



Joseph Brophy Toledo, Pueblo of Jemez.
Photo: Stefan Wachs/New Mexico Magazine

Defending Tribal Sovereignty



SUMMER 2026

*Protecting Indigenous Heritage and
Stewardship in the Age of Energy Dominance*

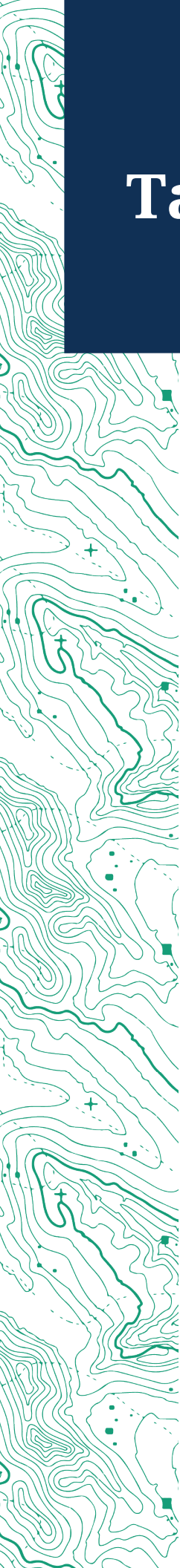


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Understanding Current Shifts and Their Implications

Over the course of two presidencies, the Trump administration has issued a series of executive actions, orders, and policies that reveal a consistent and unrelenting effort to subvert Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and the federal trust responsibility. These efforts have weakened Tribal autonomy, created uncertainty around trust obligations, and undermined government-to-government consultation between the U.S. federal government and Tribes. These policies also ignore the bedrock principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and threaten the land, water, and wildlife supporting cultural, spiritual, and Tribal subsistence rights. Collectively, these actions have sought to erode the ability of Tribes, as sovereigns, to govern their lands, waters, resources, and futures according to their own laws, priorities, and cultural values.



*Ancient petroglyphs at Caja del Rio in New Mexico.
Photo: Andrew Black*

This report is meant to inform Tribal members, Tribal leaders and organizations, policy advocates, and governmental decision-makers about the complex and systemic challenges from the Trump administration by examining recent federal actions that attack Tribal sovereignty, the trust responsibility, food subsistence, and the protection of lands, waters, and wildlife essential to Tribal self-determination. Likewise, the report maps out policy changes that degrade cultural and natural resources essential to the livelihood of Tribal and Indigenous communities. Our hope is that the report will inform both Tribes and those that seek to assist and partner with them, as well as catalyze support for and collaboration with Tribal partners to confront these grave threats.



Given this broad scope, the report advances two complementary purposes:

First,

it seeks to counter the “energy dominance” paradigm driving current federal policy by elevating a fundamentally different framework grounded in relational stewardship to the earth. For many Tribal communities, relationships to land, water, wildlife, and ecosystems are interdependent, reciprocal, and rooted in responsibilities of care, continuity, and cultural survival. This stands in direct contrast to an extractive, commodifying, and purely capitalistic approach that treats natural resources as inputs for short-term economic and geopolitical gain. By documenting how executive actions and federal natural resource management decisions reflect and operationalize this energy dominance ethic, the report highlights distinct harms to Tribal sovereignty, cultural landscapes, government-to-government relationships, and subsistence lifeways. At the same time, the report identifies the deeper existential, philosophical, and ethical threat this extractive framework poses. So long as federal governance remains anchored in a mindset of extractive energy dominance, these harms will continue to manifest across policy, agency decision-making, and legislation. This report therefore reframes these issues as part of a broader struggle over values, responsibilities, and the future of human relationships with the natural world.

Second,

the report is meant to clarify the current legal and policy landscape in order to support coordinated, informed, and values-aligned action across a broad set of actors, including Tribes, advocacy organizations, funders, policymakers, and the public. By identifying key legal developments, policy trends, and decision points, the report aims to surface concrete opportunities for intervention and collective response. At its core, this report is a call to solidarity. Confronting the systemic threats posed by the current policy trajectory requires a shared commitment to advancing Tribal sovereignty and stewardship-based approaches to land and resource governance. Readers are encouraged to engage with, support, and follow the leadership of Tribal communities, and to take action to challenge extractive frameworks and advance policies rooted in reciprocity, responsibility, and long-term ecological and cultural well-being.

While the federal actions outlined in this report appear bleak and present serious and ongoing challenges for Tribes to confront, NWF recognizes that they do not represent the longer history of Tribal resilience, self-preservation, and hope in the face of adversity, which Tribes have exemplified since time immemorial. Tribal communities are not merely impacted parties or recipients of federal aid, but sovereign governments with long histories of leadership, legal advocacy, and natural resource stewardship. Recent years have demonstrated the power of coordinated Tribal advocacy, reflecting a model of governance grounded in cultural continuity and intergenerational responsibility. Highlighting these threats must therefore be paired with recognition of Tribal agency. Federal policy may shift, but Tribal sovereignty predates the United States and endures beyond any single federal administration. The path forward requires centering government-to-government relationships, honoring federal treaty and trust obligations, and centering Tribal-led conservation and stewardship efforts.

Finally, it is important to clarify that this report does not purport to speak for Tribal communities. NWF recognizes and respects the sovereignty of Tribes, which have diverse legal, cultural, historical, and political perspectives. This report seeks to describe federal actions and their implications based on publicly available information, legal analysis, and engagement with Tribal partners. Where possible, it draws on Tribal advocacy and public statements to accurately reflect concerns raised by Tribal leaders and communities. For over thirty-five years, NWF has partnered with Tribes and Tribal organizations on wildlife and habitat conservation, focusing on supporting Tribal ecological and cultural resource protection priorities. NWF's Tribal Partnerships Program was founded upon the understanding that time and care had to be invested in building relationships of trust and respect in order to establish partnerships with Tribes to advance shared conservation priorities. Simultaneously, our core values are based upon listening to and learning from Tribes rather than following unsuccessful models based on entering relationships with predetermined goals and needs. NWF has built partnerships with Tribes based upon reciprocity and a commitment to honoring and upholding Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, FPIC principles, and the trust responsibility. [NWF's Tribal and Indigenous Partnerships Enhancement Strategy](#), enacted in 2023, aims to embed those principles by centering the core priorities of water protection, food sovereignty, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. In doing so, our hope is to create a model for other environmental organizations to more deeply engage with Tribes on ecological and cultural resource protection.





Drum circle at release of buffalo on the Wind River Reservation. Photo: NWF

Report Outline

Section I of this report examines how the administration's "energy dominance" framework is operationalized across federal policy, with particular attention to its impacts on Tribal lands, cultural landscapes, and subsistence systems. Through case studies, the section illustrates how extractive priorities, layered with procedural and funding constraints, cumulatively narrow the space for Tribal self-determination.

Section II analyzes executive orders and administrative actions that directly affect Tribal sovereignty and the federal trust responsibility, including restructuring of federal programs, rescission of prior Tribal-focused directives, and shifts in consultation practices.

Section III focuses on changes to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), highlighting how revised procedures may limit meaningful Tribal engagement and weaken protections for cultural and ecological resources.

Section IV examines the role of national monuments and other protected landscapes as critical tools for safeguarding Tribal cultural heritage, stewardship practices, and treaty-reserved resources. It also assesses emerging threats, including monument rollbacks, new legal interpretations of presidential authority, and the expanded use of the Congressional Review Act to undermine land management plans developed through Tribal consultation.

Section V addresses threats to water systems and watershed integrity, emphasizing how land use changes, regulatory rollbacks, and permitting acceleration collectively impact Tribal water rights, subsistence practices, and long-term ecologic resilience.

Finally, the report concludes with opportunities for coordinated action, outlining pathways for Tribes and their partners to advance sovereignty, uphold treaty and trust obligations, and promote stewardship-based approaches to land and resource governance.

