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Bears Ears Collaborative Management Support

Applying Organization	Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition Project, a fiscally sponsored project of Resources Legacy Fund	Application Date	6/4/2026
Applying Contact	Michelle Cruz	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Michelle Cruz, 5/19/2026, 10:54 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Bears Ears Collaborative Management Support	Requested Amount	\$50,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Bears Ears Collaborative Management Support		
Type of Project	Management Planning; Defense	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	UT	Longitude	38.47
Latitude	37.15		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Resources Legacy Fund, as fiscal sponsor for the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition Project	Primary address for organization	2632 Mesilla Street Northeast, Suite 3 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110 United States
Contact Name	Michelle Cruz	Contact Title	Fiscal Sponsorships Manager
Contact Email Address	mcruz@resourceslegacyfund.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$147,144,792.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	9	Main Phone	9164425057
Total Membership		Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://www.bearscoalition.org/
BIPOC-led	Yes	C-Suite Staff	The Project takes direction from the 5 Tribes of the Coalition, the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Zuni Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, & Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. 2 of the 3 Project leadership staff with are Native American.

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Resources Legacy Fund (RLF), a 501c3 nonprofit, serves as the fiscal sponsor for the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition Project (Project). The Project serves to support the Bears Ears Commission and its five Tribes in their efforts related to the sacred landscape in and around Bears Ears National Monument (BENM). The five Tribes, including the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Zuni Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, came together in July of 2015 to found the Coalition.

The Project's mission is to protect Bears Ears through the leadership of united, sovereign Tribes, and inspire all to strengthen connection and uphold reciprocal relationships with the land.

The Project envisions vast, protected living cultural landscapes that reclaim their inherent sovereign rights, where youth, elders, and all community members heal together and create a thriving future for all human and non-human beings.

Location Details

The Bears Ears Cultural Landscape expands beyond the formalized boundaries of the current National monument and exists in concert with other landscapes in the greater Colorado plateau region. The Bears Ears National Monument is situated between the San Juan river to the south, and the Colorado River to the northwest in San Juan County of Southeast Utah. The National Monument is only part of the broader landscape that over 20 Tribes see as worthy of protection.

The landscape is wholly federally owned, split between the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service. Within the BENM boundaries, these two federal agencies work with the Bears Ears Commission to discuss land stewardship goals and projects. The Bears Ears Commission was established by presidential proclamation and consists of one elected member of each of the five Tribes who provide traditional indigenous and ecological knowledge to benefit the management of the Monument.

While each Tribe has its own reasons and cultural connections to the landscape, there are universal aspects of this region that warrant protection and strong cultural connections. For example, the National Monument is home to the among the most dense concentration of ancestral places in the United States. This region has well over 100,000 ancestral sites in some of the best preserved conditions stretching back as far as 11,000 B.C.E. with heavy occupation and visitation during the Basketmaker and Pueblo periods of 500 B.C.E. - 1290 C.E. Our Ancestors and community members continue to utilize this area for medicinal and cultural collection, ceremony, wood harvesting, subsistence hunting and gathering, and prayer.

Beyond the ancestral connections for many native communities in the southwest, the region boasts a great array of natural beauty and diversity. From the arid high desert area, to canyons carved by millions of years of river systems and springs, to high mountains along the edges of the Monument. The boundaries, while smaller than the Tribes wanted, still protect over 1.3 million acres of ancestral land.

Final Success

That the Bears Ears National Monument is protected, and day-to-day land

Impact on Climate and Biodiversity

When Bears Ears National Monument is sufficiently protected and related to in

stewardship is informed by traditional indigenous knowledge- benefitting from the connections tribal peoples have had with this land since time immemorial.

ways that honor the land itself as well as the human and non-human relatives in and around the land, the ecosystems will be healthier, connection to land will be healthier, cultural resilience will be healthier, and the federal land management agencies will be held to higher standards nationally.

With regard to biodiversity impacts, success in Bears Ears would also mean identification of culturally important indicator species for adaptive management of multiple uses in BENM and the protection and consideration of these species in all management decisions.

Climate resiliency in Bears Ears requires planning and managing with many future generations in mind. This includes the collaborative creation of a drought management plan and the development of Tribally-defined water quality standards that protect water not only for traditional and cultural use by the people, but also for the needs of non-human relatives and the land.

Bears Ears National Monument is part of a large, interconnected, biocultural landscape with many Tribal Leaders that work at Bears Ears involved in the protection of landscapes regionally. The collaborative management approach used in Bears Ears has become a regional and national model, where lessons on considering culturally important species, protecting habitat connectivity and migration corridors, and managing beyond only human use can be applied at scales that matter for wildlife.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The continued effective management of BENM will continue to allow public access to the landscape, without limiting reasonable land use. Moreover, protection and stewardship that is guided by Traditional Indigenous Knowledge (TIK) will ensure the landscape and environment is restored, ensuring continued access well into the future.

Next, the very statue of BENM as a protected space has been under threat by the current administration, and the President in his previous administration. In Trump's first term, he drastically shrunk the Monument size, and altered the makeup of the Commission. During this time, extractive industries filed for permits in the former Monument boundaries. Once secured, those permits persist, even to today while the land is protected as a National Monuments, existing permits are exempt and extraction could continue in certain circumstances. For this reason, it continues to be important that the

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

The strategy for Bears Ears centers on Indigenous-led collaborative management and robust defense of the Monument. We support the Bears Ears Commission, representing the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Zuni Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, in providing traditional knowledge to federal agency patterns at the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Key activities include operationalizing day-to-day stewardship and hosting several annual Tribal-agency summits to overcome information barriers and facilitate long-term planning, such as water quality and drought management. The Project will continue to help facilitate knowledge gaps, and provide key liaising support between the relevant parties, using its extensive knowledge of the planning processes, and familiarity and relationships with the Tribes. This strategy will include knowledge retention and refining, process implementation to ensure

landscape has appropriate protections.

