



# UTAH DINÉ BIKÉYAH

CELEBRATING THE TEN YEAR HEALING JOURNEY OF BEARS EARS





## UTAH DINÉ BIKEYAH: BEARS EARS IS ABOUT HEALING

By Gavin Noyes, former Executive Director

Prayer and traditional religious beliefs were the primary reasons Bears Ears was protected as a National Monument. This may sound strange, since spirituality might seem rather intangible to some. However, if there was only one subject over the past ten years that was more carefully studied by the Utah Diné Bikéyah (UDB) Board than any other it was prayer. Board Members would inquire; “Did we ask permission?” “What words were uttered?” “Were proper dates selected?” “Were phases of the moon and star alignments considered?” “Which religious practitioners shall we invite?” These questions were all pondered. Everyone knew that Bears Ears is not a place where mistakes can be made or where inexperienced or unsanctioned practitioners can lead prayers. Spiritually, the UDB house was in order.

Bears Ears is full of deities, and the goal of UDB was to ensure that every non-human person, every plant, every animal as well as the sky, the mountains, and the rivers were all participants in ceremony. These prayers and requests for help would leave nobody behind. The foundation would be solid and the human intention would be pure. Political considerations were discussed too, but these were small matters by comparison. The spiritual leaders who formed UDB always centered activities on ceremony, listening to creation stories in the oldest dialects in the Navajo tongue, and on relearning the songs, the vocabulary, seeking objects and speaking to the deities about who to bring into the sacred circles of religious practice.

UDB formed itself as a non-profit on January 26th, 2012, yet many of its leaders had already been working together for decades. Several even attended boarding school together as classmates who got whipped, beaten, converted to christianity, and punished together. For those who survived this erasure of culture and removal from family, the bonds of friendship between peers would last a lifetime. The determination to succeed against all odds was less a choice, and more a necessity. Because of this shared background among Native elders, UDB always functioned like a family. In order to accomplish things that had never been done, the UDB Board relied on each other, on their ability to form collaborations, and to identify strategies. Among UDB’s founding Board Members, everyone was older than 55, and this was nobody’s first rodeo. “The bucking bronco the Board raised and named UDB was saddled and cinched up tight ten years ago this month. I am proud to see our young horse still kicking even after founding Board Members have ridden off into the sunset or earned bigger belt buckles,” says UDB founder Mark Maryboy.

“It is not easy to explain the meaning of Bears Ears to non-Native people,” explains Woody Lee, Executive Director. To Navajo People, Bears Ears includes the place Diné emerged from the earth. Bears Ears is a location where epic battles and the fate



of humankind was determined. It is where culture, language and religion were born. It is a landscape inseparable from culture, just as there are many cultures inseparable from Bears Ears. Bears Ears is a “who,” not a “what,” and has been lived upon by many distinct civilizations of highly sophisticated humans, many of whose cultures are still alive today. She is called by many names including Hoon’ Naqvut, Shash Jáa, Kwiyaqatu, Nukavachi, and Ansh An Laskokdiwe. In all languages, her name translates into English as “Bears Ears.”

In San Juan County, Utah in 2009, two things happened. First, Senator Bob Bennett passed the historic Washington County Public Lands bill which protected 256,000 acres from development and “disposed of” 5,000-9,000 acres of public land for private development. The second event of 2009 was the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested 16 white residents of Blanding, Utah on the morning of June 10th, 2009. These white citizens were allegedly caught stealing and selling 256 archaeological objects from public lands, including Bears Ears, to an undercover FBI informant. Native Americans were incensed that their histories, ancestors, and rights were still being stolen item by item, after so many decades and promises from their neighbors. In response, San Juan County Commissioner Kenneth Maryboy began leading ceremonies at Bears Ears. He organized people to determine how to respond to the lawbreakers who believed they had done nothing wrong and this potential legislative opportunity.



