

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

July 10, 2017

Dear Secretary Zinke,

As Christian leaders of Creation Justice Ministries, Mennonite Central Committee, The Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Bears Ears matter. We are people of deep faith caring for our fellow human beings, the land and the environment. Creation Justice Ministries ecumenically brings together dozens of Christian communions/denominations to share in common mission to protect, restore, and rightly share God's creation.

As Christian leaders, we are committed to taking an active role in the work of remembering, repenting, healing from, and *never repeating* historic racial injustices. Collectively, we are deeply concerned about the proposed action to reduce the size of the Bears Ears monument and the process being utilized.

For far too long, stewardship of God's creation has not been a priority, and the Native American culture, history, wisdom to care for their ancestral lands has been dismissed. The [December 2016 Proclamation](#) establishing a Bears Ears National Monument was more than historic, it was/is crucial in the process of attempting to remedy the sins that even we as Christians have inflicted upon our Native American brothers and sisters. We confess these sins. We lament the trauma our ancestors have inflicted – which continue to scar the abused and the abusers. We commit to change by engaging in the uncomfortable work of dismantling racism.

For this reason, we stand by and affirm the positions of officially elected leadership of the Hopi, Navajo, Ute Indian, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni regarding their conservation recommendations for the Bears Ears National Monument. We respect the tribal appointees who make up the officially appointed primary advisory body for management of the monument: The Bears Ears Commission. After the first meeting of the Bears Ears Commission, their first public request was for the Trump Administration to uphold the existing monument boundaries and guidelines.

We support the Bears Ears Coalition statement of June 12, 2017: "Leaving the Monument fully intact is also the correct result as a matter of right and wrong. The wonderful Bears Ears National Monument is a gift to the citizens of the United States and the world. Once experienced, the physical beauty of the red-rock terrain and the cultural power of the Old People stay with visitors forever." The Bears Ears National Monument is a place for story-sharing, for truth-telling, for relationship-building, and for healing.

One of the most basic and important things we can do to rectify racial injustice is to respect tribes' officially elected leaders, and to carefully listen to their wisdom about stewardship of their ancestral land.

We strongly disagree with this Administration's attempts to undermine or diminish the leadership of the Bears Ears Commission. We were dismayed at your interim recommendation to President Trump for the Bears Ears National Monument to be downsized or re-classified, contrary to the Bears Ears Commission's advice. This Monument deserves to be upheld. It is of national spiritual significance. It is the first and only national

monument created through the leadership of tribes, and primarily focused on the heritage of Indigenous Peoples. It tells the stories of Indigenous Peoples' resilience in times of danger.

We urge you to reverse course, and listen to the Bears Ears Commission and to the thousands of supporters for the Bears Ears Monument. We recognize the complexity of this matter, but as God's children we must honor and respect our Native American brothers and sisters, their culture and their heritage. We are compelled to right the wrongs that they have endured at our hands. We employ you to keep the Bears Ears Monument intact. This is the very least we can and should do.

Respectfully,

J. Ron Byler  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Shantha Ready Alonso  
Executive Director  
Creation Justice Ministries

#### **ABOUT OUR COMMUNIONS**

*Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a ministry of Anabaptist churches including those in the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ denominations. MCC works in more than 50 countries by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice.*

*The Episcopal Church is comprised of 2 million people of faith spanning 17 countries and is a member province of the Anglican Communion, the third largest Christian communion in the world.*

*The United Church of Christ (UCC) is comprised of 5,000 churches and nearly 900,000 members. With roots that extend to the Puritans and the Pilgrims, the UCC is today a diverse community of Christians united in seeking a just world for all.*

*The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.7 million members in more than 9,300 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region.*

*More than two million people call the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) their spiritual home. Worshiping in 10,000 Presbyterian congregations throughout the United States, they engage the communities in which they live and serve with God's love.*