Energy Dominance & the Development of Tribal Ancestral and Public Lands



The Trans-Alaskan oil pipeline, carries oil from the northern part of Alaska all the way to Valdez. Photo: iStock

Through a mindset of energy dominance, the Trump Administration has sought to maximize domestic energy production and exports (especially oil, gas, and coal), speed up and expand permitting for industrial activities, and remove environmental regulations and public input.¹ This approach has driven large-scale deregulatory efforts favoring fossil-fuel development.² As it has ramped up development, especially across the West, the Trump Administration has failed to acknowledge that public lands are often cultural landscapes intertwined with Tribal identity, ancestral heritage, spiritual practice, and treaty rights enshrined in federal law.³ Tribes directly manage or influence tens of millions of acres, including more than 730,000 acres of lakes and reservoirs, 10,000 miles of streams and rivers, and 18 million acres of forests. These lands and waters provide vital habitat for wildlife, including more than 500 species listed as threatened or endangered, and benefit people within and beyond the Tribal lands.

Tribes have longstanding legal relationships with the federal government grounded in the trust responsibility and treaty rights, which require meaningful consultation and protection of cultural and ecological resources.⁴ The harms of an energy dominance mindset rarely happen in isolation. When protections are rolled back and lands are opened to drilling, mining, or other extractive uses, the impacts layer on top of one another in ways that directly constrain Tribal self-determination. Environmental degradation of sacred sites, source waters, wildlife habitat, and culturally significant plants is compounded by procedural harms. These can look like truncated consultation timelines or processes that ignore FPIC principles, diminished or insufficient environmental reviews, and reduced Tribal influence upon land management decisions.⁵ At the same time, Tribal governments are often required to carry increased administrative burdens like project monitoring, engaging in repeated consultation processes, pursuing litigation to counter these harms, and filling regulatory gaps

created by weakened federal oversight.⁶ These demands upon Tribal resources strain already limited Tribal governmental capacity, particularly where chronic underfunding of federal trust obligations has been an ongoing, historical problem.⁷

These converging factors must be viewed cumulatively, as they impose structural pressure on Tribal sovereignty, which might carry consequences far beyond the current administration. Even if some of these policies and administrative threats were pulled back during the next presidency, some of the harm might persist. For example, the degradation of subsistence resources undermines food security and cultural continuity, gaps that may be hard to fill in the future; regulatory instability disrupts long-term planning and economic development; and repeated breaches of consultation commitments erode trust in government-to-government relationships beyond the current political moment.⁸ When ecological harm, administrative burdens, funding inequities, and diminished federal accountability are layered together in this way, the result is a narrowing of the practical space within which Tribes can exercise meaningful self-governance. Understanding these impacts as interconnected is essential to assessing how extractive policy shifts affect landscapes across the country and the long-term viability of Tribal sovereignty itself.

BLM's Public Lands Rule of 2024 clarified that conservation is a co-equal use of public lands under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.⁹ The rule authorized new conservation leasing tools, strengthened habitat restoration authorities, and affirmed the role of Tribal knowledge and co-stewardship in public lands management.¹⁰ It also created mechanisms for Tribes to partner with the DOI to restore degraded landscapes, protect culturally significant areas, and advance wildlife and watershed resilience alongside traditional multiple-use mandates.¹¹ In September 2025, the administration proposed to rescind the Public Lands Rule with a 60-day comment period. The Rule was rescinded in May 2026, further jeopardizing the future management of public lands important to Tribes.¹²

“*Understanding these impacts as interconnected is essential to assessing how extractive policy shifts affect landscapes across the country and the long-term viability of Tribal sovereignty itself.*”



Case Studies: Energy Dominance Opening Tribal Landscapes to Development

Oak Flat (Arizona)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

-  Legal & Policy Changes
-  Funding Restrictions
-  Fast-Track Development
-  Consultation Limits

WHAT'S AT STAKE

-  Trust & Treaty Duties
-  Consultation & Consent
-  Lands & Waters
-  Cultural & Environmental Protection



Read More:

www.blog.nwf.org/2024/08/protect-oak-flat-understanding-whats-at-stake/



Photo: Tomás Karmelo Amaya

The Trump administration has advanced a controversial land exchange to facilitate the proposed Resolution Copper mine at Oak Flat (Chi'chil Bitdagoteel), a site of profound religious, cultural, and ecological significance to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other Tribes.¹³ This transfer, mandated by a late-stage rider in the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act, conveys federal land within the Tonto National Forest to a multinational mining corporation, enabling one of the largest copper mines in North America.¹⁴ The proposed mine would use block caving techniques to extract a large, high-grade copper deposit located thousands of feet underground.¹⁵ The project is expected to create a subsidence crater nearly two miles wide and up to 1,000 feet deep, permanently destroying sacred sites used for ceremonies, gathering, and cultural practices.¹⁶ Tribal Nations and organizations, including Apache Stronghold, have challenged the project in ongoing litigation, arguing that it would irreparably harm their ability to practice their religion in a clear violation of the First Amendment,¹⁷ as well as undermining federal trust and treaty obligations and key environmental protections of the area.¹⁸ The project also poses significant risks to regional water systems, as the mine is projected to require vast quantities of groundwater in a region already experiencing severe water stress.¹⁹ This development shows that the administration's energy dominance agenda prioritizes large-scale extractive development over Tribal sovereignty, religious freedom, and long-term ecological stewardship. *Oak Flat is a defining example of the tension between an extractive, resource-maximization framework and Indigenous stewardship ethics grounded in reciprocity and cultural continuity.*²⁰

Chaco Culture National Historical Park (New Mexico)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Legal & Policy Changes

 Consultation Limits

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Lands & Waters

 Cultural & Environmental Protection



Read More:

www.nwf.org/Home/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2025/11-5-2025-Chaco-Canyon-Moratorium-Revisit



Photo: iStock

The Trump administration is considering revoking a 20-year ban on new oil and gas leasing within a 10-mile buffer surrounding Chaco.²¹ This area holds deep spiritual, historical, and cultural significance to many Pueblo Nations and Hopi communities, who maintain enduring connections to Chaco as a living cultural landscape.²² As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Chaco Canyon reflects both an ancient and ongoing story of Indigenous presence, governance, and resilience throughout the Southwest.²³ The 10-mile buffer helps protect over 2,400 documented cultural and archeological sites, as well as critical wildlife habitat, air quality, and water resources for the surrounding communities and for future generations.²⁴ Despite these protections, the broader region has already experienced extensive industrialization. Over the past few decades, BLM has leased [over 90 percent](#) of federal lands surrounding Chaco for oil and gas development,²⁵ with over 37,000 wells [drilled](#) and a sprawling network of roads exceeding [15,000 miles](#).²⁶ Revoking the buffer would further entrench an energy dominance approach by opening one of the most culturally significant landscapes in the US to additional extraction, deepening impacts on Tribal communities.²⁷

Ambler Road and Mining Projects (Alaska)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

 Legal & Policy Changes

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Consultation & Consent

 Lands & Waters

 Food Sovereignty & Wildlife



Read More:

www.sierraclub.org/sierra/fight-against-ambler-road-alaska-far-over



In October 2025, the Trump administration reauthorized the Ambler Industrial Road, a proposed 200-mile gravel route stretching across northwest Alaska.²⁸ The road is intended to support large-scale extraction of copper, zinc, and other minerals by providing industrial access through remote and currently undeveloped lands.²⁹ The route would cross hundreds of streams and wetlands and traverse the southern foothills of the Brooks Range, cutting through intact ecosystems that are critical to subsistence lifeways.³⁰ Alaska Native communities have consistently opposed the project due to its anticipated harm to wildlife migration, water quality, and access to traditional hunting and fishing areas for subsistence use. The road would intersect with key caribou migration routes and increase industrial traffic, noise, and pollution in areas that have remained largely undisturbed.³¹ Indigenous groups have also raised concerns about inadequate consultation and the cumulative impacts of expanded mining activity facilitated by the corridor.³² The reauthorization of Ambler Road reflects a broader energy dominance strategy that prioritizes industrial access and resource extraction over the protection of subsistence systems and cultural landscapes. The Ambler Road, and other critical mineral mining proposals, reveal an increasing moral dilemma: these minerals are important for our transition to clean energy technologies to address climate change, but also threaten human and wildlife communities. Ultimately, they pose difficult, ethical decisions about the scale of mining needed to meet clean energy goals while safeguarding lands central to Tribal sovereignty when selecting locations for development projects.³³

