

April 29, 2010

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
702 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John T. Salazar
United States House of Representatives
326 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Bennet and Representative Salazar:

On behalf of the following organizations and the thousands of Americans that comprise our members nationwide, we write in support of the permanent designation of the approximately 4,726-acre Chimney Rock Archaeological Area in southwestern Colorado's San Juan National Forest as a national monument. Chimney Rock is arguably the most important cultural site managed by the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service).

Exhibiting many of the features that earned Chaco Canyon a World Heritage Site listing, Chimney Rock was recognized as a National Historic Landmark in 1970. Between A.D. 925 and 1125, the ancestors of modern Pueblo Indians occupied Chimney Rock and the surrounding lands, and the site remains of cultural significance to many descendant tribes. Hundreds of cultural elements surround Chimney Rock's soaring twin rock spires, including the Great House Pueblo. Chimney Rock is the most northeasterly and highest (7,600 feet) Chacoan site known to exist. Every 18.6 years the moon, as seen from the Great House Pueblo, rises between the rock spires during an event known as the Northern Lunar Standstill.

Chimney Rock has no designation equal to its cultural significance. Consequently, it suffers from many of the problems that plague the Forest Service's Heritage Program, including the lack of a clear cultural resource preservation mandate and inadequate funding. Additionally, neither the Forest Service Organic Act nor the National Forest Management Act require the Forest Service to inventory, plan for or otherwise protect cultural resources under its care, including significant sites like Chimney Rock. Finally, the Forest Service dedicates no program funding for Chimney Rock beyond paying the salaries of two federal employees who spend only part of their time there. Without the assistance of the non-profit Chimney Rock

Interpretive Association, which operates the site through a Forest Service special use permit, Chimney Rock would likely deteriorate from neglect.

A national monument designation would be a win-win for this nationally important cultural site, the community, tribes and the public. A designation would attract public attention and increase heritage tourism to Archuleta County and the Four Corners area. Historically, national monument designations also have brought increased federal funding and resources, thereby providing for higher quality visitor facilities, more interpretation, better public education and improved site stabilization. Finally, the designation would provide the Forest Service with a clear mandate to identify and protect Chimney Rock's archaeological and cultural values.

For these reasons, our organizations believe that a national monument designation would bring Chimney Rock the recognition, resources and protection it so clearly deserves. Therefore, we request the introduction of legislation in the House and Senate for the designation of Chimney Rock Archaeological Area as a national monument to be managed by the Forest Service.

Sincerely,

Richard Moe
President
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Linea Sundstrom, Chair
Conservation Committee
American Rock Art Research Association

William H. Doelle
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San Juan Citizens Alliance

Athan Manuel
Director of Lands Protection
Sierra Club

Dr. Margaret Conkey
President
Society for American Archaeology

Suzanne Jones
Colorado Regional Director
The Wilderness Society

Dr. Stephen H. Lekson
Professor of Anthropology
University of Colorado
Department of Anthropology and
Museum of Natural History

cc: The Honorable Jeff Bingaman, Chair, Senate Committee on Energy &
Natural Resources
The Honorable Nick J. Rahall II, Chair, House Committee on Natural
Resources
The Honorable Tom Tidwell, Chief, U.S. Forest Service
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture