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### Recreation and the Sacred: A Case Study of Diné Bikéyah

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# RECREATION AND THE SACRED: A CASE STUDY OF DINÉ BIKÉYAH

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**Abstract:**

The relationship between indigenous groups and outdoor recreation is something that has been analyzed by various scholars. In the North American context, scholars have primarily focused on conflicts regarding land use particularly as it relates to the concept of the sacred. Although these works speak to general truths the complexity of the relationship between outdoor pursuits and Native American groups is often over-simplified. This thesis analyzes the potential of outdoor recreation as a means of economic empowerment for the Navajo people. The work draws on the various initiatives that are currently underway to promote outdoor recreation in the Navajo Nation. These initiatives to develop outdoor recreation have taken into consideration sacred lands to avoid desecration. This work reveals that the promotion of outdoor recreation on Navajo Lands has immense economic potential; however, careful planning and consideration is imperative to respect cultural and sacred understandings in regard to place.

**Acknowledgments:**

I am grateful for the support and insight provided by Dr. Necefer and other experts who shared their perspective with me. This work has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of our complex history that has created systems that have ultimately oppressed Native populations. For that understanding, I am grateful. The Diné people I have spoken to have been incredibly gracious and patient. Thank you for opening the door to collaborate. I appreciate the faith that was placed in me. *Ahé'heé.*

This work would not be possible without the guidance of my advisor at the University of San Francisco. Dr. Dowd-Urbe has consistently provided me feedback and consistently challenged my work, this has made the thesis stronger.

I also wish to express gratitude to the individuals who engaged with my writing and forced me to hone the way I express myself. This work is better because of that engagement. Thank you.

My family has been incredibly supportive of me throughout my life. I am grateful for my childhood in the wild landscapes of Montana, and for the moments in the mountains, which were the impetus for my life's path.

I would be remiss to not pay homage to the landscape in which I am currently residing and the people who call this place their ancestral home. I reside on stolen land of the Ohlone people. I have received many gifts from this land as I run near her ocean, bike through her forest and sleep under her skies. These experiences have given me strength to engage deeply with this process.

*Makkiš horše.*

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## 1. Introduction

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2021, the president of the Navajo Nation, addressed the sixth annual Navajo Trails and Outdoor Recreation Conference. President Nez referred to creation stories of the tribe, as he stated how trails and outdoor recreation could be used as a tool to fight “modern-day monsters” referring to public health challenges of the Navajo Nation (Navajo Nation Trails and Outdoor Recreations Conference, 2021). His presence at the event aligns with the movement that is growing to develop outdoor recreation opportunities. These actions taken by the Nation stand in sharp contrast to the scholarly work that has been written involving Native American groups and outdoor recreationists.

This thesis examines how the Navajo people, who inhabit the largest Native American reservation in the United States, may successfully leverage outdoor recreation for economic benefit while simultaneously respecting the sacredness of landscape.

Although there has been little published about this topic, the scholarly work regarding Native American groups and outdoor recreation has emphasized conflict between indigenous groups and recreationists. There have been many moments of tension driven by clashing worldviews (Boggs, K., 2016; Zeppel, H., 2010; Dunstun, A., 2016; Grimm, L. 1997; Milholland, S., 2010; Dussais, A., 2000). The efforts happening on the Navajo Nation stand in sharp contrast to the framing that has been presented by many of these authors, who have focused on confrontation. The case that is presented in this thesis is distinct from the predominant theme in previous literature in that it focuses on outdoor recreation development for and by the Navajo people.

Through loss of control of landscapes as a result of colonialism, recreational tourism has been forced on spaces viewed as sacred by native groups. A classic example of this is the

development of a ski area like Arizona Snowbowl on what is viewed as holy lands for regional tribes the San Francisco Peaks or Dook'o'osłííd in the Navajo language (Dunstun, A., 2016). In most cases, indigenous people do not benefit in any meaningful way from such tourism. Yet, they are forced to endure the consequences of outsiders interfacing with the sacred. However, tribes have the possibility of using recreation as a mechanism of economic development. This requires recreationists to respectfully interface with tribal landscapes and specifically landscapes in which they are welcomed into. This approach could be compatible with tribal traditions and expectations.

The development of, for instance, a multi-day bike route is an example of a form of ecotourism that is beginning to be actualized in the Navajo Nation. Many of these initiatives have taken the initiative to be conscious of the possible impacts on sacred lands and to develop a form of ecotourism that is in line with Navajo values (Navajo Trails and Outdoor Recreation Conference, 2021). The respecting of these landscapes has required deep community engagement, and sensitivity to culture.