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Alaska)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Legal & Policy Changes

 Consultation Limits

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Consultation & Consent

 Lands & Waters

 Food Sovereignty & Wildlife



Read More:

www.nwf.org/Home/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2025/4-29-2025-Arctic-Refuge-Legislation-Protects-Wildlife



Photo: iStock

Under the Trump administration, the DOI has finalized plans to open the entire coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — roughly 1.5 million acres — to potential oil and gas drilling.³⁴ This plan reverses prior decisions and advances long-standing Trump policy goals aligned with expanding domestic resource extraction, including in the Arctic.³⁵ The coastal plain, known as the 1002 Area, is ecologically and culturally indispensable for many Indigenous communities.³⁶ It has served as the primary calving and nursery grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd and provides habitat for polar bears, migratory birds, and other wildlife. For the Gwich'in people, the area is known as *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit* ("The Sacred Place Where Life Begins"), reflecting its central role in their traditional subsistence practices, food systems, culture, and spiritual life.³⁷ Opening the Refuge to drilling threatens to disrupt caribou migration and calving patterns, with cascading impacts on food security and cultural continuity for Indigenous communities that have depended on these systems for millennia.³⁸ *This policy shift exemplifies the administration's energy dominance framework by prioritizing short-term extraction over long-term ecological integrity and Indigenous stewardship, further intensifying the existential and ethical tensions at the core of these decisions.*³⁹



Executive Actions and Orders Impacting Tribal Sovereignty



Photo: Adobe Stock

Federal Trust Responsibility

The federal trust responsibility is a longstanding legal doctrine in U.S. federal law grounded in treaties, statutes, executive orders, and Supreme Court precedent.⁴⁰ It reflects the unique government-to-government relationship between the US government and Tribes and imposes enforceable obligations on the United States.⁴¹ At its core, the trust responsibility requires the US federal government to:

1. honor treaty and statutory commitments, including the protection of Tribal lands, waters, hunting and fishing rights, and other reserved rights;
2. engage in meaningful government-to-government consultation following FPIC principles before taking actions that affect Tribal interests;
3. protect Tribal lands, resources, and cultural heritage from harm; and
4. administer federal programs in good faith, ensuring that funding, services, and decision-making structures support Tribal self-determination instead of undermining it.⁴²

While the concrete application of the trust responsibility may vary depending on statutory and treaty language, courts have repeatedly recognized

that federal agencies must act with fiduciary care when managing Tribal assets and interests.⁴³ Recent executive actions and administrative shifts raise serious concerns under this doctrine, including:

1. the rescission of executive orders aimed at strengthening Tribal self-determination;
2. restructuring of Indian Affairs agencies, policies, and actions;
3. funding freezes and expedited permitting processes that may disrupt consultation processes;
4. a shift in decision-making authority that may weaken Tribal access to federal resources;
5. exposing trust lands, treaty-reserved resources, and culturally significant sites to environmental degradation; and
6. actions that otherwise undermine the federal government's obligation to act in good faith and in the best interests of Tribes.⁴⁴

Understanding the federal trust responsibility is essential to analyzing the legal and policy implications of the actions described in this report because this responsibility is a non-discretionary binding legal obligation upon the U.S. government.

First Term of Trump's Administration

Monument Reductions and Antiquities Act Rollbacks

FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Executive Actions
- Legal & Policy Changes
- Consultation Limits

WHAT'S AT STAKE

- Trust & Treaty Duties
- Consultation & Consent
- Lands & Waters
- Cultural & Environmental Protection



In 2017, the Trump administration issued presidential proclamations dramatically reducing the size of Bears Ears National Monument by approximately 85% and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by nearly half. These actions followed Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's review of national monuments under Secretarial Order 3349 ("American Energy Independence"), which prioritized energy development and resource extraction. The reductions exposed sacred sites and cultural landscapes to potential extraction and looting while undermining a historic model of Tribal-led conservation and government-to-government collaboration. The Biden Administration reversed both of these rollbacks.

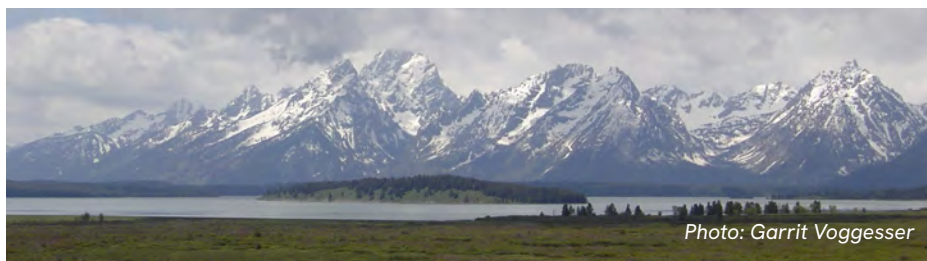
Executive Order 13783 "Promoting Energy Independence & Economic Growth." ⁴⁵

FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Executive Actions
- Legal & Policy Changes
- Fast-Track Development
- Consultation Limits

WHAT'S AT STAKE

- Trust & Treaty Duties
- Consultation & Consent
- Cultural & Environmental Protection



EO13783 directed federal agencies to review and roll back regulations that could "burden" domestic energy development, including oil, gas, and coal. While framed as economic policy, the order accelerated leasing and infrastructure development across public lands, some of which overlapped with Tribal ancestral territories and treaty-reserved use areas. The order deprioritized climate and environmental considerations and contributed to expanded extractive activity without corresponding safeguards for Tribal consultation, cultural resource protection, or cumulative environmental impacts affecting Tribal communities.

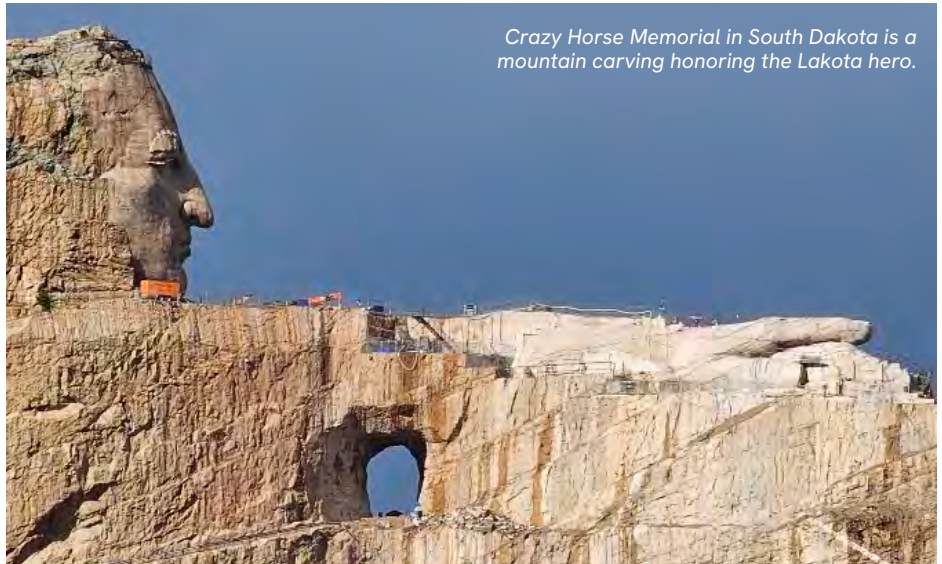
Executive Order 13807 “Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure Projects”⁴⁶

FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Executive Actions
- Legal & Policy Changes
- Fast-Track Development
- Consultation Limits

WHAT'S AT STAKE

- Consultation & Consent
- Cultural & Environmental Protection



Crazy Horse Memorial in South Dakota is a mountain carving honoring the Lakota hero.

