencies must choose planning Alternative B-1 in their final RMPA and EIS documents. B-1 is the only alternative that would provide the protection that sites, site clusters, and communities in the 10-mile zone merit. None of these site clusters or communities will be adequately protected if the 10-mile zone is reduced to 0, 2, or 4 miles (part of the range of options in the RMPA alternatives). Further, BLM lacks any ethnographic information about the importance of these site clusters and communities to modern-day Pueblos and Tribes—information that the ongoing ethnographic studies funded by BLM and DOI-BIA will provide.

Given this background, I make the following recommendations to preserve and protect cultural resources within the 10 mi. cultural protection zone:

- Close the 10 mi. zone to all new leasing across all land types, and, where closures are not possible, apply no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulations. This recommendation aligns best with Alternative B-1 in the RMPA document.
Where cultural resources are present in lease areas, oil-gas operators should invite interested Tribes and Tribal members to conduct site visits; plan development to address Tribal concerns. Require that operators file viewshed and soundscape analyses with the Park Service, BLM, and BIA before conducting surface-disturbing activities and, in cooperation with those agencies, develop viewshed and soundscape protection plans.

- Require that BLM and BIA consult with the National Park Service before issuing new leases and drilling permits.
- To protect dark night skies, limit flaring and artificial lighting.
- Prioritize reclamation of well pads, access roads, and other oil and gas infrastructure to restore viewsheds from Chaco Culture NHP and nearby cultural sites.
• Prioritize new drilling within already-developed, less-sensitive areas using avoidance measures, such as siting, screening, and mandatory unitization.

4. The Great North Road Corridor requires special treatment under the BLM–BIA joint plan.

Another area that warrants a landscape-level management approach is the corridor of cultural and archaeological sites and great houses along the Great North Road (but beyond the 10 mi. protection zone around the park). This corridor has seen significantly more oil and gas leasing and development than the lands directly surrounding Chaco Culture NHP, but, like the lands around the park, it too contains a high density of connected cultural sites that would benefit from common lease stipulations and development guidelines. To protect this area, the plan should

• Create a single area of critical environmental concern (ACEC) along the entire Great North Road corridor and close it to future leasing.
• Prohibit new rights-of-way across the Great North Road and other identified Chacoan roads.
• Require phased leasing that prioritizes leases away from areas with low development potential and sensitive resources.
• Require that operators file viewshed and soundscape analyses with the Park Service, BLM, and BIA before conducting surface-disturbing activities and, in cooperation with those agencies, develop viewshed and soundscape protection plans.

For the Great North Road, then, the agencies should adopt consistent management decisions and resource protections at various landscape levels across federal, Tribal, and allotted lands and should coordinate these decisions with the state of New Mexico. The agencies should manage areas with connected resources and common resource management concerns under consistent stipulations and development conditions.

5. The agencies should conduct viewshed and soundscape analysis for Chacoan great house communities.

In addition to closer collaboration with the NPS, as discussed above, I encourage the agencies to support other efforts to protect Chacoan communities from indirect effects to viewsheds and soundscapes. The recent work
by Van Dyke (2017; Van Dyke et al., chapter 11 in this volume) documents considerable indirect and cumulative effects to the viewshed and soundscape of the Pierre’s Community (figure 16.5). Despite the ACEC established to protect the community, Van Dyke concludes that the encroachment of oil-gas facilities has compromised the integrity of the community and the ability of the archaeological community to fully understand and assess its role in the Greater Chaco Landscape. Thus, I feel strongly that viewshed and soundscape analysis must be completed for all Chacoan great house communities and protective measures put in place prior to allowing any additional leasing within the communities’ boundaries.

Thus, working with NPS and archaeological groups, I urge BLM and BIA to conduct a comprehensive viewshed and soundscape analysis for all Chacoan great house communities across the Greater Chaco Landscape. The agencies should exclude known Chacoan communities from additional leasing until studies are complete. They should assign stipulations to protect Park Resources, including stipulations that require NPS consultation before development can proceed near the park. In the planning documents adopted by BLM and BIA, ensure that there is a robust, ongoing role for NPS in future oil and gas management decisions.