The 2016 legislation, Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act, or the NATIVE Act, is a national example of promoting ecotourism and a respectful approach to recreation on Native American lands. The U.S. Congress is allocating funding to the Forest Service for this initiative in the upcoming fiscal year. This is a specific example of how Outdoor Recreation is considered a relevant and appropriate tool for Native American groups to address economic and public health concerns (U.S. Congress S. 1579, 2016; Department of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2020).

Previous scholarly work in this regarding the Navajo people and outdoor recreation has focused on analyzing the conflict specifically between Snowbowl ski area and the Navajo Nation

(Dunstun, A., 2016), and the conflict between climbers and the Navajo Nation (Boggs, K., 2016). It is important to recognize that the approach and framing of these works which focused specifically on areas of conflict, leaves a gap in understanding regarding the potential of these pursuits. The tension that these authors present speak to general truths, yet the efforts in promoting outdoor recreation that are currently underway in the Nation indicate that the relationship between these activities and the tribe is more complicated than those studies suggest.

There are 574 tribes federally recognized by the Bureau of Indian affairs in the United States, and although each of these groups have a variance in their lifeways and traditions, there is often a generalization that happens regarding Native peoples. The First Nations Development Institute conducted a survey in which more 13,306 people were surveyed. The institute found that public perception about Native Americans is often “based and guided by misperceptions, assumptions and stereotypes” (Nagle, R., 2018). Notably the Navajo people have passed several laws and have gone to court to protect aspects of their culture from misrepresentation (Lyubymova, S., 2019). The public perception of these groups does not allow for understanding unique experiences of each tribal group.

Different indigenous groups are discussed in the following text; it needs to be noted that each of these groups have a different historical context. Beyond this, as sovereign nations, they have different visions and aspirations. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive overview of these many tribal groups. However, it should be noted generalizations of these diverse groups are especially common when speaking about concepts such as sacred lands. From conversations and engagements, the author has had within the Navajo community, Navajo beliefs and cultural practices are not monolithic. As such, this thesis should not be viewed as representative of native groups generally or even the entire tribe; every group will have unique

responses to the sacred. The quotes that are present in this work should be noted as the viewpoints of individuals. These statements should not be understood as representative of the views of the entire tribe.

Positionality is important to bring to the forefront. The author is not a member of the Navajo Nation, and hence the ability to contribute meaningfully to the research question outlined should be questioned. This research has been informed by a related research project on which the author was invited to collaborate. The author engaged with a select group of Navajo scholars and outdoor recreation professionals who were generous enough to share their perspectives, and illuminated many of the cultural elements that this document addresses. However, due to the pandemic, engagement has been necessarily limited and no in-person interviews were conducted. This research has also been informed by the author's more than ten years of experience in the outdoor recreation industry including extensive involvement in the development of ecotourism with marginalized communities along with previous collaborations that the author engaged in with the Diné centering on activism for the protection of Bears Ears National Monument from 2015 to 2016.

Although on a personal level, this is a product that is necessary for the completion of a degree in the academy. The author felt a sentiment that attempting to speak to the academic community serves no purpose for the indigenous people who had invited the author to collaborate. Certainly, these people know more about how they view their lands and how they believe their lands should be used. In her groundbreaking work *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) begins with the concept that “‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.” She very deliberately makes the case of how knowledge production has been used to oppress and re-colonize indigenous peoples. She

writes, “at a common-sense level research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument,” speaking directly to this predicament. The author has chosen to maintain much of the thrust of what the Diné counterparts asked the author to collaborate on as the core of this project.

A note on language -throughout the text the author uses the terms Diné and Navajo interchangeably. Diné in the Diné Bizaad (Navajo Language) refers to “the people,” and is commonly used. In conversations that the author had, both Diné and Navajo were used to describe the tribe, and as such they are both used within this text. It should be noted that Navajo does not originate from the Diné Bizaad, it was a name that was given to the tribe by Spanish colonists, and subsequently adopted by the U.S. Government (Lyubymova, S., 2019). There are several other words in the Diné Bizaad that will be found within the thesis.

When referring specifically to the Navajo Nation any understanding of the place in the contemporary moment requires a basic understanding of its history. The Navajo people’s creation stories speak of rising from another world into this plane. They rose into the space that they inhabit, bordered by four sacred mountains. The tribe was known to be nomadic, and was feared by the Spaniards and subsequently the U. S. settlers due to the frequent raids which occurred. A critical moment in the history of the people is the forced relocation to Bosque Redondo from their homeland from 1864 to 1868. Since this point, their relationship with the U.S. government has been tumultuous with their culture very much oppressed for much of the twentieth century. Boarding schools, and cultural repression have had a significant impact on the people who inhabit the place (Brugge, D., & Wilson, R., 1976). The remnants of settler colonialism can still be felt in the Nation. Although there are many complexities to this story, it

is beyond the scope of this work to dive into all of the intricacies. However, the contemporary moment is evidence of some of the impacts of this history that are still prevalent.