This Order established a policy to streamline federal permitting processes for major infrastructure projects by setting strict timelines and limiting environmental review. While intended to increase efficiency, the order constrained opportunities for meaningful Tribal consultation and public participation under laws like NEPA and the National Historic Preservation Act. By compressing timelines and centralizing decision-making, the order made it harder for Tribes to engage early and effectively in decisions affecting their lands, waters, and cultural resources following FPIC principles.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) Leasing Program⁴⁷

FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Legal & Policy Changes
- Fast-Track Development

WHAT'S AT STAKE

- Consultation & Consent
- Food Sovereignty & Wildlife
- Cultural & Environmental Protection



Photo: Adobe Stock

Authorized through legislation, the Trump administration's implementation of the ANWR oil and gas leasing program marked a significant policy shift. The DOI moved forward with opening the coastal plain to drilling, despite sustained opposition from the Gwich'in Nation and others. This area is sacred and central to the Porcupine Caribou herd, which underpins subsistence, culture, and food systems. The administration's actions prioritized energy development over Tribal concerns, raising longstanding issues regarding consultation and subsistence protections.

Second Term of Trump's Administration

Rescission of Executive Order 14112 "Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations"⁴⁸

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

 Funding Restrictions

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Consultation & Consent



Photo: NWF

One of the most significant concerns for Tribes has been the revocation of a Biden-era directive aimed at strengthening Tribal self-determination and improving federal delivery of funding and services. EO 14122 sought to enhance agency accountability to honor trust and treaty obligations, including improving consultation processes and reducing administrative barriers that limit Tribal access to federal resources. Its revocation represents a rollback of these efforts, weakening institutional mechanisms to support federal-Tribal relations and signaling a weakening of federal commitments to building Tribal capacity and upholding Tribal sovereignty.⁴⁹

Executive Order 14210 "Indian Affairs Workforce Efficiency and Productivity"⁵⁰

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Consultation & Consent



Photo: Adobe Stock

EO 14210 directed federal agencies, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education, to undertake restructuring efforts under a broader "government efficiency" initiative. This required agencies to develop reorganization plans that could affect how Tribal services are administered (e.g., staffing, resource allocation). While framed as administrative reform, the order has raised substantial concerns among Tribes regarding its potential to shift priorities away from Tribal issues and disrupt services central to Tribal governance.⁵¹ By reshaping how federal Indian programs are administered without instituting clear safeguards for Tribal consultation or consent, the order risks undermining Tribal self-governance and limiting Tribal ability to effectively access and manage federal resources.

Executive Order 14148 “Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions”⁵²

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

 Legal & Policy Changes

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Consultation & Consent



This sweeping EO rescinded dozens of prior executive orders, especially those advancing equity, civil rights, and Tribal protections, including EO 14112 (above). Beyond the immediate policy impacts, this order signals a broader reorientation of federal policy priorities away from equity-focused governance and toward a narrower administrative framework. For Tribes, this rollback weakens policy infrastructure supporting meaningful consultation, equitable resource distribution, and recognition of Tribal self-determination in federal decision-making processes.

Executive Order 14253 “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History”⁵³

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Consultation & Consent



This Order directs federal agencies to remove or alter historical content on public lands that “disparages” the United States’ past and focus on narratives celebrating the country’s progress. This order seeks to rewrite and erase Indigenous stories, connections, and historical context tied to their ancestral lands, many of them currently held as public lands. By reshaping how history is presented on federally managed lands, the order undermines Tribal efforts to ensure accurate representation of their histories and weakens recognition of the cultural and legal significance of these landscapes.

Executive Order 14154 “Unleashing American Energy”⁵⁴

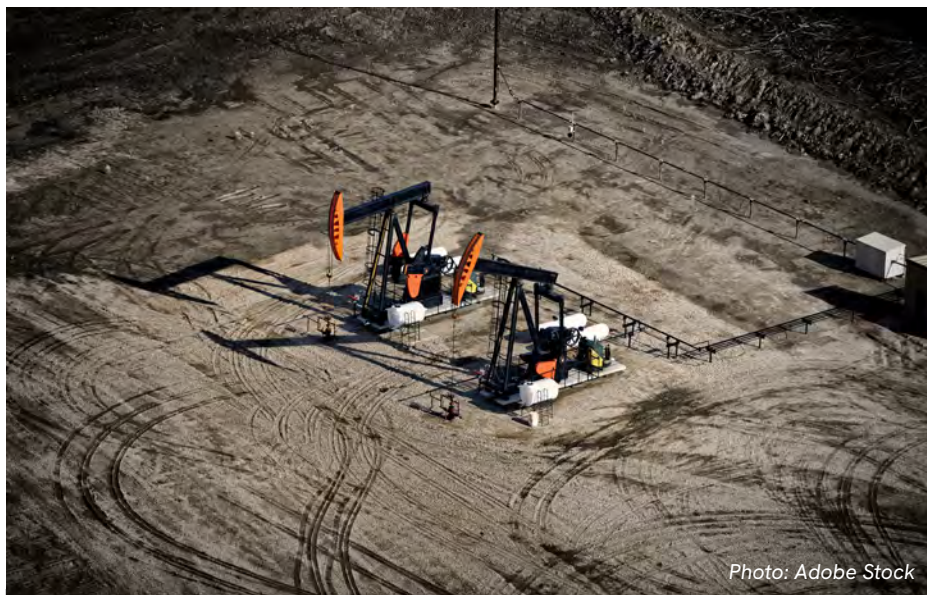
FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Consultation & Consent

 Cultural & Environmental
Protection



EO 14154 advances an aggressive energy development agenda by directing agencies to expedite permitting, reduce regulatory barriers, and prioritize fossil fuel production on public lands and waters. The order also contributed to the rescission of longstanding NEPA implementing regulations, fundamentally altering the environmental review process.⁵⁵ For Tribes, these changes can have significant implications, including accelerated permitting and reduced environmental oversight that might limit opportunities for consultation, increased risks to sacred sites and subsistence resources, and the marginalization of Tribal input in decisions affecting ancestral lands and treaty resources.



National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Changes and Implications

NEPA is a foundational environmental law requiring federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of major federal actions and consider alternatives before proceeding.⁵⁶ NEPA also serves as a key procedural mechanism through which Tribal Nations can engage in decision-making processes affecting their lands, resources, and cultural sites.⁵⁷ Recent changes to the DOI's implementation of NEPA represent one of the most significant procedural shifts in federal environmental review in decades.⁵⁸ Following the rescission of the Council on Environmental Quality's government-wide NEPA regulations and Executive Order 14154 (above), DOI has transitioned most of its NEPA procedures from binding regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations to a non-regulatory NEPA Handbook.⁵⁹ This shift increases agency discretion, narrows the scope of required analyses of environmental effects to those deemed "reasonably foreseeable" with a "reasonably close causal relationship," and removes mandatory public comment opportunities for draft environmental assessments and impact statements unless otherwise required by statute. The revised framework also incorporates statutory deadlines and page limits, expands opportunities for applicant-prepared environmental documents, and eliminates certain "extraordinary circumstances" safeguards that previously limited categorical exclusions.⁶⁰

These changes have significant potential implications for Tribal sovereignty, including the management of sacred sites, water resources, wildlife habitat, and subsistence practices.⁶¹ By narrowing cumulative

and indirect effects analysis, accelerating timelines, and reducing guaranteed public participation, the revised NEPA procedures risk limiting meaningful Tribal consultation under FPIC principles. These changes could also constrain the ability of Tribes to assess downstream water impacts, threaten treaty-reserved resource rights, and create landscape-scale ecological harm. The rescission may also reduce scrutiny for projects affecting ancestral Tribal lands and subsistence resources. At the same time, the reclassification of procedures into a handbook rather than codified regulation creates uncertainty about consistency and judicial deference, potentially eroding trust and consultation obligations.⁶²

Changes to NEPA have taken place within a broader context of ongoing "permit reform" proposals in Congress, including bills that would shorten statutes of limitations, restrict judicial remedies, and further limit consideration of cumulative impacts.⁶³ This broader pattern reflects a narrative that NEPA is the primary barrier to infrastructure and energy development and should thus be curtailed. But for Tribes and frontline communities, NEPA has historically provided one of the few structured avenues for early, informed, meaningful engagement and for elevating environmental justice, subsistence, and cultural resource concerns.⁶⁴ Weakening those procedural safeguards risks diminishing transparency, public accountability, and the government-to-government processes that are foundational to Tribal Sovereignty.