Mark Maryboy, a seasoned politician and Kenneth's older brother, cut his teeth on public lands issues as a young man. Mark was the first Native American elected to public office in the State of Utah and he structured the UDB Board to fill a hole in tribal government and the non-profit sector. Mark selected one Native American leader from each of 10 reservation communities in San Juan County. Each UDB Board Member was assigned to convene community members to discuss water, public land, and natural resource issues every month. They relayed information to and from their own Chapter House communities so that people got involved, became educated, and eventually voted on land and water issues as informed constituents. UDB's focus on the protection of off-reservation public lands was intended to bring local indigenous communities and multiple tribal nations together. Native People hold the right for these cultural sites to be protected, yet at the time were told their rights stopped at the reservation boundary.

UDB set out to become a model organization for others to follow on off-reservation public land conservation. Strategically, to protect Bears Ears, we decided; 1) federal agencies will respond to scientific data, 2) Utah politicians will respond to local advocates, 3) political alliances would be formed to win approval of the Utah delegation knowing that a Utah bill sponsor would eventually be important, and 4) sovereign Tribes (not UDB) must eventually champion the designation effort in Washington D.C.. This four-prong political strategy (developed in partnership with Round River and the Navajo Nation) turned out to be effective. UDB leaders persisted with confidence in the spiritual foundation of their request, and eventually succeeded in protecting Bears Ears on December 28th, 2016 after requesting the five Tribes to lead the designation in 2015.

Willie Grayeyes, UDB's first Board Chair set its mission as "healing the earth and its people," a purpose that was later adopted by the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. Upon receiving its 501(c)3 status and its first grant from the Conservation Lands Foundation, Mark Maryboy set the goal for the UDB organization to become "a nationally recognized environmental group, like the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, The Wilderness Society, or the Sierra Club." The Board asked Gavin Noyes to serve as "staff person" in 2012 and later hired him as "Executive Director" in 2014. The organization built itself by gradually expanding its funding and staff by an average of one new staff per year. It has steadily expanded its partnerships, its volunteers, and its reach beyond San Juan County, and seeks opportunities to assist other Tribes in protecting their sacred lands.

An organization never forms on its own, and UDB owes its existence and effectiveness to critical early support from key people, as well as to tens of thousands of people who have subscribed to our e-Newsletter, followed us on social media platforms, made a donation, became a sustaining donor, volunteered, or even just mentioned our cause at the dinner table. As a reader, supporter, donor, volunteer or an ally your involvement is what makes UDB who we are. So, we thank you, and celebrate you on our 10th birthday! The spiritual grounding of Board Members and staff is what keeps the reigns in UDB's hands and our eyes on the horizon. But it is also the support from so many people like you who have patted our back and cheered us to victory along the way. Getting bucked off and trampled is a normal day in today's political arena. We look forward to riding this bucking bronco for another ten years with you.

# 30 UDB SUCCESSES IN FIRST 10 YEARS - 2012-2022



1. Created 1.9 M acre Bears Ears National Monument Proposal Map and Campaign Plan (2010-2013).\*
2. 75 elder interviews detailed hunting, gathering, and sacred sites in need of protection (2010-2011).
3. Publication of book, Utah Diné Bikéyah, which was distributed to most Utah Republican leaders in state and federal office (2011).
4. 15 total trips to Washington D.C. advocating for Bears Ears proposal (2010-2017).
5. UDB convenes and requests 5 Tribes to lead designation of Bears Ears. Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition is formed on July 16, 2015 comprised of Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, Ute Mountain, and Ute Indian Tribes.

6. UDB Board Members break Washington DC record for most turquoise and silver ever sent through metal detectors! (Line of 100 people behind them were not pleased.)
7. Cultural Sensitivity Training provided to thousands of media, non-profit and government representatives (2017-Present).
8. Blocked Roadless Rule exemption request by State of Utah (2019).
9. Assisted thousands of individuals during pandemic with food, water, seeds, and sheep (2020)
10. More than 100 resolutions passed by local tribal governments (2012- Present).

11. Recruited new allies to conservation: spiritual leaders, actors, athletes, children, musicians, artists, researchers, and more (2012-Present).
12. Hosted hundreds of ceremonies (2012- Present).
13. Bowls of mutton stew served to thousands of community members (2012-Present).
14. Distributed 150,000+ fliers/gifts at fairs, parades and meetings (2012-Present).
15. 25+ different t-shirt designs. (2014- Present).
16. Bears Ears National Monument designated (December 28th, 2016).

