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NCAI Urges Protection of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument 2025 Monument Management Plan

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Dear Congressmembers,

The National Congress of American Indians (“NCAI”) opposes the unprecedented use of the Congressional Review Act (“CRA”) to disapprove the 2025 Monument Management Plan for the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (“GSE RMP”), which provides land management tools crucial to protecting Tribal rights and interests. NCAI urges Congress to vote “no” on H.J. Res. 151 and S.J. Res. 109, a Joint Resolution of Disapproval under the CRA that would overturn the GSE RMP. If passed, this legislation would undo protections for the landscape and resources that support the health of Tribal communities, their traditional cultural values, and their ways of life. They would also undermine the immense Tribal efforts that helped to ensure protections for ancestral homelands were incorporated into the GSE RMP. This questionable use of the CRA would undercut the consultation and engagement undertaken by Tribal Nations, the Department of the Interior, and the public in developing the plan.

NCAI was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal governments. NCAI advises and educates the public, state governments, and the federal government on a broad range of issues involving Tribal sovereignty, self-government, treaty rights and policies affecting Tribal Nations. NCAI’s primary focus is protecting the inherent sovereign legal rights of Tribal Nations through positions directed by consensus-based resolutions. These resolutions include advancing Tribal Nations’ leadership in natural resource protection and environmental stewardship and safeguarding Tribal Nations’ cultural heritage linked to landscape and culturally significant place protections.¹

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was designated in 1996 and now protects nearly 1.9 million acres in southern Utah. To Tribal Nations affiliated with landscapes like that of Grand Staircase-Escalante, these landscapes hold immense religious, spiritual, historic, and cultural significance. The Grand Staircase-Escalante landscape includes slot canyons, stone arches, petroglyphs, footprints of the affiliated Tribal Nations’ ancestors, and springs,

¹See NCAI Resolution [#SEA-25-007](#); NCAI Resolution [#MOH-17-006](#); NCAI Resolution [#MKE-17-057](#); NCAI Resolution [#SD-15-065](#)



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plants, and animals still important to the Tribal Nations' ways of life. Tribal Nations hold a deep responsibility to protect these landscapes, their ancestral homelands and cultural resources to ensure they can maintain their ways of life for generations to come.

The GSE RMP was finalized in January 2025 after two years of public input, scientific research, and meaningful Tribal consultation. The GSE RMP contains important resource management directives that protect Tribal Nations' cultural resources and sacred places, including through the consideration of Indigenous Knowledge. Unfortunately, the legislation now before Congress would eliminate these cultural and religious protections without the same engagement and consultation that went into creating them. The GSE RMP also provides protections and guidance for decisions important to other communities with interests in the Grand Staircase-Escalante landscape, such as recreation businesses, guides, hunters and anglers, and ranchers. A vote to eliminate the GSE RMP would replace the settled expectations of Tribal Nations and stakeholders with uncertainty, conflict, and instability.

Moreover, federal planning documents, like the GSE RMP, are critical to ensuring coherent governance and management decision-making. These planning documents are therefore an indispensable source of transparency, trust, and information to Tribal Nations with sovereign interests in protecting irreplaceable cultural landscapes that they steward and continually rely upon. NCAI strongly opposes the misuse of the CRA to eliminate years of Tribal engagement in federal planning processes.

The continued misuse of the CRA to overturn land management tools sets a dangerous precedent. Until last year, Resource Management Plans, like the GSE RMP, had never been treated as rules subject to review under the CRA since its enactment in 1996. This use of the CRA creates significant legal uncertainty, irreparably impairs Tribal Nations and stakeholders' abilities to make informed land use decisions, and puts Tribal Nations' ancestral lands and important cultural sites within the Grand Staircase-Escalante landscape at greater risk of looting, vandalism, and degradation.

To Tribal Nations affiliated with landscapes like Grand Staircase-Escalante, the landscape is inseparable from who they are. The GSE RMP encourages local control and engagement by allowing Tribal Nations to carefully steward their sacred sites, educate the public about the cultural importance of the landscape, and actively participate in protecting their cultural resources. NCAI urges Congress to vote "no" on the legislation that would eliminate the GSE RMP.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Maccaro", written in a cursive style.

Mark Maccaro, President

National Congress of American Indians