The Importance of National Monuments to Tribes



*The Toadstools, Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument, Utah.
Photo: Adobe Stock*

Declared by a President using the Antiquities Act of 1906, National Monument designations seek to protect landscapes, seascapes, cultural and sacred sites, and important wildlife areas from mining, drilling, and other industrial activities.⁶⁵ Recognizing that congressional inaction often left critical landscapes vulnerable and subject to various threats, Congress gave the president authority under the Act to create national monuments through executive proclamation. Given congressional dysfunction over recent years, national monument protections have been an essential tool to protect many landscapes important and sacred to Tribes.⁶⁶

Reducing or eliminating national monument protections threatens Tribal heritage, cultural and sacred sites, landscapes, and wildlife habitat central to traditional ways of life. Many Tribes have long expressed that protecting landscapes and seascapes aligns with their responsibilities as stewards of creation, safeguarding biodiversity and water, soil, and wildlife essential for future generations.⁶⁷ Reducing protections can undermine those stewardship goals. Monument designations made after extensive consultation with Tribal

leaders and centering Tribal co-management reflect acknowledgment of Tribal sovereignty and cultural priorities. Rollbacks undermine that consultation requirement, deepening mistrust in federal land management processes.⁶⁸ As discussed below, national monuments are facing the dual threat of having existing management plans undone through the use of the Congressional Review Act and/or having their boundaries redrawn through executive proclamation.

Shrinking and Threatening National Monuments

The second Trump administration has advanced a more aggressive legal and policy posture toward national monuments, signaling a willingness to revisit and sometimes rescind Obama- and Biden-era designations and to fundamentally challenge their legal permanence. In 2025, the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel issued a controversial opinion asserting that the Antiquities Act of 1906 authorizes presidents to revoke prior

national monument designations in full, and not merely modify their boundaries.⁶⁹ This interpretation marks a shift from longstanding executive branch practice and scholarly consensus, which have held that while presidents may reduce the size of monuments, only Congress has the authority to revoke protections entirely.⁷⁰

This legal shift significantly heightens risks for Tribes. Many national monuments were designated specifically to protect culturally significant landscapes, sacred sites, and ancestral homelands, often following years or even decades of Tribal advocacy and consultation.⁷¹ By introducing legal uncertainty around the durability of these protections, the administration has opened the door to rollbacks that could expose these landscapes to extractive development driven by an energy dominance framework. The result is a threat to specific sites and a destabilization of one of the primary legal tools used to safeguard Indigenous cultural heritage and stewardship.⁷²

The Weaponization of the Congressional Review Act (CRA)

The CRA, enacted in 1996, allows Congress to invalidate recently issued federal agency rules through a joint resolution of disapproval passed by a simple majority in the Senate under expedited procedures and signed by the President.⁷³ If successful, the rule is nullified and the issuing agency is barred from promulgating a future rule that is “substantially the same,” unless Congress authorizes it.⁷⁴ While the CRA was historically used sparingly, it has emerged in recent years as a far more aggressive deregulatory instrument.⁷⁵ This has been particularly true during presidential transitions, when Congress can leverage the statute’s “lookback” window to target and invalidate rules finalized late in the previous administration. In 2025, Congress passed a record number of CRA resolutions, disproportionately targeting environmental protections and public lands management actions. Congress also advanced an expansive interpretation of what qualifies as a “rule,” reaching back to invalidate resource

management plans and other agency actions that were never previously understood to fall under the CRA’s scope.⁷⁶

This expanded use of the CRA carries significant implications for Tribes. Many of the disapproved actions involved environmental protections, public lands management decisions, and regulatory safeguards that directly affect sacred sites, treaty-reserved resources, air and water quality, and subsistence lifeways.⁷⁷ Targeted actions are often the outcome of years of government-to-government consultation in alignment with FPIC principles, which emphasize the right of Indigenous peoples to meaningfully participate in and withhold consent from decisions affecting their lands, territories, and resources. But because CRA resolutions move through Congress on a fast-track basis with limited debate, no opportunity for amendment, and minimal transparency, they can effectively override these processes, thus erasing years of environmental analysis and Tribal engagement in a matter of weeks.⁷⁸

The CRA’s “substantially the same” prohibition further exacerbates these harms by introducing long-term regulatory uncertainty. If an existing management plan developed with robust Tribal consultation and input is invalidated under the CRA, future administrations may be constrained from adopting similar protections, even where they are necessary to uphold trust and treaty obligations. In practice, this creates substantial barriers for Tribes seeking to reestablish protections for sacred and ancestral lands, as specific components of prior plans may be deemed impermissible.⁷⁹ Taken together, these dynamics undermine procedural safeguards and reflect a broader shift toward expedited, extraction-oriented decision-making, narrowing the federal government’s ability to fulfill its trust and treaty obligations and limiting Tribal sovereignty.

Case Studies: National Heirlooms Under Attack

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (Minnesota)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Fast-Track Development

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Lands & Waters

 Food Sovereignty & Wildlife

 Cultural & Environmental
Protection



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Boundary-Waters](https://www.nwf.org/Home/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2026/4-16-2026-Senate-Votes-to-Remove-Safeguards-in-Boundary-Waters)



Photo: Adobe Stock

A particularly worrying example of these dynamics can be seen in the Boundary Waters region of northern Minnesota, one of the most ecologically intact freshwater systems in North America. This area is hydrologically interconnected, with thousands of lakes and streams forming a watershed that flows north into Canada.⁸⁰ It is also part of the ancestral homelands of the Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) peoples, who retain treaty-reserved rights to hunt, fish, and gather in the region, which the federal government is obligated to respect.⁸¹ Nevertheless, federal actions have sought to reverse or weaken protections for the Boundary Waters in order to advance mining projects, such as those associated with the Twin Metals lease.⁸² These efforts have included attempts to rescind mineral withdrawal protections and revive previously canceled leases.⁸³ For Tribes, these policy shifts represent violations of their sovereignty, federally protected treaty rights, and relational responsibilities to land and water.

Efforts to advance mining in the region have been met with strong opposition from Tribal governments and advocates, who have emphasized the inadequacy of consultation processes and the failure to obtain meaningful consent under FPIC.⁸⁴ Sulfide-ore mining poses particularly serious risks in this watershed, as it has the potential to generate acid mine drainage that could permanently contaminate interconnected waterways, undermining both ecosystem health and treaty-protected subsistence practices.⁸⁵ The push to open this landscape to extraction reflects a broader pattern in which expedited legal and procedural mechanisms, including the CRA, are weaponized to advance an energy dominance agenda at the expense of Tribal stewardship and future generations.

