Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to share the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s strong support for the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act (S. 1079) introduced by Senators Tom Udall (D-NM) and Martin Heinrich (D-NM). My name is Tom Cassidy, and I am the Vice President for Government Relations and Policy.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded charitable, educational and nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1949 in order to “facilitate public participation in historic preservation” and to further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws. The intent of Congress was for the National Trust “to mobilize and coordinate public interest, participation and resources in the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings.” With headquarters in Washington, D.C., nine field offices, 28 historic sites, more than one million members and supporters and a national network of partners in states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust works to save America’s historic places and advocates for historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government.

We appreciate the Committee scheduling this hearing to discuss this legislative proposal to withdraw certain federal lands in the Greater Chaco area to protect the nationally and internationally significant cultural and historic resources from new oil and gas development in the immediate vicinity of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The National Trust strongly endorses this legislation and its companion legislation in the House. I appreciate the opportunity to reiterate testimony provided on similar legislation introduced in the previous Congress.

**Background and Need**

The Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act would permanently withdraw approximately 316,000 acres of federal lands surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from disposal, mining, and mineral leasing laws to prevent future oil, gas, and other mineral development. This withdrawal corresponds roughly with a 10-mile radius around the Park. It would not impact nonfederal minerals owned by tribal, state, or private entities within the broader 909,000-acre Chaco Cultural Heritage Withdrawal Area identified in the bill.

While the cultural resources associated with Chaco culture extend across an even larger landscape, this legislation takes a critical step to protect largely unfragmented areas around Chaco Canyon. The Greater Chaco landscape includes remarkable and interconnected cultural

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1 54 U.S.C. §§ 312102(a), 320101.
resources, including ceremonial sites and great houses, and an elaborate network of engineered roads that provided a physical and cultural link for people across the region. The global significance of this landscape led to the addition of Chaco Culture to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987 with the goal of preserving outstanding elements of ancestral Pueblo culture that dominated the region from the mid-9th to early 13th centuries. The World Heritage listing includes not only Chaco Culture National Historical Park, but also Aztec Ruins National Monument and additional protected archaeological areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

The Greater Chaco landscape has enduring significance for many tribes throughout the southwest, including those descended from the ancestral Pueblos whose culture and economic life centered on Chaco Canyon. We applaud the bill’s sponsors for working with the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the Navajo Nation to develop this legislation, and we encourage continued dialogue with tribes that have cultural and sacred ties to the region.

The natural and cultural landscape as a whole—not just individual sites and artifacts—make this area worthy of protection. Yet most Chacoan sites and roads located on federal lands outside the Park and World Heritage boundaries are at risk from a variety of activities including, most significantly, energy development. Oil and gas development in Greater Chaco is problematic not only due to direct impacts to sites, artifacts, and traditional cultural properties, but also because of impacts to viewsheds, soundscapes, and dark night skies that provide a connection to the experiences of ancient culture and make Chaco such an internationally important site for preservation.

Threats from energy development associated with the Mancos-Gallup Shale formation led the National Trust to include the Greater Chaco landscape on our annual list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2011. Since that time, pressure for oil and gas leasing in the area has increased. Most recently, multiple parcels within the Greater Chaco landscape were slated for a March 2019 lease sale. The National Trust formally protested leasing in this and two other instances since March 2018. While the Bureau of Land Management has ultimately deferred lease sales on each occasion, these important resources require the permanent withdrawal that this legislation would provide.

Notably, the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the National Congress of American Indians have passed resolutions calling for a moratorium on all oil and gas permitting and leasing in the Greater Chaco landscape. The pueblos and tribes have requested this moratorium to protect traditional cultural properties and sacred sites until an ethnographic study and an updated Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the region are completed.

**Conclusion**

This area is threatened by energy development. The National Trust supports the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act and encourages members of the Committee to act favorably on this bill. We also encourage collaboration among this Committee, federal agencies, tribes, and other stakeholders to create a coordinated, updated management plan that better recognizes and protects cultural resources on public lands in the region. Robust interagency coordination, tribal consultation, and public involvement are necessary to limit the effects of industrial development on this globally-significant resource. Thank you again for this opportunity to present the views of the National Trust for Historic Preservation on this important piece of legislation.