



## **WESTERN LEADERS NETWORK CALLS ON INCOMING BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AND FEDERAL LEADERSHIP TO PRIORITIZE CONSERVATION, CLIMATE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Jan. 19, 2021

**CONTACT:** Jessica Pace, [jess@westernleaders.org](mailto:jess@westernleaders.org)

Western Leaders Network, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization of more than 450 local and tribal elected officials across the Interior West, urges the incoming Biden administration, Interior Secretary Designee Deb Haaland, EPA Administrator Designee Michael Reagan and other federal agencies to take action to address climate change and conserve natural places, which are essential to the health and sustainability of western communities.

“As local and tribal elected officials, we understand firsthand the connection between the health of our environment and the sustainability of our communities, and how climate change impacts devastate our local economies and degrades our way of life,” WLN Executive Director Gwen Lachelt [wrote in a letter](#) sent today. “If we hope to address these problems, recover economically from the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure the existence of natural places for future generations, we must accelerate conservation, regulate the use and development of our natural resources, and implement policies to slow the warming of our climate.”

WLN requests that incoming President Joe Biden, Interior Secretary Designee Deb Haaland and EPA Administrator Designee Michael Reagan fully restore and strengthen protections for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase national monuments; sign an executive order to protect 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030; enact strong federal regulations to protect water quality and reduce climate change-causing methane emissions; freeze fossil fuel leasing on federal lands and waters to not only reduce climate emissions, but also create a clean and renewable energy transition plan for public lands; sign an executive order advancing environmental justice and equity across all federal agencies; and reform the Mining Act of 1872 to protect the environment and local economies from pollution from abandoned and leaking hard rock mines.

“Bears Ears National Monument is one of the most concentrated areas of cultural value in the nation, and its establishment in 2016 was negotiated with a coalition of tribal leaders,” **Regina Lopez Whiteskunk, a former Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council member and Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition Co-Chair**, said. “It is a prime example of how we can work toward achieving the 30x30 goal, and how important it is to include the input and expertise of indigenous communities. I urge the Biden administration to fully restore Bears Ears, and use it as a model going forward in conserving other culturally significant natural places.”

“It is a science-based fact that conserving more of our natural resources and our sacred and cultural places ensures we have strong biodiversity and ecosystems, food security, healthy

economies and opportunities to get outside in nature,” said **Austin Nunez, San Xavier District Chairman of the Tohono O’odham Nation in Arizona**. “In 2021 and the next four years, I urge the new presidential administration and federal decision-makers to keep future generations in mind and take meaningful action to protect our lands, air and water, and mitigate the damage done by our changing climate.”

“The San Juan Basin where I live is home to one of North America’s largest concentrations of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas and major contributor to the climate crisis wreaking havoc on western communities,” **Victor Snover, Mayor of Aztec, New Mexico**, said. “When I see my community and state experiencing dangerously high ozone days, or extreme heat and drought, there’s no question that climate solutions must be one of the forefront issues for our federal leadership and agencies over the next four years.”

Western Leaders Network is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that unites, supports and cultivates pro-conservation local and tribal officials across the Interior West to protect western lands and build healthy, sustainable and resilient communities. <https://www.westernleaders.org/>