17. 8 Bears Ears Prayer Runs hosted or sponsored (2017-Present).
18. Hosted UDB's annual Summer Gathering 2015-2021, reaching peak attendance in 2019 with 800+ people.
19. Dozens of Op Eds published, hundreds of quotations in news articles, participation in many film documentaries and books on Bears Ears (2012-Present).
20. "Swatted down" Blanding and Monticello's attempt to break San Juan County into two.
21. Extended 3 nearly extinct ceremonies by another generation (2018-Present).

22. Successfully elevated Bears Ears to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues before UN Special Rapporteur.
23. Supported two Totem Pole Journeys led by the Lummi Nation supporting Bears Ears.
24. Collected 27,000 (of 1 million total) petition signatures in defense of Bears Ears National Monument (Summer, 2017)
25. UDB Board Chair Willie Grayeyes/ UDB nominated as "Utahn of the Year" by Salt Lake Tribune 4 years in a row, 2015-2018.
26. UDB, Tribes, and dozens of groups filed joint litigation against President Trump challenging the use of the Antiquities Act as a tool to remove protections.

27. Bears Ears & Grand Staircase NM's are restored! (October 8th, 2021)
28. Built support over ten years for the passage of the Utah Navajo Water Rights Settlement bill which passed in December 2020.
29. Bluff elementary school is purchased in partnership with the Town of Bluff. Remodel to convert into Community Cultural Center will begin in 2022.
30. Litigation against Trump became moot, however the State of Utah is promising to sue President Biden for restoring protections.



As a value, relationships means recognizing our ties to one another and the land, and thus choosing to act with integrity and communicate with respect

Relationships

**UDB MISSION**

Preserve and protect the cultural and natural resources of ancestral Native American lands to benefit and bring healing to people and the Earth.

Native Culture

As a value, Native culture means honoring the deep spiritual foundation of our work, and encouraging traditional arts, languages, and land use practices.

Land Protection

As a value, land protection means preserving the environment so that whole and healthy natural systems can continue to sustain future generations of humans who remain connected to the land.

**BEHIND US THERE IS BEAUTY · BELOW US THERE IS BEAUTY · ABOVE US THERE IS BEAUTY  
BEFORE US THERE IS BEAUTY · BEAUTY SURROUNDS US**

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF UDB**

\* Developed by the UDB Board & Anna Brady in June, 2015

**WHO ARE WE?**

We recognize our history.  
 Since time immemorial we are strong and vibrant people dwelling peacefully on these lands. Hweeldi forced us from our lands, caused pain and suffering for our families. After the Long Walk, assimilation and boarding schools continued to traumatize our people. New generations grow strong but carry these memories.  
 We recognize our history.

**WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

We are the people we've been waiting for.  
 Our communities are dormant, waiting for change.  
 We are rising up, telling the next story through our actions.  
 We have the knowledge, vision, and humility to lead.  
 We are honoring the spirit and way of our ancestors.  
 We are a strong people who hold a wealth of knowledge.  
 We are the people we've been waiting for.

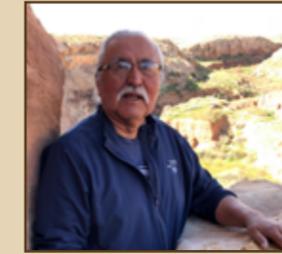
**HOW WILL WE HEAL?**

We will achieve our vision through listening and respect.  
 Bears Ears National Monument will become a permanent place of refuge and for activation of culture.  
 We will educate youth and visitors about our relationship with this land.  
 We will support traditional artists, artisans, farmers, and healers to thrive at our home.  
 We will share our knowledge and experience to help other indigenous communities protect their cultures, languages, and sacred lands.  
 We will restore and continue our ceremonies and celebrations.  
 We will achieve our vision through listening and respect.

**WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

We will lead the way to heal our people and the Earth.  
 Bears Ears and all surroundings will be protected for future generations.  
 Tribes will co-manage our ancestral homelands.  
 The land and all its non-human beings will be healthy and secure.  
 Federal, state, and local governments will respect our traditions and spirituality.  
 Our youth and families will thrive with knowledge and tradition.  
 We will lead the way to heal our people and the Earth.

