

**Written Statement Submitted by the Pew Charitable Trusts to the
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

**For the record of the legislative hearing held on July 13, 2023
Regarding H.R. 4374**

The Pew Charitable Trusts' US Conservation project seeks to sustain biodiversity and resilient ecosystems by collaborating with policymakers, communities and businesses, Tribes, and many others.

Pew opposes H.R. 4374, the Energy Opportunities for All Act

Pew strongly opposes H.R. 4374, which would nullify Public Land Order (PLO) No. 7923, issued by the Secretary of the Interior on June 7, 2023. The PLO withdraws for 20 years over 336,000 acres of public lands surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park (NHP) in New Mexico from location and entry under the U.S. mining laws and from new leasing under mineral leasing laws. The PLO applies only to federal lands and does not include any private lands or allotments, which means that no existing leases would be prevented from being developed.

Located in the high desert of northwest New Mexico, Chaco Canyon and its surrounding landscape was the center of the Chacoan culture for over 400 years. Today, it remains a living cultural landscape and represents a spiritually and ecologically significant area to numerous Pueblos and Tribes in the Southwest. The region contains over a dozen Chacoan great houses, ancient roads, and thousands of other cultural resources and is so historically significant that portions of the park are designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of only two dozen such sites in the United States.

[Beginning in 2015](#), well before the administrative withdrawal process was initiated in 2021, Pueblo and Tribal leaders and local communities called for the landscape surrounding the NHP to be protected due to the many sacred sites located outside park boundaries. Over the past few decades, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has leased over 90 percent of federal lands surrounding Chaco Canyon for oil and gas development, leading to over 37,000 wells being drilled in the area. The resulting emissions have caused substantial harm to the health of Indigenous and other local communities, which now endure poor air quality and pollution exposure. Allowing more drilling in this area would exacerbate this dire health crisis and disregard the calls from the Pueblos, Tribes, and other localities to safeguard this area.

Support for Protection of Chacoan Region

The process leading up to the Department of Interior's decision on PLO 7923 included robust public engagement and more than [110,000 public comments](#) from people across the country in support of the 20-year mineral withdrawal surrounding Chaco Canyon NHP.

The mineral withdrawal also enjoys broad support by New Mexicans. In May 2023, Senators Ben Ray Lujan and Martin Heinrich and Representatives Teresa Leger Fernandez, Melanie Stansbury, and Gabe Vasquez – representing the entire New Mexico congressional delegation – reintroduced the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act (S.1404/H.R.3062), which would prevent new oil and gas leasing on the federal lands encompassed by the administrative withdrawal. This is the third time legislation protecting the area around Chaco Canyon has been introduced and in 2019 [the bill even passed the U.S. House of Representative with bipartisan support](#).

Further, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG)—representing the 20 Pueblo nations of New Mexico and Texas—applauded the Administration’s decision to provide a 10-mile buffer surrounding the Chaco Canyon NHP. Both the APCG and the Hopi Tribe have submitted testimony opposing HR 4374.

Conclusion

Pew strongly opposes H.R. 4374 and supports PLO 7923, which includes a 10-mile mineral withdrawal surrounding the Chaco Canyon NHP. This bill is opposed by the entire New Mexico congressional delegation, as well as the desires of the Governor and APCG. At the same time, Pew recognizes the rights of allotment holders and private landowners to develop their leases. It remains vital that Pueblo nations and other tribes, along with policymakers, continue their ongoing dialogue to build on PLO 7923 and enable lasting stewardship for the region in the future.

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