6. The agencies should suspend completion of the RMPA and EIS planning process until pending cultural-ethnographic data are available for the Greater Chaco Landscape.

Given the long timeframe under which this planning process has unfolded, from 2014 to 2020, over seven calendar years, and the importance of the Greater Chaco Landscape to many Pueblos and Tribes, it is unfathomable for the agencies to rush to complete this process in the absence of detailed ethnographic-cultural data. The Tribes have pushed for years to have the agencies complete a detailed study, and the funding was finally procured in 2018 by BLM. Unfortunately, as of late 2020 very little work had been completed with the project funds. Additional funding came through the 2019 Department of Interior appropriations bill, with $1 million earmarked for Tribal cultural-ethnographic work. Because of the pandemic, however, nothing was completed with these funds in 2020. Because of this I am compelled to ask, why not wait to finish the current planning process until at least some preliminary results are available from these studies? Our work with the Pueblo of Acoma in 2018 revealed dozens of Acoma traditional cultural properties (TCPs) across different locales of Greater Chaco. It seems very likely that many additional cultural sites and
TCPs of concern to Tribes will be identified over the next few months and years. These findings will undoubtedly impact oil-gas leasing patterns in the area.

**DISCUSSION**

The Greater Chaco Landscape includes Chaco Culture NHP and many cultural resources in the surrounding landscape that are affiliated with ancient Chaco, such as the Great North Road and Pierre’s Site. Over the years, the BLM has leased more than 91 percent of its managed landscape for oil and gas development (see figure 16.2). Together with our partners, and until we have legislation in place, we have asked the BLM and BIA to put in place a moratorium on future oil-gas leasing in a 10 mi. protection zone around Chaco Culture National Historical Park and to also ensure the protection of significant sites in the broader landscape, including the Pierre’s Community and other significant areas identified in Archaeology Southwest’s 2020 study (Reed 2020).

The All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) has spoken out on several occasions, issuing several resolutions calling on the BLM and BIA to work
closely with Pueblo people while preparing this new plan (APCG 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). The Pueblo governors also endorsed a series of measures that would go a long way toward protecting the magnificent cultural resources and modern-day residents of the Chaco area from oil and gas development, including supporting the 10 mi. protection zone around the park that would be off-limits to oil and gas development. Most recently, the APCG has partnered with the Navajo Nation in 2017 and 2019 to press the agencies for additional protections across the Greater Chaco Landscape (APCG 2017, 2018).

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI 2017) passed a resolution in October 2017 calling on the Department of the Interior to issue a moratorium on all oil and gas permitting and leasing in the Greater Chaco Canyon Region to protect traditional cultural properties and sacred sites in the region until the BLM and BIA initiate and complete an ethnographic study of cultural landscapes across the Greater Chaco region and finish the management plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). I support the NCAI’s resolution and amplify their call for a moratorium on new oil-gas development across Greater Chaco.

Many groups and individuals in New Mexico have worked tirelessly to support this process. US senators Udall and Heinrich and Congressman Ben Ray Lujan have played an instrumental role in working to find a solution to protect the Chaco Canyon area—recognizing that they must balance all of their constituents’ diverse interests. Moving forward, we will continue to need strong leadership from our elected representatives to see this process through.

Archaeology Southwest has continued intensive dialogue with BLM and BIA as they finalize the draft RMP amendment and EIS for the Greater Chaco Landscape. I feel strongly that the standard approach to cultural resource protection, as prescribed by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other laws, is not working in this highly sensitive area. The Section 106 approach calls for cultural resources (historic and archaeological sites, traditional cultural places, and sacred sites) to be identified and then either avoided by construction activities or to have adverse impacts on resources mitigated through various measures. This approach has resulted in a highly dissected landscape that is crisscrossed by oil-gas roads and pipelines and various wells pads and other facilities (figure 16.6). These activities have severely impacted the ancient Chacoan landscape.