**UDB'S FOUNDING MEMBERS**



Willie Grayeyes  
Chair



Leonard Lee  
Vice-Chair



Dorothy Redhorse  
Treasurer



Jonah Yellowman  
Spiritual Advisor



Evangeline Gray  
Board Member



Mark Maryboy  
Board Member



Kenneth Maryboy  
Ex-officio Board Member



Gavin Noyes  
Staff/Executive Director

**STRENGTH MOUNTAIN**

PROTECTING TIES TO THE LAND & SECURING ACCESS

**PROTECTION MOUNTAIN**

**WARRIOR MOUNTAIN**

PROTECTING NATIVE CULTURES & LANGUAGES

**SANCTUARY MOUNTAIN**

RESPECT FOR ALL HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN BEINGS

**BEARS EARS MOUNTAIN**

HEALING THE EARTH & EACH OTHER



## UDB ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

\* Selected by majority Board vote in June 2015

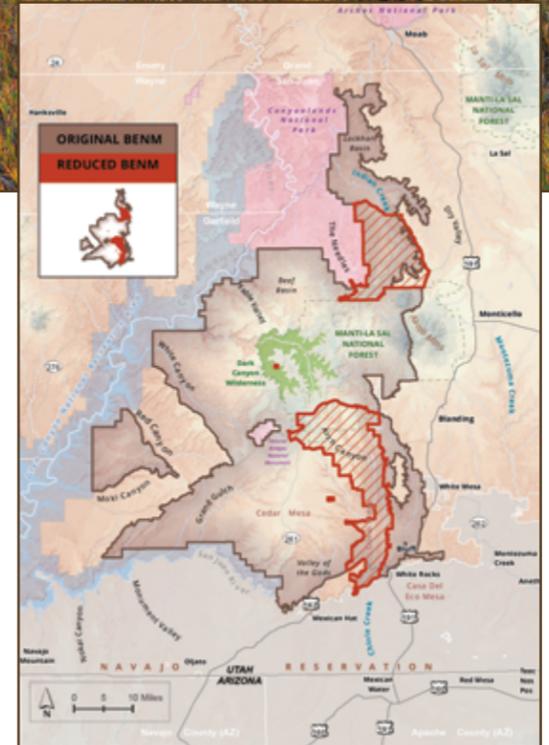
- Stay connected to the Bears Ears landscape
  - \* Rights to herb collection, hunting, fuel gathering—forever access
  - \* Rights to hold ceremonial practices for all five BEITC tribes
  - \* Securing places for wildlife and intact habitat
  - \* Monitoring of sacred sites
  - \* Maintaining strong communication with Tribes, agencies, funders, and supporters
- Leave monsters such as oil, coal and uranium in the ground, do not bring them back to life
- Help Tribes protect sacred sites, language, and cultures using Bears Ears as a model
  - \* Advance broad policy change including hunting, gathering, ceremony, water, and more
- Create a Community Cultural Center in Bluff for language, culture and youth education
- Inspire improved life choices among our communities and youth
- Facilitate abundance and thriving of our people
- Carry on legacy of ancestors' leadership
- Ensure Utah delegation understands the value of tradition and spirituality
- Economic development
  - \* Sustainable ecotourism and heritage tourism



## SUCCESS IN 10 YEARS LOOKS LIKE

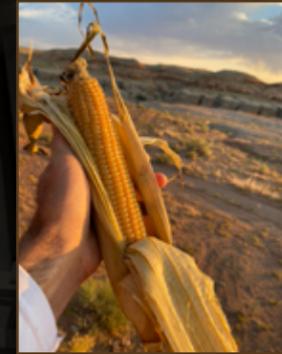
- Bears Ears is permanently protected and expanded to 1.9 M acres
- Tribes co-managing Bears Ears in partnership with federal agencies
- Native grassroots people securely accessing lands for gathering resources & practicing traditions
- Families & communities increasingly relying on traditional foods, farming, crafts, and arts
- Community Cultural Center established for arts, foods and language and to instruct youth & visitors
- Sacred cultural sites protected and respected through education and management
- Bears Ears landscape & non-human persons healthy and vital
- Tribal coalition is strong. Sovereignty and self-determination are respected locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Racial harmony in local communities. San Juan County an example and inspiration to the world of respect and healing from traumatic past

UDB's Founding Board Members selected most of these goals in 2015 to guide us for fifty years.



