



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

March 27, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) has been closely following the Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (RMPA/EIS) being prepared by Bureau of Land Management Farmington Field Office, in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The RMPA/EIS will have important implications for lands in the San Juan Basin of northwestern New Mexico, including those near Chaco Culture National Historic Park.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world. The greater Chaco landscape is of tremendous concern to our membership, and to many others interested in the cultural heritage of North America.

The draft RMPA/EIS is now in a 90-day public comment period which began on February 28, 2020, coinciding closely with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States. Threats and disruptions associated with this pandemic make meaningful public participation in the planning process impossible. In addition, we object to the schedule and rushed effort by the BLM/BIA in developing the related programmatic agreement. The processes are integrally linked. For these reasons, we join the New Mexico Congressional Delegation in asking that the Department extend the RMPA/EIS comment period by at least 120 days so that it may be completed in an orderly and effective manner after this crisis has passed.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Watkins".

Joe Watkins, Ph.D., RPA
President