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (Utah)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Legal & Policy Changes

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Consultation & Consent

 Cultural & Environmental Protection



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www.nwf.org/Home/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2026/2-26-26-Grand-Staircase-Escalante-CRA



Grand Staircase is yet another landscape with significant cultural and archaeological value, which local [inter-Tribal coalitions](#) have advocated to protect.⁸⁶ During its first administration, the Trump administration cut the Monument nearly in half, eliminating between 900,000 and one million acres from its original 1.9 million-acre size.⁸⁷ Like Bears Ears (see below), reducing protections made it easier for extractive industries to target the region and increased threats to Indigenous cultural resources. Shrinking these two monuments was widely seen by Indigenous communities as diminishing federal protection for lands they consider sacred homelands and repositories of ancestral history, making them more vulnerable to damage, looting, and industrial development.⁸⁸

A resolution introduced by the Utah Republican delegation through the CRA during Trump's second presidential term would overturn the monument's Resource Management Plan, violate FPIC principles, and leave wildlife habitat vulnerable.⁸⁹ It also prohibits BLM from adopting a substantially similar plan in the future, as discussed above. The management plan, developed in consultation with Tribes, incorporated the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and protection of sacred sites. It also sought to ensure that Indigenous communities would have access to their ancestral land for traditional, spiritual, and subsistence usage. If this resolution passes, it will subvert any efforts to uphold the federal government's trust responsibility and set a precedent that will create uncertainty for Indigenous self-determination across the country.⁹⁰

Bears Ears National Monument (Utah)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Executive Actions

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Trust & Treaty Duties

 Cultural & Environmental Protection



Read More:

www.nwf.org/Home/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2024/3-11-24-Bears-Ears



Photo: Adobe Stock

Bears Ears was originally designated in 2016 following an unprecedented, unified effort by the Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition, which included the Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe, and Pueblo of Zuni.⁹¹ The monument protects a vast cultural landscape rich in archaeological sites, sacred areas, ceremonial spaces, and traditional use areas that remain central to Tribal identity, spirituality, and lifeways.⁹² [The designation also marked a historic step toward co-management, as the Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition](#) partnered with previous administrations through federal consultation to come to a collective agreement that incorporated Tribal Nations into stewardship roles. This co-management plan was a direct outcome of the federal government honoring Tribal rights and the trust responsibility while recognizing the deep and enduring relationship between Tribes and their ancestral homelands.⁹³

In 2017, the Trump administration reduced Bears Ears by about 85%, shrinking it from 1.35 million acres to about 201,876 acres.⁹⁴ This action dismantled essential protections, exposing thousands of sacred landscapes and archaeological sites to mining, looting, vandalism, and off-road vehicle damage.⁹⁵ These culturally significant sites include cliff dwellings, petroglyphs, burial areas, and ceremonial locations. The reduction also opened previously protected lands to potential mining, drilling, grazing, oil and gas leasing, and other extractive uses, reflecting a prioritization of resource development over Tribal stewardship.⁹⁶ Although subsequent actions restored the monument's original boundaries, the new legal theory advanced in 2025 raises the possibility that such protections could again be reversed or eliminated entirely for Bears Ears.⁹⁷

Marine Monuments: Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument (Hawaii)

FEDERAL ACTIONS

 Fast-Track Development

WHAT'S AT STAKE

 Lands & Waters

 Food Sovereignty & Wildlife

 Cultural & Environmental
Protection



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In 2025, the Trump administration issued a proclamation opening significant portions of this vast marine monument in the Pacific (nearly 500,000 square miles) to commercial fishing within 50 to 200 nautical miles of previously protected zones.⁹⁸ This action rolled back longstanding conservation measures designed to safeguard one of the world's most intact and biodiverse marine ecosystems, which holds cultural importance to local Native communities that have [long advocated](#) for the site's protection.⁹⁹ Marine national monuments in the Pacific, including Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, hold profound cultural and spiritual meaning for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander peoples.¹⁰⁰ These ocean spaces are understood as living relatives and ancestral realms, integral to Indigenous cosmologies, navigation traditions, and food systems.¹⁰¹ Protections limiting commercial fishing have played a critical role in preserving coral reef ecosystems, sea turtles, sharks, migratory species, and biodiversity in general, while also supporting traditional subsistence practices. Opening these waters to commercial extraction introduces risks of overfishing, habitat degradation, and ecosystem imbalance, undermining both ecological resilience and Indigenous stewardship. This shift reflects a broader extension of energy dominance logic into marine spaces, where short-term economic exploitation is prioritized over long-term stewardship.¹⁰²

Additional Monuments Sacred to Tribes



Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. RGNM protects a high-desert landscape made up of deep canyons, volcanic features, and critical wildlife habitat in New Mexico.¹⁰³ For Tribal Nations, including Taos Pueblo and other Pueblo communities, the area holds deep cultural, spiritual, and historical significance, as it encompasses sacred sites, traditional use areas, and long-standing relationships to the Río Grande.¹⁰⁴ The monument has faced renewed scrutiny under extractive policy frameworks, particularly with respect to mineral development and energy infrastructure. Any rollback of protections would risk fragmenting ecosystems, degrading water quality, and disrupting access to culturally important sites.¹⁰⁵ For Tribes, these actions would potentially undermine ongoing cultural practices and stewardship responsibilities to the land.



Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. This monument in New Mexico, co-managed with the Pueblo de Cochiti, is known for its unique geological formations as well as its cultural and spiritual importance to the Pueblo.¹⁰⁶ The area includes ancestral lands, traditional gathering areas, and sacred sites. While the monument has faced access-related challenges in recent years, broader threats stem from potential policy shifts that could deprioritize Tribal co-management and weaken protections. Any movement toward reducing monument status or altering management frameworks would risk undermining Tribal sovereignty and disrupting carefully negotiated stewardship arrangements under FPIC.¹⁰⁷



Avi Kwa Ame (“Spirit Mountain”) National Monument. Designated in 2023, this monument in Nevada is sacred to multiple Tribes, including the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, and others.¹⁰⁸ The area encompasses desert landscapes, petroglyph sites, and ecological corridors that support desert bighorn sheep and other species.¹⁰⁹ Despite its recent designation, it has already been identified as a potential target for rollback under an energy dominance framework, particularly due to its proximity to areas of interest for mining and energy development.¹¹⁰ For Tribes, the monument represents a cultural sanctuary and a recognition of Indigenous leadership.



Grand Canyon National Monument expansion areas. While Grand Canyon National Park itself is long protected, surrounding areas included in recent monument designations, as well as mineral withdrawal zones, remain vulnerable. These lands in Arizona are culturally significant to numerous Tribes, including the Havasupai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, and others. One of the most pressing threats has been uranium mining near the canyon's watershed. Efforts to roll back protections or reopen lands to mining could have devastating impacts on water quality, including contamination of aquifers and springs that are vital to both ecosystems and Tribal communities. For example, the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument was designated in 2023 following extensive Tribal advocacy.¹¹¹ This monument protects nearly one million acres surrounding the Grand Canyon and is co-stewarded with input from Tribal Nations.¹¹² The monument was established to prevent uranium mining and protect cultural resources, water systems, and sacred sites. Given its direct limitations on mineral extraction, it may be particularly vulnerable under an energy dominance agenda.¹¹³ Any effort to rescind or weaken this designation would reopen the region to mining pressures, threatening both ecological integrity and Tribal sovereignty.



“For Tribes, these policy shifts represent violations of their sovereignty, federally protected treaty rights, and relational responsibilities to land and water.”

Threats to Water Resources



For many Tribes, water is both an ecological resource and a source of cultural identity and continuity, subsistence, treaty-reserved rights, food sovereignty, and self-determination.¹¹⁴ Federal actions affecting land management, energy development, and regulatory frameworks directly implicate Tribal water security in communities that are already at increased risk in terms of both water quantity and water quality standards.¹¹⁵

Downstream Communities and the Trust Responsibility

National monuments, marine monuments, and culturally significant landscapes often function as critical headwaters, aquifer recharge zones, and intact watershed systems.¹¹⁶ Rollbacks of monument protections and the expansion of extractive activities like mining, oil and gas drilling, road-building, and large-scale infrastructure risk contamination of surface and groundwater sources; increased sedimentation and erosion affecting

downstream Tribal communities; habitat degradation for culturally and ecologically important species; and fragmentation of watersheds through roads, pipelines, and industrial corridors.¹¹⁷ For many Tribes, degradation of upstream lands directly affects downstream water quality and availability, particularly where Tribes rely on subsistence fishing, hunting, and gathering practices.¹¹⁸

Numerous Tribal Nations hold treaty-reserved rights to fish, hunt, and gather in certain areas, as well as federally-recognized water rights.¹¹⁹ Federal actions that weaken environmental safeguards or accelerate development can undermine the practical exercise of these rights. These impacts may include reduced stream flows affecting fish populations; pollution that renders waters unsafe for subsistence use; and habitat destruction affecting species central to food security and sovereignty, as well as cultural identity.¹²⁰ When industry development moves forward without meaningful consultation under FPIC principles or adequate environmental review, it raises concerns about environmental harm and interferes with legally protected rights.