In 2018, Archaeology Southwest engaged researchers Richard Friedman and Sean Field to conduct analysis of the BLM-procured LiDAR data (and other remote sensing data) from 2016 (Reed, Friedman, and Field 2019). This project was supported by the Conservation Lands Foundation and focused primarily
on oil-gas lease parcels from the BLM’s March 2018 sale, as well as the Bis sa’ani Chacoan Community located roughly 5 mi. northeast of Chaco. A variety of landscape features were identified by the analysts across the lease areas and in the Bis sa’ani Community area. Most were determined to be of modern or recent historic origin. Nonetheless, several features of possibly ancient, Chacoan origin were found (figure 16.7). Several landscape features were identified within the Bis sa’ani Community that line up with a road-related feature recorded during the late 1970s work (Breternitz et al. 1982). These features show evidence of relatively recent vehicular activity (used as a two-track road). However, given the match to the previously identified road segment, it seems likely they are part of a Chacoan road through the Bis sa’ani area. In several of the lease parcels, anomalous linear features were detected that do not appear to represent modern or historic phenomena. Additional fieldwork is necessary to confirm or refute the ancient origin of these features. Nevertheless, this limited LiDAR project makes clear the value of using these data to assess lease parcels across Greater Chaco (Reed, Friedman, and Field 2019).

Figure 16.6. Aerial photograph showing the crisscrossing roads and oil-gas facilities that are impacting the Greater Chaco Landscape. Photo by Paul Reed.
Finally, Archaeology Southwest worked with the Pueblo of Acoma to complete a limited ethnographic study of a portion of the Greater Chaco Landscape in 2018 (Anschuetz et al. 2019). The project involved visits to Fajada Butte in Chaco Canyon (figure 16.8), sites along the Great North Road including Twin Angel’s Pueblo, Halfway House, and the Pierre’s Community, the Bis sa’ani Community northeast of Pueblo Bonito, Pueblo Pintado, oil-gas lease areas within the 10 mi. protection zone, and additional areas. Goals of the Acoma Project included having the Acoma team visit the landscapes of Greater Chaco that are threatened by development and collecting appropriate data to help inform BLM and BIA as they continue managing oil-gas development across the GCL. Project findings indicate the presence of Acoma TCPs and cultural landscapes that have not been previously identified or discussed.

Adding to my list of recommendations above, then, I encourage BLM and BIA to require oil-gas lease holders to use LiDAR and other remote...
sensing data that are currently available to assess tracts of land to be developed. This approach should complement more conventional archaeological work under Section 106 of the NHPA and reduce the risk of unidentified cultural resources being damaged or destroyed during oil-gas development. In addition, the preliminary findings of the Acoma Ethnographic Project make clear that the requirements of Section 106 of the NHPA and Bulletin 38 are not being adequately met with the standard, archaeological approach to fieldwork and reporting. It is critically important to get Native American teams into the field to document cultural resources prior to clearances being issued for oil-gas and other development across the Greater Chaco Landscape.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is clear that the BLM and BIA should protect larger pieces of the remaining landscape, particularly areas surrounding Chacoan great house communities and areas identified by Native American Pueblos and Tribes as
TCPs or sacred sites. With the advances in various technologies, as described in this volume by Ruth Van Dyke, Anna Sofaer and her colleagues, Carrie Heitman and Sean Field, and others, it is abundantly clear that archaeologists completing survey work prior to oil-gas development are not identifying all of the archaeological and cultural resources and phenomena on the landscape and that continuing with the current approaches to resource protection will result in losses of additional, undocumented cultural resources and further impacts to the Greater Chaco Landscape. Moreover, consistent with obligations under NHPA, NEPA, and related laws, the agencies must incorporate and utilize the significant new information about the Greater Chaco Landscape that has been generated internally and provided to them by the Tribal and archaeological communities. The Acoma Ethnographic Project recently completed (Anschuetz et al. 2019) amply demonstrates the need for Native American experts to identify their own cultural resources in the field, prior to development. The use of LiDAR and other remote sensing data should be required of all oil-gas developers prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Lastly, with funding finally in place for two cultural-ethnographic studies by Tribes, we ask the agencies to delay finalization of the RMPA and EIS documents until preliminary results from this very important work can be incorporated into the planning documents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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