This thesis will begin with the methods employed in this study including inventorying outdoor recreation resources, and a select number of semi-structured interviews held with individuals identified as experts. A spatial representation of the Navajo Nation, which maps out the potential for outdoor recreation will follow. The thesis will subsequently review relevant literature regarding sacredness, tourism, and outdoor recreation. A discussion regarding the policies that the Navajo Nation has employed to mediate outdoor recreation on the Nation will follow. The thesis will then provide a high-level overview of the Navajo Nation and contextualization of these outdoor pursuits, specifically as they relate to the tribe. This overview of outdoor recreation found on the Nation could serve as a road map to understand some of the complexity in developing an outdoor recreation industry. In conclusion, there will be a synthesis of the perspectives the author has encountered regarding the fundamental questions posed above, and an analysis regarding how the Diné are interacting with this effort.

## 2. Methods

The primary focus of this work has been to identify potential strategies and opportunities for the development of outdoor recreation on and for the benefit of the Navajo Nation along with understanding the implications for this type of development as it intersects with sacred lands. This study includes spatial analysis, expert elicitation, and statistical analysis. The research project was primarily informed by an engagement with a project based out of the University of Arizona in which the author interned for six months. The project seeks to promote outdoor recreation as an alternative to extractive industry in the Navajo Nation. The individuals involved in this project are very connected to the Navajo community, and hence were critical in the author

gaining access to interviewees. The work that was done also was critical in the author gaining understanding of the Nation.

The author developed a GIS map, did research into Navajo policy, and conducted interviews with experts during the work for this project. Although there was discussion of a trip to the Nation to do further research, due to the pandemic all communication was conducted virtually. Therefore, by necessity, there was not a deep engagement with the communities the thesis focuses on. In moving forward if further studies are conducted, it is critical that local input is obtained. In this project the individuals interviewed were considered ‘experts’ and all had connections to outdoor recreation. Potentially due to the involvement of these individuals in outdoor recreation there could be a difference of opinion from these individuals and the community in general who often are not involved in these pursuits.

It is important to note that without the author’s relation to the project based out of the University of Arizona, the author would not have had access to interviewees, or a grounding to be able to do this work. Due to the overlap of the research projects the work from the internship blends into and informs this thesis.

## 2.1 Spatial Analysis

This work involved the author creating a spatial analysis of outdoor recreation resources using GIS software to highlight the location of outdoor recreation potential throughout the Navajo Nation. This work involved using pre-existing maps including U.S.G.S. topographical maps of trails and federal / tribal land jurisdictions, along with blogs, Google Earth, and online resources developed as guidebooks for individuals traveling on Navajo Lands to create a visual representation of outdoor recreation opportunities in a usable format. All of the resources with the exception of All Trails, a clearinghouse of trails globally, and the USGS topographical maps

had open access. As of date there is no comprehensive visual representation to highlight areas which have a high amount of potential for outdoor recreation development on the Navajo Nation. This project used GIS software to create map overlays. The concept of providing spatial context has been consistently used since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although this study did not involve a more in-depth analysis than producing a map of the Nation, that reveals areas of high density of recreation potential. There is a possibility of utilizing this information for further study. Malczewski defines several ways in which GIS can be used to analyze spatial information which could potentially be of use for further spatial analysis (Malczewski, J., 2004).

The virtual nature of the development of this resource and lack of physical interaction with the landscape points to the incomplete nature of this resource. However, being that there is no other topographical representation which is comparable the work is intended to be a basis to be built upon.

## 2.2 Expert Elicitation

As Morgan (2014) purports, expert elicitation is often viewed as a low-cost, low-effort technique of producing research, and if done improperly this type of research can turn off an entire expert community from further participation. In order to mitigate this risk, this work involved nine, carefully performed, semi-structured interviews. The author engaged three initial individuals who were identified by the project based at the University of Arizona who could be defined as experts because of their familiarity with both outdoor recreation and the Navajo Nation. The interviewees were all established in their careers and viewed as successful by the lead of the University of Arizona project. Notably the individuals were all in one way or another connected to the outdoor industry, ranging from the organizer of the annual Navajo Nation equestrian conference to an individual employed as a climbing guide. These individuals

recommended other viable participants for this research study serving as “seeds” for further discussions. This modified version of snowball sampling was made possible because of the author’s connection to the individuals based out of the University of Arizona (Goodman, L., 1961). It should be noted even with connections there was hesitancy with the interview process generally, which is indicative of distrust of ‘research.’ As discussed previously the work does not represent a comprehensive study of all possible opinions regarding the topic and should not be viewed as definitive.