Clean Water Act (CWA) Rollbacks and Permitting Instability/ Uncertainty



Read More:

<https://www.nwf.org/Our-Work/Waters/Clean-Water-Act>

Recent federal policy shifts and judicial decisions affecting the scope of CWA, particularly regarding the definition of “Waters of the United States” following *Sackett v. EPA*, have narrowed federal protections for wetlands, intermittent streams, and other waters that are hydrologically connected to larger systems.¹²¹ For Tribes, these changes can result in reduced federal oversight of upstream development; increased burden on Tribes to monitor and enforce water quality protections, as well as regulatory confusion given contradictory standards; regulatory gaps affecting wetlands and ephemeral streams that are ecologically vital; and complications in Tribal Treatment-as-a-State authority and water quality standard implementation.¹²² Permitting acceleration under “energy dominance” initiatives further compounds these risks, particularly when environmental review processes are truncated or public participation is limited.

In addition, water impacts rarely occur in isolation. Monument or land protection rollbacks, expanded leasing, infrastructure corridors, and regulatory narrowing collectively contribute to watershed fragmentation and long-term hydrological stress. In areas already experiencing drought, climate change impacts, and groundwater depletion, these pressures disproportionately affect Tribal communities.¹²³ Finally, funding freezes or restructuring within federal agencies may reduce technical support, enforcement capacity, and infrastructure investment in Tribal water systems, further compounding risk.

“*When industry development moves forward without meaningful consultation under FPIC principles or adequate environmental review, it raises concerns about environmental harm and interferes with legally protected rights.*”



Photo: Adobe Stock



Conclusion

For centuries, Tribes have defended their lands, waters, and cultures from exclusion, erasure, and encroachment. The federal government intended the reservation system to assimilate Tribes and seclude them in places often described by policy-makers as “wastelands.” Today, reservations and other lands with Tribal rights are frequently places with abundant habitat and wildlife because of Tribal ecological knowledge, stewardship, and management.

In the midst of U.S. colonialism, this history of resilience and resistance has changed shape from years of active armed conflict into an era of treaty rights and government-to-government diplomacy. In recent decades, the mosaic of strategies has included intertribal coalitions, litigation, legislative advocacy, cultural revitalization, grassroots organizing, and innovative co-stewardship models. From collaborative management frameworks for national monuments and marine protected areas, to water rights settlements and environmental justice advocacy, Tribal Sovereigns continue to shape federal policy and conservation outcomes in meaningful ways.

There are concrete indicators that underscore the scale and impact of Tribal conservation leadership. Tribes steward or influence management across tens of millions of acres of land and habitat through reservations, treaty-reserved territories, co-management agreements, and cultural landscape initiatives. Tribal-led restoration efforts have reconnected rivers and revitalized fisheries through major dam removals and watershed rehabilitation projects, restoring salmon and other culturally significant species to spawning grounds after generations of blockage. Tribal wildlife departments manage and recover threatened and endangered species, reintroduce bison and other keystone

species, and implement science-based conservation plans grounded in Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Across the country, Tribes are leading large-scale habitat restoration, climate resilience planning, forest management, and water governance initiatives that benefit not only Tribal citizens but entire ecosystems and other human communities. These measurable outcomes demonstrate that Tribes are among the most effective leaders in conservation efforts.

Despite this leadership from Tribes and their partners, there has been an unrelenting and systemic threat to Tribal sovereignty from the Trump administration. This has resulted in an erosion of the trust responsibility and a cascade of impacts threatening food subsistence and the protection of lands, waters, wildlife, and cultural resources and sacred sites essential to Tribal identity and self-determination. With this report, we *propose that a paradigm shift is needed that counters the energy dominance and colonialist mindset of this administration with an approach that centers Indigenous perspectives of relational and reciprocal stewardship of our natural and cultural resources.* To avoid this needed shift in thinking will only result in additional harm. Embracing this shift will result in collaborative, or co-stewardship, approaches that will bring Tribes and their partners together with unified messaging and action that can shift and counter the anti-Tribal agenda. By clarifying the current legal and policy landscape, we support and encourage a coordinated, informed, and values-aligned effort that unites a broad set of actors from Tribes, advocacy organizations, funders, policymakers, and the public.

Above all, this report is a call to solidarity that rests on choices about our values, responsibilities, and the future of our human relationships with the natural world. Together, we can confront the current systemic threats by committing ourselves to relationships with each other that advance Tribal sovereignty and stewardship-based approaches to natural and cultural resource management.

“*By clarifying the current legal and policy landscape, we support and encourage a coordinated, informed, and values-aligned effort that unites a broad set of actors from Tribes, advocacy organizations, funders, policymakers, and the public.*”



Navajo woman in Monument Valley Tribal Park, Arizona holding an “I voted” sticker. Photo: iStock

Taking Action Together

Confronting the systemic threats posed by the current policy trajectory requires a shared commitment to advancing Tribal sovereignty and stewardship-based approaches to land and resource governance. Countering the systemic threats to Tribes will require a diversity of tactics and tools that can be advanced both individually and collectively.

These tactics should be grounded by some overarching understandings and commitments. Statements from administration officials promising to “listen,” “learn,” and prioritize Tribal consultation¹²⁴ stand in tension with the policy trajectory documented here, where expedited permitting, regulatory rollbacks, and structural changes to federal programs have constrained meaningful Tribal engagement.

We must move from a deficit mindset to an investment mindset guided by equity and a long-term vision.



How We Preserve Tribal Sovereignty



We must sustain and strengthen our commitment to contextualize history to justify action.

For instance, countering the energy dominance and colonial mindset requires an understanding of issues such as a. the historic inequity in conservation funding for Tribes; the politics of policies that consistently prioritize other issues over Tribal priorities and weaken congressional support for Tribes; the outright opposition and racism of policies flowing from the federal administration to Congress and the U.S. public; the lack of awareness of historic capacity and resources challenges to Tribes; and, ultimately, the lack of recognition of the immense amount of work and leadership of Tribes to conserve ecological and cultural resources.

We must deploy storytelling by Tribes and education about Tribal priorities and concerns, and that must lead to specific action steps.

For example, the general and rhetorical support for Tribes from decision-makers, policy leaders, and the conservation community must be pivoted to actionable support. There must be a commitment to actionable support that is resourced with human and financial capacity. The lack of resources has resulted in a paradigm of de facto Tribal exclusion.

We must have unflagging solidarity with Tribes on their conservation priorities.

Too often, support for Tribes is situational and inconsistent. It is vital that Tribes know they are not alone, that the conservation community stands by and stands up for Tribes because successfully protecting natural and cultural resources from the myriad threats of development, climate change, and the federal administration's attacks requires co-stewardship, collaboration, and unity.

How We Preserve Tribal Sovereignty

“If we don’t come together, the landscape will pay the price of our division.”

– ANDREW BLACK, TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS
DIRECTOR OF LANDS AND WATERS

We must learn from and embrace Tribal understandings of familial and communal relationships with the land, water and wildlife in order to have a more sustainable reality and equitable future.

If the country continues to embrace a dominance mindset, we will go down the same ruinous path that is leading to species extinction rates hundreds of times greater than normal. We must begin to see the land, water, and wildlife as a community to which we belong, not a commodity which belongs to us.

We must institutionalize accountability mechanisms that ensure Tribal consultation, consent, and co-management are not discretionary but enforceable and grounded in law.

We must also advance structural shifts in governance that move beyond consultation toward shared decision-making and Tribal-led stewardship. This includes embedding clear standards, timelines, and consequences across agency actions; supporting oversight through Congress and watchdog entities; and ensuring that consultation is measured by outcomes so that Tribal input meaningfully shapes decisions affecting lands, wildlife, waters, and cultural resources.