Map by Rick Tingey

# COVID RELIEF



## UDB DELIVERS DURING COVID-19

In 2020 the pandemic hit and the UDB Board voted to shift its focus toward Covid relief. Elders are the backbone of Native communities holding wisdom, language, and culture, so we aligned everything around the cultural preservation aspect of our mission. UDB provided direct community support including food, water, seeds, and even baby lambs for families to raise. We increased community-wide resiliency by renewing farming, ranching, and elder knowledge transmission while kids could not attend schools.



Even today, on our 10-year anniversary, January 26th, 2022 our communities are still being impacted by Covid-19, even though vaccination rates are above 90%. Native American Tribes have never held the political power nor controlled enough financial wealth to protect communities from pandemic outbreaks like Covid-19. Today, in 2022, the genocide of Native People in the U.S. does not feel like a historic event, and we must work together to ensure that running water, electricity, roads, and other essential human services are finally extended to reservation communities in the U.S.

Many of our partner organizations have lifted these heavy burdens alongside our Board, staff and volunteers. UDB wants to acknowledge Navajo-Hopi Relief, Utah Navajo Health Services, Seeded Sisters, Salt Lake Covid Relief. Many additional groups and individuals provided critical early support including Rural Utah Project, Bluff Area Mutual Aid, Pueblo Covid Relief, Kids Speak for Parks, Patagonia, Humanity Collective, and others. UDB probably reached every on reservation home in San Juan County, Utah and hundreds more in Arizona. UDB's Board focused on serving the most remote regions, with the fewest English speakers such as the high mesa tops and deep canyons where traditional elders live.

## 2020 COVID-19 RELIEF BY THE NUMBERS

### COVID-19 SERVICES PROVIDED

7,900 People Served- 2 Week Supply-Family Food Packages	1,725 boxes/ buckets
Miscellaneous Support- ground beef, school supplies, beans, etc.	250 boxes
Winter Jackets donated	1,000+ delivered
Cash sent to Partner Organizations	\$22,000
730 water tanks delivered (275 gallons each)	200,750 gallons
Indigenous Seeds Delivered- Corn, beans, squash, etc.	1,000 packets
Baby Churro sheep and goats, and feed supplies (\$300 per family/pair)	120 baby animals



# FOLLOWING THE BEARS EARS PATH FORWARD

By Woody Lee

The Navajo phrase “Diné Bikéyah” translates as, “the human relationship between the sole of your foot and the earth.” This phrase captures UDB’s mission of reciprocity, relationships, and healing. It defines the respect the UDB Board holds for itself, other people, and the earth we walk upon. We are grateful to all people who have joined us in walking the land since our formation as a non-profit.

Looking ahead at the next ten years, Bears Ears will continue to be central to our work. We intend to expand protections to 1.9 million acres, to shape the Bears Ears management plan, and ensure Native American cultural access is safeguarded. Bears Ears will continue to be a place we hold up as an inspiration, a place that orients our prayers, and a landscape where people from all cultures can come to pray, to heal, and to restore our minds and bodies.

Navajo elders across Utah and the Four Corners region are asking me many questions at Chapter House meetings since President Biden restored the monument in October, 2021. “Can we return to our old ways?” “Can we hold traditional dances and ceremonies at Bears Ears?” “Can we harvest wood to build our hogans?” “Can we hunt using traditional methods and not be harassed by state game wardens?” “Will fencing be removed and private property deeds dissolved so that we can move freely alongside the plants we are harvesting?” “When boys are ready, can we have their coming-of-age ceremonial sweats up at Bears Ears?”

Bears Ears was established as the first-ever Native American requested National Monument. As such, we must shape the agencies that manage these lands and write policies that define what protection means in Indigenous thought and action. Elders understand traditional stewardship. They worry about our young people and their ability to pass traditional knowledge on to the next generation. On the reservation, most young people are moving toward Christianity and UDB’s programs offer an alternative centered on relating to and understanding the earth, the natural processes that support us, and tradition. We are living in a changing time when we are again allowed to use our Native tongue, raise our children and grandchildren according to our beliefs, and we are able to pray to the earth in our own ways.