Another key component of this work was attending the Navajo Outdoor Recreation Conference hosted by Navajo Yes, held February 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> in 2021. Although the conference was held in a virtual format this year, the sessions were incredibly enlightening, the conference addressed many of the themes presented within this document, highlighting the potential for outdoor recreation to be used as a tool for both economic development and addressing public health. The conference also highlighted stories of both organizations and individuals who participate in, and use these pursuits for public health outcomes. Through the conference the author also met several individuals who were added to the list of interviewees.

Of the nine interviews that were conducted, it is important to note all were conducted virtually or over the telephone due to complications caused by COVID-19. In academic studies it has been found that in person interviews reveal more context to the interviewer (Oppendaker, R., 2006). The interviewer used a standardized set of questions however, to accommodate the different expertise of the individuals that were spoken to, follow up questions led to variance in the interviews. Questions asked within this process included: questions regarding the perspective of management of outdoor recreation on the Nation, questions regarding the conflict of sacred lands and outdoor recreation along with questions regarding the barriers to development of

outdoor recreation on the Navajo Nation, and potential paths forward. The interviewees were then asked to refer the interviewer to other potential participants in the study using snowball technique as the mechanism of reaching a broader population (Etikan, I., et al., 2016). The interviewees consisted primarily of Diné individuals. However, it should be noted that two non-Diné individuals were interviewed because they work for non-profits organizations that operate in the space of promoting outdoor recreation in the Navajo Nation. The gender dynamic of this study was also skewed, the interviewees consisted of seven individuals who identified as men and two as women.

The interview data was analyzed using framework analysis as defined by Srivasta and Thomas (2009). This involved indexing, charting and mapping these responses to illuminate themes. It should be noted however, that the experts interviewed within this study had different perspectives regarding different activities on the Nation. The individuals interviewed included executive directors of nonprofits developing outdoor recreation on the Navajo Nation, several academics, athletes, and guides. To maintain privacy, individuals are not identified throughout this document, however, initiatives of importance which these individuals are connected to are mentioned throughout, serving as notable examples within the Navajo Nation.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

In the data analysis there was an attempt to gain a deeper understanding by contextualizing all of the interviews as a complete data set. This allowed a broad set of data in which to inform the analysis (Ayres, L., et. al, 2003). The results from the interviews are spread throughout the thesis, and the author has demarcated all of the responses in an identical manner, citing them as “personal communication”. In several instances the interviewees were directly affiliated with organizations which are working on developing outdoor recreation on Navajo

Nation. The information is relayed primarily explains the context of the work these organizations are doing. The author did not deem it necessary to conceal the organizations as they are relevant to the case.

### 3. Geographic Distribution of Opportunities

The figure displayed below is a simplified version of the interactive map which was made available for analyzing geographic opportunities. This image should be observed as underrepresenting the distribution of opportunities within the Navajo Nation. It should be noted that these opportunities are relatively evenly distributed across much of this space. It should also be noted that many of the layers of data were removed to simplify this map, for example the climbing routes have not been visually represented as it is illegal to climb on the Nation at present. Also, trail projects in development are not represented on this map.

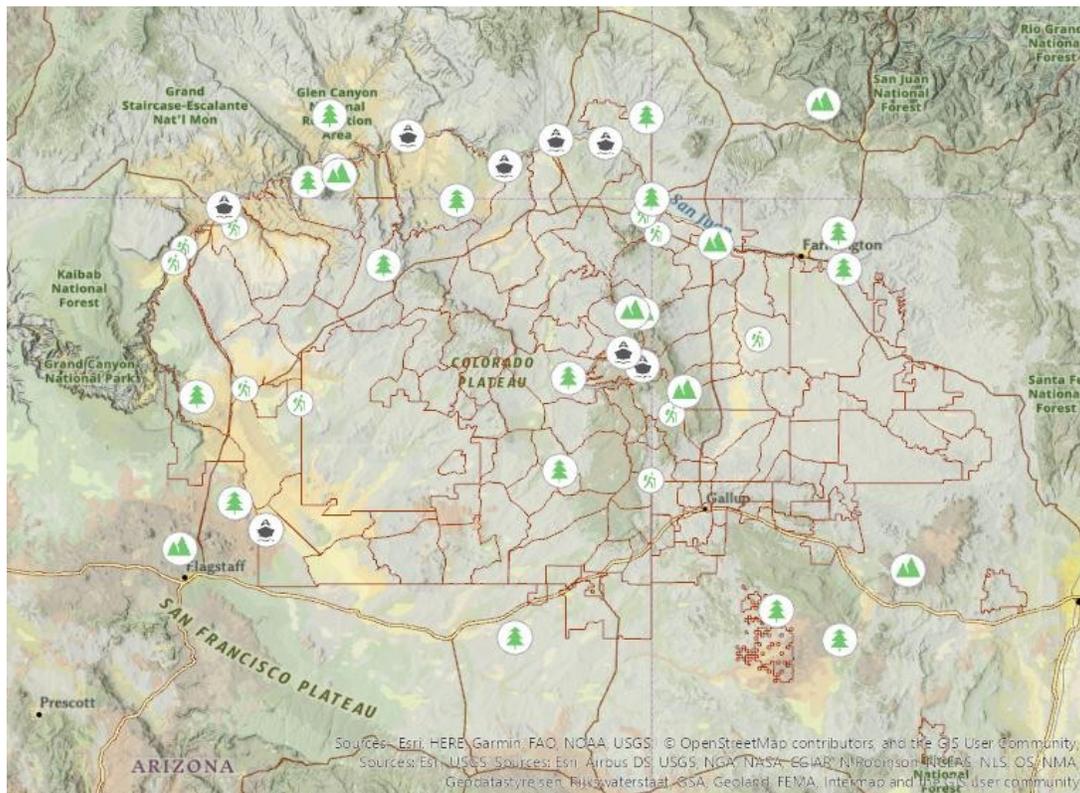
The relatively high distribution of monuments and protected spaces is indicative of the scenic value of these landscapes. This map is placed in this document primarily to provide contextualization to the discussion that follows. Often the academy speaks of topics in the abstract. However, it is important to note that there are lives which are affected by both the positive and negative impact of tourism.