Monument designation by the Obama Administration actually improved local businesses by putting this area on the map. While tourism to the area has always occurred, it more than doubled after designation to just over 416,000 visitors annually. All these visitors bring money to local towns and businesses. In San Juan County, where the Monument is located, much of the economy is focused on other extraction like mining, which can experience boom and bust cycles, depending on the price of specific resources at any given point in time. This is contrasted with the tourism and outdoor industry, which is isolated from these cycles, bringing more stable income to the region via tourism. Overall, the economic case for BENM and lasting protections is strong, bringing in new tourism dollars, isolated from regional economic indicators like mining and extraction.

frequent questions from Tribes are preempted when possible, and programming to build capacity within Tribes for the future. Capacity Building includes two programs directly aimed at the Tribal communities the Project serves, and includes an inter-generational and culturally focused conservation corps, as well as a youth focused version of the Bears Ears Commission, bringing in young leadership development and helping to show how young people can have a voice when it comes to land management. Finally, the Project is starting its first community site visit program, bringing a handful of Tribal members to the Monument and covering all costs associated with the trip. While land protection is valuable, it means nothing when our people do not have the means to access it, therefore this program will directly connect the community to place.

The Project acts as the financial backbone for these efforts, ensuring Tribal direction is implemented. Led by local Indigenous communities, our steering committee approves all strategy and budgets, and two of our three lead staff members are Native American. Additionally, more than half of the total Project staff are indigenous with strong connections to their local communities. This project will play the key role in centering and accentuating the goals of the individual Tribes while creating a space for them and the federal agencies to discuss in depth. Without the Project, this would fall to the federal agencies, or Tribes, who are both currently under-resourced and unable to focus the necessary resources on this work, therefore limiting or erasing a meaningful voice the Tribes should have.

A major challenge remains the defense of the Monument's boundaries against political threats that are varied and different than in the President's first term. Threats like the Congressional Review Act being used against other Monuments and landscapes risk the work the Tribes have put in on the current Monument management plan, and further undermine Tribal sovereignty.

The business community could help our efforts by continuing to highlight the value that tourism adds to rural communities like San Juan county. Businesses could also share information about the broader threats to public lands under this administration with their clients/ customers. Moreover, in some political jurisdictions, like Utah, businesses often have a greater amount of sway than NGOs like the Project. In these instances, businesses could

Key Decision Makers Redacted due to confidentiality.

Working With Business Community

support the work of the Project by acting as intermediaries and hosting informational conversations with elected officials.



Elevate Voices

The work of the Project centers and is led by local indigenous communities from the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, and Zuni Tribe. This link is in the Project's foundational DNA as the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition Project was born from an agreement between these five Tribes, and each of them continue to shape the Project through the direction of their appointed Representative. This group acts as a steering committee, approving budgets, projects, external communications, and providing input and guidance on the formation of the Project's strategy, mission, vision, and values. This is starkly different from other similar organizations who simply add staff and a singular position whose role it is to liaise with Tribes. At our Project, Liaising with Tribes is the central expectation of each staff member and at each stage of program and organization development.

On the ground, we have staff who go beyond appointed members of the Tribes to various levels of community stakeholders through community engagement campaigns in each of the

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1) Established processes of how federal agencies and the Bears Ears Commission will collaborate on implementation projects. There is a process in place, but it has often left the Tribes with less than ideal level of information, or overwhelms the Tribes with complexities given there is often no dedicated Tribal staff.

2) Four meetings between the Bears Ears Commission and federal agency bodies. These in-person conversations set the stage and greatly facilitate process in other areas such that they are often necessary to make long term decisions. The Project needs funding to continue hosting these conversations, and ensuring no barriers hinder Tribal participation.

3) Continued protection for Bears Ears National Monument at its current size or greater.

4) Outline of the process and timeline for the first Resource-specific management plan, agreed to by the Commission and federal agency partners.

five Tribal Communities we focus in, as well as through various programs like the Bears Ears Conservation Corps: an intergenerational cultural enrichment program on the Monument; and the Bears Ears Youth Council: a program designed to connect young people to the decision making process for the Monument.

In other work, the Project has taken steps to further democratize its learnings over the years as it relates to inter-Tribal collaboration, and federal planning processes. The Project has always been willing to meet with and provide relevant information to other Tribal coalitions like the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Commission, the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, the Six Sovereigns, and many more groups. Moreover, the Project is developing an interactive site to further share information and this guidance with the hope that it will empower other Tribes to go further.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA support will help to fund the in-person meetings required to make progress on long-term processes and implementation plans. Each meeting is funded by the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition Project and includes accommodations, travel reimbursements, meals, informational packets, meeting facilitation, and honoraria. These meetings cost between \$17,000 and \$25,000 when not including staff time. The meetings are often organized so that the Tribes can meet internally before or after conversations with federal agency partners, and include site visits when near the Monument.

Confidential Items

Question 7 and its response should be kept confidential.

Other Relevant Application Details

