

Chaco Road Update: County Asks for More Money – Say No Now

San Juan County representatives met with Representative Tom Udall in mid-February to ask for additional funding totaling \$1,200,000 for the paving of CR 7950, the main access road to Chaco Canyon National Historical Park. Rep. Udall earmarked an initial funding of \$800,000 for the road project. Udall's decision whether to grant the request in the form of a new appropriation is due any day. Please immediately write, call, or email Rep. Udall (see page 3) opposing the granting of any new funding. The San Juan Citizens Alliance has joined our efforts to stop the paving and has co-signed two letters to Udall supporting our cause.

The arguments the County has advanced for paving the road are that the road is "dangerous," and that it does not work for access unless you are in a special vehicle like a four-wheel drive. Neither of these arguments is true. According to a document prepared by the State of New Mexico's Preservation Division, the road is in fact "usable by ordinary passenger vehicles throughout the year" and four-wheel drive is "not a necessity." I have driven the road many times and have never been unable to get to Chaco, even in a compact rental car. The canyon, after all, sits in an arid high-desert environment that receives little precipitation.

What is necessary is for drivers to slow down, but this small inconvenience is not an argument that the road does not provide adequate access. Anyone who wants to get to Chaco can already do so. The argument that it is "dangerous" and creates a

liability is the opposite of the truth, and no evidence whatsoever has been presented by San Juan County to back up their claim. Paving the road and increasing the speed and number of visitors will in fact create a huge liability for San Juan County. If the road becomes a superhighway packed with tourists anxious to get to Chaco, the frequency and the severity of accidents will increase, not decrease. And emergency response in this remote area is very difficult. The area is also open grazing land to horses, cattle, sheep, and goats. There are no fences to keep livestock off the road, few speed limit signs, and many unmarked sharp curves.

We continue to ask for improvements, not paving. San Juan County is touting a fallback position that they will pave the road using local funds if federal funds are not available. Please ask Rep. Udall to oppose any effort that in effect circumvents the thorough impact studies of a complete Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). With his leadership, the earmarked \$800,000 can be directed into improvements like good fencing, good signs, and good maintenance.

Chaco is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is both a fragile archaeological site as well as sacred ancestral land to many Native Americans. At the entrance to many of the large pueblos in Chaco, there are signs that read "Sacred site. Enter with respect." That is what we are asking for here. Let the unpaved road protect the canyon from commercialization and overwhelming visitation. Let it slow us

all down a little, the proper response when you are entering a land still held as sacred by so many.

Links for important email addresses are available at our website (www.dont-pave-chaco.com). If possible, please send copies to the Chaco Alliance at dontpavechaco@gmail.com. Thanks to all of you for your support.

—Anson Wright
Coordinator, Chaco Alliance

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