The general takeaway from this topographical work is that throughout the Nation there are different, yet, consistent opportunities for recreation. A topographical map of sacred landscapes does not exist, to the best of the author's knowledge. Due to the nature of Navajo spirituality this potentially would not make sense to be represented in this manner, however, the location of these landscapes is known by community elders and using maps is a possible tool to avoid conflict. This strategy was used in the development of the *k'e* trail system out of

Crownpoint, New Mexico which will be discussed in further detail later in the thesis (personal communication, 2021).

As described in the methods section due to the nature of the development of this map it should be viewed as a resource to be built upon. There could be for instance room to include more information and photos within this interactive resource in the future.

As this map is a picture of an interactive map a legend was left out of the creation of the image. The explanation of these symbols is as follows: the mountain symbol is used to indicate both important mountains and areas with snow recreation potential. The walking symbol is used to indicate the start of a trail. The small boat is used to indicate areas of potential for water recreation. The tree indicates both federal and tribal protected monuments and parks. In many of the protected spaces there are existing trails and recreation opportunities.



**Figure 1.** Geographic distribution of outdoor activities developed on the Navajo Nation (Adapted from: Alltrails pro, 2020; Americancanyoneers.org, 2020; discovernavajo.com, 2020; National Park Service, 2020; Natural Atlas, 2020; Navajo Yes, 2020; U.S.G.S, 2020)

## 4. A Literature Review of Sacredness and the Confluence with Recreation

The author's understanding of sacredness has been informed by Lane (2001) who argues for an infusion of the methods that scholars have taken in the past. The various approaches consist of trying to illuminate the reverence of space from an ontological approach, which required immersion. Writing about spirituality from inside of the group gives a scholar the advantage of understanding the 'holiness' of the space. Others have tried to define these topics as a cultural issue, arguing that the sacredness of place is open to interpretation by various groups and that there will always be counter beliefs. This allows for a discussion regarding the cultural elements of the experience. Finally, there was a development of a phenomenological approach which indicates that the more than human world is interacting with humanity. In his work speaking of these three approaches Lane states, "Taken together, they form a dancelike exchange that is essential to the holistic perception of the way any manifestation of the holy is perceived in space" (Lane, B., 2001). In summation 'sacredness' is informed by culture, experience, and the natural world. The Diné view certain spaces with reverence, and in the author's understanding of the landscape, their culture, and their spiritual beliefs all contribute to this. This leads to the Diné often guarding these places with caution, as they form a part of the identity of the tribe (Jett, S., 1992).

The characteristics of places that are important to the individuals that hold a specified space as sacred are critical to understand in any discussion of the sacred landscapes. There are cultures which hold exclusion of 'nonbelievers' as an important characteristic of a sacred space. Conflict generally arises when this exclusion is difficult to control or the group which holds the place in esteem does not have the ability to control the space. How different groups have interacted with this has been incredibly diverse (Rutte, C., 2011).

