



Greater Chaco Coalition Primer

The Greater Chaco region is a living and ancient cultural landscape. A thousand years ago, Chaco Canyon in northern New Mexico was the ceremonial and economic center of the Chaco Cultural Landscape, an area encompassing more than 75,000 square miles of the Southwest in NM, AZ, CO and UT and sacred to Indigenous Peoples. Today, Chaco Canyon is a National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site, considered one of the most important archaeological sites in the Americas, yet the vast majority of the Greater Chaco Landscape is leased to oil and gas activities. Indigenous People, primarily Pueblo and Navajo (Diné) peoples, sacred cultural sites, precious water resources, and the area's biodiversity are all under a grave and growing threat from fracking.

For over a century, the federal government has quite literally treated the Greater Chaco Landscape like a national energy sacrifice zone. Victim to large-scale resource exploitation, including a history of Navajo displacement and land theft, the Greater Chaco region has been carved into a complex checkerboard of federal, state, private, and Navajo allotment land. A maze of federal and state agencies control the area, allowing for oil, gas, and mining companies to exploit communities, as well as layers of law, regulations, and oversight agencies. New Mexico is now the second biggest oil producer in the United States, hosting the world's largest oilfield in southeast New Mexico and west Texas, with more than 91% of available lands in the Greater Chaco area leased for fracking.

Fracking disproportionately harms Indigenous communities due to their unique relationship to the land and water, and their exposure to the harmful effects of colonization and racism. Diné families experience fractures in their community including increased truck traffic, road degradation, infrastructure decline and failures, increased noise and light pollution, health impacts, decreased air and water quality, degrading water quality, unsafe conditions for livestock, destruction of sacred sites, and other associated impacts. Fracking spills, leaks, and explosions happen daily. Still without proper protections, the region is now host to a variety of boondoggle scams to propel the oil and gas industry, including false-promises of "clean" hydrogen and efforts to turn toxic radioactive fracking waste into drinking water.

For decades, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management has skirted updates to its Farmington, Rio Puerco, and adjacent field offices' resource management plans that would finally address the cumulative impacts of industrialized fracking on the Greater Chaco Landscape. Despite dozens of public meetings, two million protest comments, and countless resolutions calling for restraint, federal and state agencies continue to rubberstamp more fracking with no safeguards in place to protect the region's cultural landscape and without adequate consultation with the public, Tribes, Navajo Chapters, and impacted communities. In response to continued calls for action, Secretary Deb Haaland announced the "Honoring Chaco Initiative" in 2021 - a new collaborative process that promises to finally deliver meaningful cultural landscape protection in Greater Chaco. However, despite the ongoing "Honoring Chaco" process, the Bureau of Land Management continues to approve hundreds of new oil and gas wells and related activities, including the re-issuance of 45,000 acres of oil and gas leases in August 2022.

One thing is certain: Greater Chaco cannot be honored while it continues to be sacrificed.

Greater Chaco Coalition Platform

In approving wide-scale fracking on public and Tribal lands, the Department of Interior has failed to consider:

- The health, wealth, and wellness of impacted communities, especially that of local Navajo communities, Chapter Houses, and Allotment Land Owners.
- The Greater Chaco Landscape expands far beyond Chaco Culture National Historical Park and immediate vicinity and holds spiritual and cultural significance to all Indigenous peoples who are rooted in Chaco culture, not limited to the Navajo Nation.
- The long-term and cumulative impacts of fracking on health, land, water, air, and climate.

The Greater Chaco Coalition (Frack Off Chaco) operates by the [Jemez Principles](#) for democratic organizing and is a collaborative effort between Indigenous community leaders, Native groups, non profits, and public lands and water protectors to advance the following platform:

1) Restore the balance. No more fracking; clean up the mess

The federal fossil fuel program is fundamentally broken. Relief is needed, no more leasing or drilling across the Greater Chaco Landscape. Land management decisions must center on protection of integrity of the cultural landscape. The Greater Chaco Landscape has been an energy sacrifice zone for far too long, and the legacy of pollution, including abandoned, orphaned, and non-producing wells must be addressed and fully remediated.

2) Meaningful Tribal consultation and consent at every stage of decision-making

The “check the box” culture of consultation must end, and co-management must begin. Any review, policy, or planning efforts must respect timelines of Tribal-led ethnographic studies and center meaningful Tribal consultation, including free, prior, and informed consent, extended to traditional Navajo Chapters, the Navajo Nation, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, and all Tribes who trace lineage to these sacred lands or to Chaco culture.

3) Protect the health, wealth, and wellness of communities; just transitions

Community protections must be put in place to assure quality of life. Just transition efforts and community infrastructure investments must be funded by federal and state agencies to reconcile impacts of sacrifice zones and environmental racism. Fair share distribution and reparations for Tribal and Navajo allotment landowners must be fairly revisited.

4) Assure environmental justice, address and repair cumulative impacts

Greater Chaco protection cannot be defined by lines on a map, it is defined through the holistic view of the land, air, water, and the sacred. Before issuing fracking permits and leases, agencies must assure suitable protections for the region by first comprehensively analyzing the cumulative impacts of existing and potential oil and gas activities on public health, local quality of life, cultural resources, water resources, air quality, environmental and social justice issues, and climate change.

Learn more at: www.frackoffchaco.org