In late 2021, UDB purchased the former elementary school in Bluff where we will move all of our programming once a remodel is complete. We hope to grow and expand our impact with a cultural center in this space where people can learn, share ideas, and understand the importance of Bears Ears. Our hope is that being able to show our neighbors what we do will break down barriers in San Juan County where Native people are still misunderstood. Traditional foods, climate change education, renewable energy, water sustainability, and cross-cultural revitalization are all projects we are excited to advance when our building opens.



Photo credit: Blake McCord

UDB has three staff located in Salt Lake City, and we just relocated our offices into the Leonardo Museum building downtown. Please come visit us. You will find our art gallery in the public space and our offices located upstairs.

We do not know if a Bears Ears congressional bill will be developed. If this happens, legislators need to be in consultation with the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition as well as Native citizens in each community. Failure to without the Tribes’ input (as has so often happened in the past) will undermine our shared goals around healing.

Communications will really develop in the coming years with more staff and clear Indigenous messaging. We are helping to build a Native American communications hub with national partners that cover the whole United States. We plan to diversify and expand our translation efforts to help young people become more fluent in each of the languages across Indian country. Locally, a lot of work will start from things like opening the community culture center. These educational pieces will go a long way toward healing people and the land.

Collectively, we want non-Natives to start seeing Indigenous people for who we really are. We represent the best of humanity, but still struggle to overcome prejudices, recent acts of genocide, boarding school traumas, theft of land, contamination of water, exploitation of workers, and extraction of precious resources from our communities. Black Lives Matter,



Water is Life, Land Back, and other movements have changed the political discussion in recent years. These efforts are essential, however, we also need to break down barriers, share communications, and heal across political divides. The Utah political arena should not be a space for conflict, but rather an opportunity to find common ground. Bears Ears specifically should be a space for peace. In the years ahead, tremendous collaboration will be needed to bring water, farming, infrastructure investments, and business opportunities to families living on the reservation. I hope we can hold a bigger vision for our shared future because these long-overdue improvements, will benefit everybody.

Even at my own Navajo family Thanksgiving dinner, I had a relative who was opposed to Bears Ears, “it’s a land grab by the federal government,” this individual said. My wife, who shared this individual’s experience of being a foster child in the LDS placement program understood her mindset. She approached her delicately. She listened and talked. After an hour

my anti-Bears Ears relative began to relate and conceded, “Ok, I agree with you.” She said Bears Ears is common ground that we can stand on together as we build a shared future.

We know Bears Ears is a starting place for healing and it is possible for people to understand each other. UDB will make many advances in the next ten years, continuing to bring as many people as we can together to walk the land and listen to the earth.

## IN MEMORIA



### MARY JANE YAZZIE

UDB's esteemed Board Member, Mary Jane Yazzie, passed away on Monday, September 24th, 2018. Mary Jane was like family to everyone at Utah Diné Bikéyah. She rarely missed a meeting or event, and always supported our staff in kind ways like gifting Green River melons, or sharing a laugh. Mary Jane had a HUGE and beautiful heart. She was gentle, compassionate, and loving. She was also a strong advocate and tireless protector of her ancestral homelands, the Bears Ears. Mary Jane strengthened Ute culture working with elders and youth reflecting a matriarchal leadership we desperately need more of in the world today. Mary Jane was a wisdom keeper and one of the most fluent speakers of the Ute language. Her passing was a blow to the world and she left a hole in the heart of the White Mesa community and in the UDB organization.



### ALBERT HOLIDAY

Albert Holiday was an elected tribal leader, medicine man, Board Member, relative, and friend.

At UDB, Albert Holiday led us forward with his knowledge, his understanding of ceremony and medicine, and through his powerful songs. He led horseback rides across the lands, he traveled to every meeting, rally, and presentation and he made his voice, and the voice of his people heard. During Covid-19, he delivered food, water tanks, sheep, and other items to elders and community members in need, but sadly succumbed to the virus. Albert rooted himself in traditional Navajo ways and carried himself with gentleness, grace, confidence, and strength. He also shared his humor and his joy for life with everyone. Albert entered the world of our ancestors on January 6th, 2020.





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