In the case of Indigenous peoples, the sacredness of place is often rooted in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which is loosely defined as the oral traditions passed down by indigenous peoples for generations. Although difficult to define as these knowledges and relationships to place vary for distinct tribes, the body of research into these concepts provides insight for understanding of the sacredness of space. In many instances these knowledges have provided rules for the way in which indigenous people interact with landscape. In the Navajo case in particular some of these practices have been codified into law as the Fundamental Law of the Diné (Rock, T., & Ingram, J., 2020)

When these relationships to land have been abused by tribal members or outsiders, Native American tribes have often attempted to defend their sacred spaces from the federal government and other groups. Conflict has arisen regarding spaces held as sacred which are managed by other groups in the U.S. often as federal lands. Examples of this include the damming of Glen Canyon, which was held sacred by several Native American groups including the Navajo. In another case the conflict between climbers bolting lines on Bear Lodge (Devils Tower National Monument) in Wyoming specifically illuminates the historical conflict between recreationists and native groups. In this particular instance the Lakota people and surrounding plains tribes came into legal conflict with the National Park Service over management decisions which allowed the continuation of the development of climbing routes, arguing this was a desecration of the sacred (Grimm, L., 1997). With regards to both the damming of Glen Canyon and the management of Bear Lodge following litigation the courts ruled against the tribes. Notably, however, in the Bear Lodge case, there was an effort to address the concerns which were brought forth by these peoples. There was a voluntary climbing ban placed by the National Park Service

on the Tower in the month of June, and there was interpretation installed which explained the native perspective to the monument (Dussais, A., 2000).

Another notable example with relevance to the Navajo people is the conflict between a tribal coalition, including the Navajo people, against Arizona Snowbowl ski resort. The coalition of tribes sued the resort over the manner in which they approach their sacred site. A quote which speaks to the core of this issue is:

“... in the long run if the expansion is permitted, we will not be able successfully to teach our people that this is a sacred place. If the ski resort remains or is expanded, our people will not accept the view that this is the sacred Home of the Kachinas. The basis of our existence as a society will become a mere fairy tale to our people” – Hopi tribal members (Michaelson, R., 1985).

These conflicts have led to the passage of the executive order 13007 or “Indian Sacred Sites,” by the Clinton administration in 1996, which was intended to give voice to Native people to protect their sacred spaces. The American Religious Freedom Act which was passed in 1978 was also in many ways seeking to address some of the discrimination that had been perpetrated on these groups in many cases by the US government. These came after a period of governmental pressure for adoption of Christianity and Western culture (Michaelson, R., 1985). Although theoretically beneficial, these laws can be criticized as they place much of the burden of proof on native tribes. The incredibly complex task of translating worldviews can work against native tribes operating in the U.S. legal system (Milholland, S., 2010). This concern worked against the Navajo people and local tribes in the legal battle against Snowbowl Ski Area. On the Navajo Nation this is less of a concern however, the federal protected lands within the Nation are spaces in which the tribe must conform to the U.S. legal system.

The issue of management of sacred space is still incredibly salient for many native people. For instance, in a recent letter from Shane Doyle, an Asaalooke tribal member, to the Forest Service in regards to the Crazy Mountain range in Montana, Doyle notes that, “we all have a stake in preserving their integrity.” He continues to state how the mountains should be perceived “with reverence and not turned into a recreational playground” (Doyle, S., 2020).

Not all interactions between diverse groups and the sacred have been negative. The interface between the sacred and tourism has been addressed all around the world, from Arizona to Zanzibar. (Dahl, C., 1993; Gómez-Barris, M., 2012; Madeweya, K. et. al, 2004). This interface requires careful examination, as there is potential for exploitation and cultural appropriation if not properly designed and managed. Examples of cultural appropriation are incredibly common; two salient examples are: the commercialization of Mexican culture with important events like *Día de los Muertos* replicated around the world. This has been considered offensive to many Mexican people. Hawaiian culture is another example in which commercialization has been ubiquitous: tiki bars, plastic luaus and Hawaiian dance have become commonplace around the world. These misrepresentations often provide no benefit to the indigenous peoples (Gertner, K., 2019).

Kemper (2012) writes of how the Hopi tribe have set up strict regulations as to how their ceremonies can be viewed and specifically how photography has been prohibited to maintain the sacred nature of these events. The ability of groups to have control over what is considered holy should be done to serve the specific community’s goals that holds the space in esteem (Rutte, C., 2011). In the case of the Hopi the recording of ceremonies, and even at times the presence of members outside of the Hopi community within certain spaces could be viewed as an act of desecration of the sacred (Kemper, K., 2012).

Tourism developments can be problematic when they become appropriated by capitalist influences, and local people lose control of how people interface with these places. An example of this is written about in the Sacred Valley of Peru, in which Western influences have opened up a form of new-age tourism in the Andes. This tourism is reliant on a mystified version of the Incan history and the indigenous Q'ero people. This particular instance has created a market demand for indigenous ceremonies, and although indigenous people have been included in the process the individuals who hold power in mediating the ceremonies are western 'new age gurus.' Although employment is generated for indigenous people, the question of whether this type of tourism will bring benefit to the community is debatable (Gómez-Barris, M., 2012).

