



8.10.21: It is with great appreciation and gratitude, Utah Diné Bikéyah celebrates the restoration of Bears Ears National Monument to the original 1.36 million acres the Obama Administration granted back in 2016. We thank the Biden Administration and especially Interior Secretary Deb Haaland for this restoration and give much thanks to the efforts provided by many allies, partners and other nonprofit organizations.

Much cultural and spiritual significance is spread across this land as Indigenous peoples, numerous tribes and members come here for ceremonies and continue to acknowledge ancestral and sacred sites to this day. Throughout the region there are incredible landscapes that encompass vital ties to Native existence, such as stories of creation, migration, sustainability, protection and healing.

As referenced in Obama's Bears Ears Restoration Proclamation, "The traditional ecological knowledge amassed by the Native Americans whose ancestors inhabited this region, passed down from generation to generation, offers critical insight into the historic and scientific significance of the area. Such knowledge is, itself, a resource to be protected and used in understanding and managing this landscape sustainably for generations to come."

Utah Diné Bikéyah continues and always has advocated for the expansion of Bears Ears National Monument to the size suggested of 1.9 million acres. We also recognize the leadership given by the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and their persistent encouragement of this restoration. We also give a special thanks to all our funders who have supported our journey toward the restoration of Bears Ears National Monument. Your kindness and generosity have made this goal possible by lifting up the original vision, prayer, and work of the grassroots communities. We give acknowledgement to those elders, traditional people, and medicine practitioners whom we have lost during the pandemic not here to share this special day with us. We look forward now to protecting this land for generations to come.



Board members Phillip Rentz, Mary R. Benally and Jonah Yellowman sit on the top on of Moki Dugway the day of BENM restoration | PC: Meredith Benally

We at Utah Diné Bikéyah have been blessed with many gifts this Fall. And as we welcome in on these blessings, it is important to note that many of them have occurred during the month of October - an auspicious period in which signifies a shift in time and a new year.

During this month, we watch as Our Mother Earth prepares herself for change and then provide the necessary protection for those in need of refuge amidst the cold winter months. It is Navajo belief that during "Ghaaji", another term for October meaning "half", the yellow warmer months and the white colder months meet and stand back to back, finally meeting halfway.

According to our Elders, as colder winds sweep the land, this is a sacred time for Navajo deities to prepare themselves for winter ceremonies, song, and dance. Ghaaji is also a month dedicated to personal reflection and the renewal of one's spirit.

This October, UDB, much like the leaves of every Oakwood tree, has been changing, shifting and embarking on exciting expeditions. We at Utah Diné Bikéyah are thrilled to announce this Navajo New Year, our organization has been gifted with not only new staff, but also with two office spaces, and have received word for the restoration of Bears Ears National Monument.

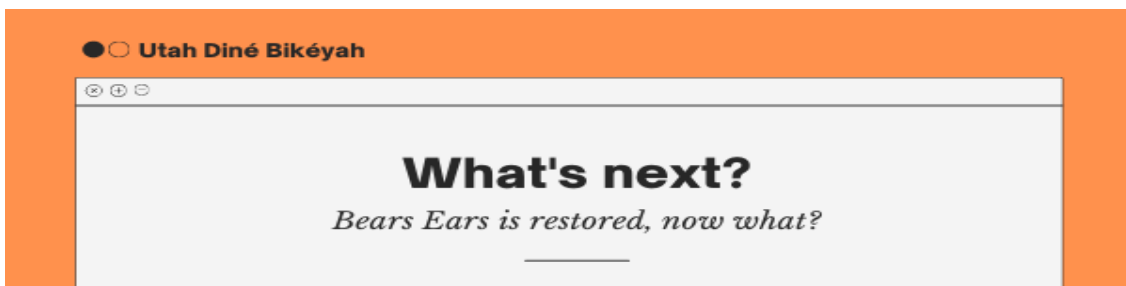
"Utah Diné Bikéyah celebrates the Bears Ears National Monument restoration. We also acknowledge the challenging times our native communities are having right now which makes this achievement bittersweet but a welcome and hopeful change for the future. We appreciate all the support and hard work of many people, organizations, leaders, and supporters who have helped advance our mission of healing the land and the people," shares Executive Director Woody Lee.

As we continue to count our blessings this year, let's come together and pray for the continuation of hope, blessings, healing and prosperity for all.



Indigenous communities, partners and allies gather at Moki Dugway to celebrate the restoration of BENM.

PC: Ida Yellowman



As we applaud the restoration of Bears Ears National Monument, there is still more we need to accomplish. Further items of business include bringing awareness to the toxic and radioactive waste chemicals emplaced in White Mesa, Utah.



Indigenous communities gather together to rally against Uranium mining | PC: Tim Peterson

About a mile out from Bears Ears, the White Mesa Mill is known as the United States' only operating conventional uranium mill.

Owned and operated by Energy Fuels, a Canadian corporation, the mill processes uranium from multiple mines across the Colorado Plateau which also includes radioactive waste from contaminated sites across Northern America.



PC: Tim Peterson



To put things in better perspective, this toxic and radioactive waste is about three miles away the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's White Mesa community on Highway 191. Which is quite literally too close for comfort.

Most recently, UDB joined Grand Canyon Trust to bring awareness to this issue at hand via conference and spiritual walk. The event encompassed speeches from Indigenous leaders and experts working to protect our collective land, water, culture, and people from uranium contamination.



PC: Tim Peterson

"From what I've seen this area is very invested in uranium as a part of their culture... as a part of their nationalistic identity... You can even call it sort of a pride in American militarization and security. This has gotten to the point where historically the past San Juan County Commissioner would wear a bolo tie with a piece of uranium on it. He would wear it to these county commission meetings with other Natives around and then he'd be like oh look I'm wearing this and it's not doing anything to me... And you know what? He eventually died because of that uranium bolo. It killed him because he exposed himself directly... And I'm not sure how many other examples of proof we need to present in order to make a change," Angelo Baca, UDB's Cultural Resource Coordinator shares.



To better understand our fight against uranium mining and collective mission to protect White Mesa, [click here](https://www.grandcanyontrust.org/white-mesa-uranium-mill): <https://www.grandcanyontrust.org/white-mesa-uranium-mill>