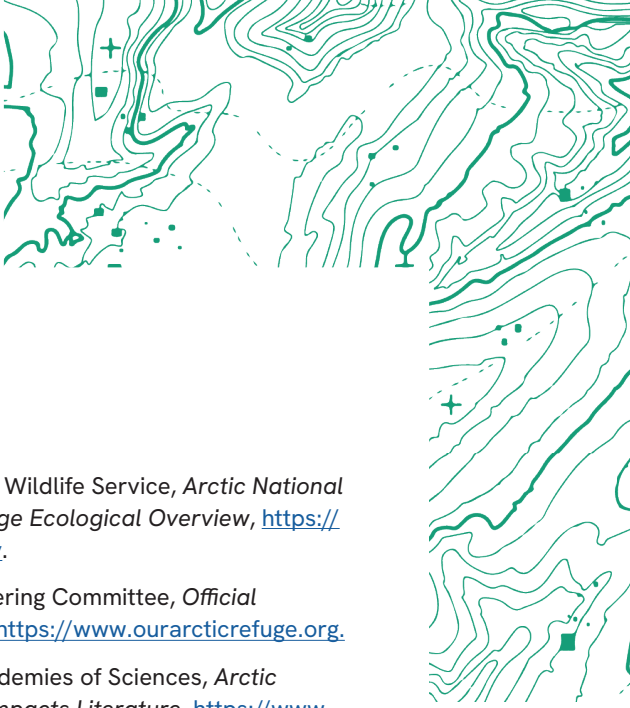
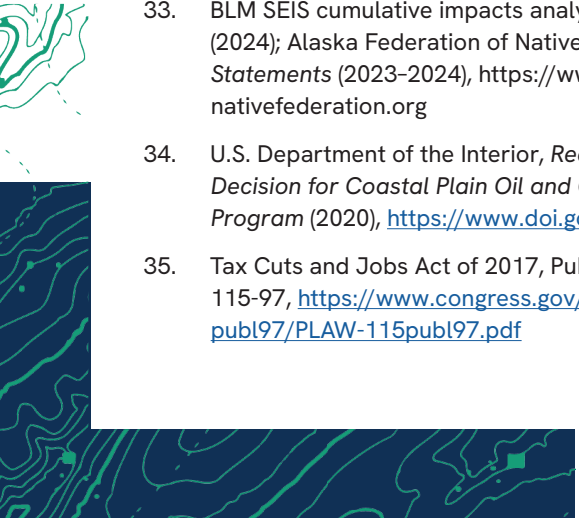
We must respect Tribal self-determination in advocacy and partnership.

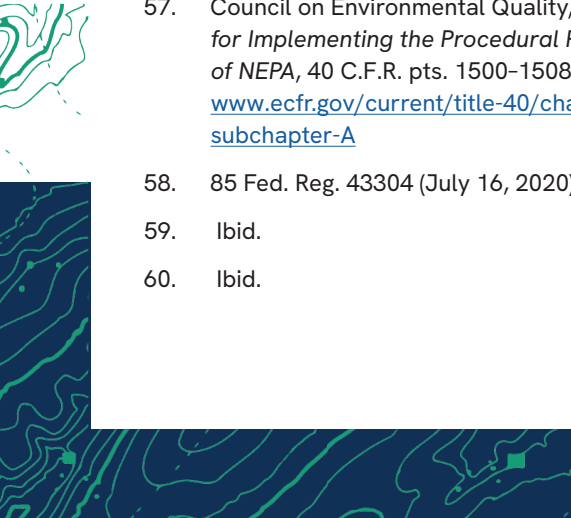
Just as Tribal Nations must be able to determine their own futures, efforts to support Tribal sovereignty should be guided by Tribal priorities. Before engaging in advocacy, policy work, or public campaigns, we need to take the time to listen, build relationships, and ask Tribal Nations how they would like allies and partner organizations to show up in support of their goals.

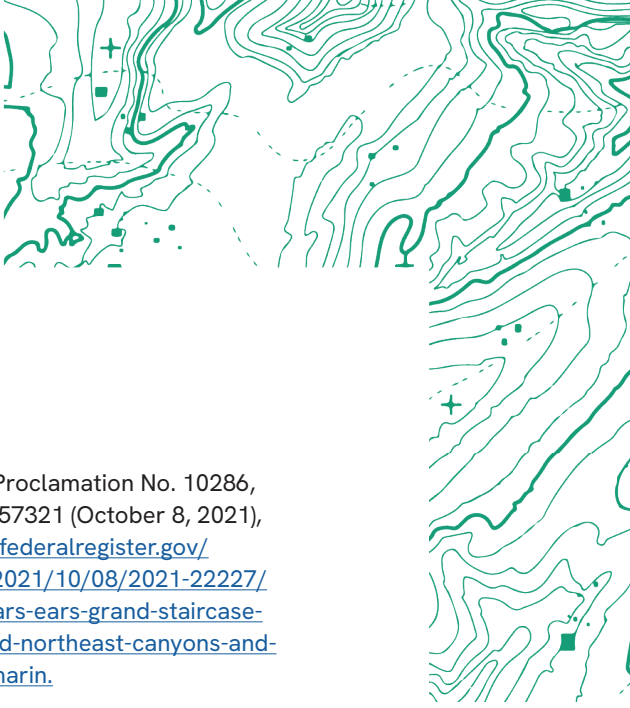
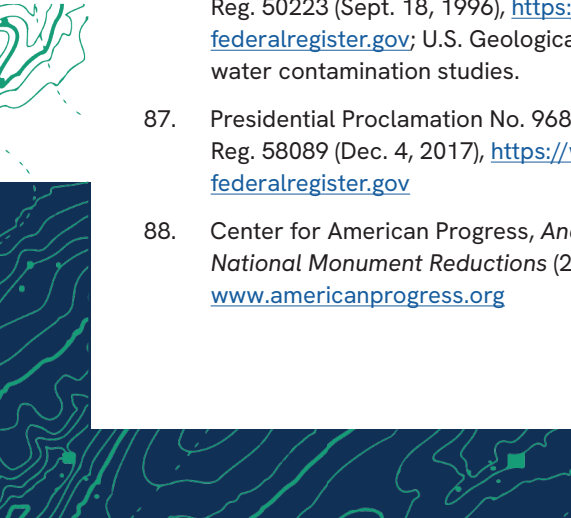
We must honor the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by recognizing, protecting, and upholding the deep and religious connections Tribes have with sacred lands, waters, wildlife, and cultural sites.

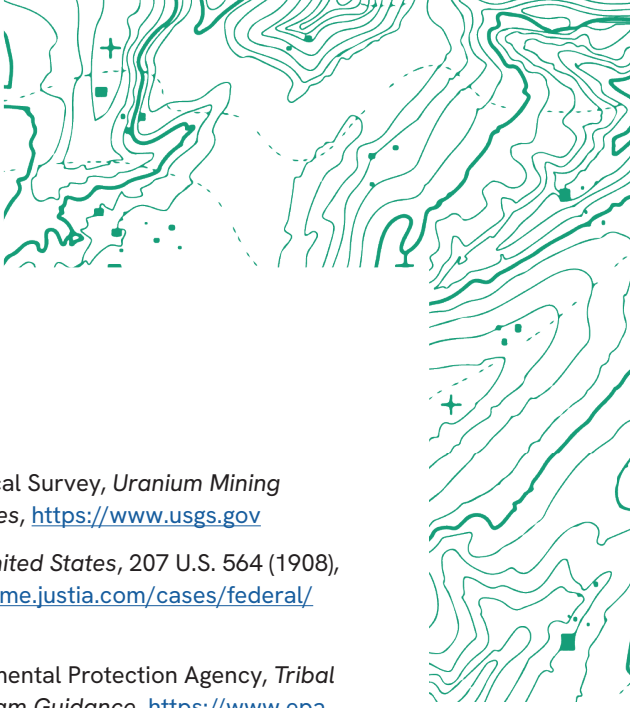
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Looking Ahead

Join Tribal Nations, Indigenous advocates, and the National Wildlife Federation in defending sovereignty, protecting treaty rights, and advancing policies that respect Tribal self-determination and strengthen Indigenous stewardship of lands and waters.



Photo: Alexis Bonogofsky