There are other instances where indigenous people have used tourism, which uses these spaces as a fruitful economic venture to the benefit of their peoples. Although conflict has been emphasized, Native American reservations in the United States are home to a variety of different types of tourism projects (Sage, L., et al., 2019; Law, 1996). In many instances, tribes derive a significant part of their economy from visitation. Visitors predominantly come to recreate in natural landscapes, buy local crafts, view tribal ceremonies or other historical features; they also often participate in developed tourism activities including but not limited to pow-wows, casinos, and cultural tours (Notkze, C., 2004). Although attitudes vary drastically regarding tourism in different indigenous groups the general consensus is there is a positive view of the industry's economic potential. However, tourism is also typically viewed with skepticism (Spencer, D. & Glover, J., 2011; Hearne, R., & Tuscherer, S., 2008). In 2012, indigenous groups came together in the Pacific Islands to issue a declaration regarding Indigenous tourism, which included the following statements:

“Recognizing that whilst tourism provides the strongest driver to restore, protect and promote Indigenous cultures, it has the potential to diminish and destroy those cultures when improperly developed” (ATTA, 2012).

As rural America becomes more dependent on the tourism industry, an ever more significant portion of jobs are dependent on tourism. It is important to consider this as an option for sustainable livelihoods for Native American reservations (Timothy, D., 2005).

In the following section there will be a discussion regarding several successful cases of indigenous groups managing forms of ecotourism on their tribal nations, ultimately to set up the discussion for the case of the Navajo Nation.

#### 4.1 Selected Successful Cases

The author has identified three cases which in the estimation of this work seem to be operating relatively successfully. These are: the environmental tourism operation of the Maori people; the tourism operations owned and run by the Mescalero Apache tribe including Ski Apache; and hunting operation which is run by the White Mountain Apache. The theoretical framework that the author has been influenced by when thinking through these types of development are written about in texts regarding “eco-tourism” and particularly “pro-poor tourism” (Ashley, C., et. al, 2000; Capocchi et al., 2019; Fletcher et. al, 2019). Although each one of these cases is unique, they hold similar characteristics of being run by and for the empowerment of peoples. There are notable cases all around the world of successful operations; however, these were selected both for their unique success and in the later examples for their cultural relevance for the Diné.

### 4.1.1 Maori

New Zealand's Maori people have welcomed tourists as a fundamental part of their economy. The Maori queen in the conference described by Zeppel argued for the Maori people to engage deeper in the industry and benefit beyond just service work (Zeppel, H., 1997). This tourism project done by the Maori people is especially notable due to both the prominence and the manner in which the project has remained under Maori sovereignty. In discussing this a quote stands out from Mahuta quoted in Barnett:

“[T]ribes must act to retain their position as the controllers and regulators in any...venture and this must be written clearly into all contacts. They must always be seen as the kaitiaki, of their resource be it cultural, spiritual or physical” (Barnett, S., 1997).

For the Maori people spirituality is a key component of their world view. In a study almost twenty years later, Puriri and McIntosh dove into how the Maori world view could be centered as the industry moved forward. The results of the research echoed the quote above noting that the main conflict is maintaining cultural control over what is shared, and maintaining authenticity in the engagement with the outside world (Puriri, A. & McIntosh, A., 2019). The history of inclusion of tourism into the Maori economy is punctuated by moments of tension and complications, resulting in initiatives such as a certification process for Maori-made products. These initiatives have been viewed as successful. The Maori people have been cognizant of what aspects of their culture they want to share along with which spaces and knowledge should be held exclusively for the community (Ryan, C., 1997). This has allowed them to benefit economically, and maintain and strengthen their identity.

Ransfield & Riechenberger (2021) in their work illuminate the ability of Maori tourism organizations to uphold indigenous values held by their communities even with the neo-liberal

capitalist systems. Many Maori tourism operations successfully have incorporated cultural values into their business model. The concept of the economy of *mana* has become common within these businesses. *Mana* is defined as - "...a quality, energy or consciousness in the world which can be harnessed and expressed in activities through acts of generosity and wisdom, compassion . . . and forgiveness" (Spiller & Stockdale quoted in Ransfield, A. K., & Riechenberger, I., 2021). The ability of cultural values to drive businesses through compassion has been critical in maintaining cultural values. For instance, taking into consideration the importance of protecting landscapes, and providing for the broader community are important for many Maori tourism operators. These organizations take into account the spiritual nature of the land and the importance of protecting it. Although the initiatives taken by these tourism organizations to incorporate environmental, social or cultural initiatives in many instances decrease profits, the relationship between business sustainability and cultural values is not necessarily dichotomous and the success of their operations allowed these tourism operations to contribute to their culture and their community. Summing up one of these values a Maori participant states:

"The land is our life force. It is because of the land that we are here and able to operate our business. It is our responsibility as staff of the business to nurture the land and protect the land in everything that we do." (Lee quoted in: Ransfield, A. K., & Riechenberger, I., 2021)

The ability of these businesses to operate in a manner which is respectful of their culture and the landscapes that are held as sacred allows these businesses to be successful not only economically but culturally.

### 4.1.2 Mescalero Apache

Individuals of the Mescalero Apache believe there are locations that are connections between the physical world and the spiritual world. Often mountains are viewed as incredibly important places that are considered sacred. Beyond this, certain plants and sweat lodges have important qualities that are considered sacred for the tribe. When these places are interacted with in an inappropriate manner this interaction is viewed as dangerous (Carmichael, D., 1994).

Ski Apache, in the eastern part of Arizona is located on an incredibly important mountain for tribe. The ski resort also is a significant source of revenue for the Mescalero Apache people (Henderson, M.). The tribe has been given control of this resort and operates the operation which is located on Forest Service Lands. However, the space is notably important to the people. The tribe developed an inn located near the ski area, and this allows the tribe to generate more profit from the operation (Henderson, M., 1988). The resort has some of the most established snowmaking and services of any resort in the state and has been able to operate relatively successfully (Bark, R. et al., 2010). The ski opportunities in the winter and hiking and mountain biking opportunities in the summer season allow for this operation to be financially successful year-round (skiapache.com, 2020; Mescalero Apache Parks and Recreation, 2020). The tribe also operates hunting tours from the lodge during the fall season. The Mescalero Apache divide their permits based on recreation areas within the reservation. The jurisdiction is locally implemented which allows local communities to have control and benefit from this recreation. This results in a different fee for permission to use specific zones and local jurisdiction over the different recreational activities including camping, fishing and fern picking.

In a quote from an unpublished ethnographic study conducted by Martha Henderson, regarding the development of Ski Apache she summed her research regarding this contradiction:

“Economic development of a sacred site seems at first glance to be a contradiction. Yet many places are valued for their embodiment of perfection, redemptive or healing qualities, prayer, or worship which are also major sources of income” (Henderson, M.).

In her research Henderson speaks about the process developing this ski resort, the initial tension felt by the community, and the resolution which was ultimately achieved by regulating which spaces could be accessed, and how those spaces could be accessed by individuals outside of the tribe (Henderson, M).

### 4.1.3 White Mountain Apache (Ndee)

Another tribe that has operated tourism very successfully is the White Mountain Apache known to charge upwards of \$10,000 for different hunting tags. Historically there has been tension between the state of Arizona and tribes in regards to the management of game. However, in 1983 a Supreme Court decision declared that the rights of tribes to manage hunting on their lands supersedes that of any state office (Amerman, S, 1992). The White Mountain Apache runs a specific type of hunting tourism in which they open the season early to a few high-paying individuals to reduce the number of animals that will be hunted from their lands; because of the large antlers and health of the herd they can charge a significantly elevated price. Ultimately this stems from the relationship that the tribe maintains with the animals. In maintaining a healthy herd, they are able to both allow for cultural hunting practices to continue and also use the space for a tourist venture which is highly profitable for the tribe.

In Apache the word *ni'* is used for both land and mind, the language and the culture are intertwined with landscapes. In the case of the White Mountain Apache Tribe, neither the loss of control of territory nor the attempt of the U.S. Government to eradicate the culture was successful in disconnecting the tribe from the land. For the Apache the health of the land is

intertwined with the health of the people, cattle have been completely removed from their landscapes and there have been many initiatives to restore habitat (Welch, J., & Riley, R., 2001).

Tourism has been a strategy that the White Mountain Apache has used since the 1960s as a mechanism of economic development. In 1969 the White Mountain Apache opened the oldest structure in Fort Apache as a cultural interpretive center. Since then, in 1994 the tribe opened a tourism office, and have invested in the Cibecue Falls area including developing a welcome center and accompanying trails (Welch, J., et. al, 2005). Tourism has also been used as a strategy to reclaim narratives of the history of the tribe. The White Mountain Apache received a grant to inventory almost fifteen hundred places throughout the homelands of the tribe, this is serving as a tool for both education and for consultation with the government about the management of lands (Welch, J. & Riley, R., 2001). This has allowed the tribe to gain a greater degree of sovereignty over what happens in spaces considered sacred to the tribe.

The White Mountain Apache Tribe regulates recreation through the Game and Fish department which sells boating permits, fishing permits, permission to view Cibecue Falls, vehicle permits, river access permits, and camping permits, along with controlling the application process to apply for hunting tags. The White Mountain Apache also run a ski resort and operate a tourist resort near Hawkley Lake (White Mountain Apache Game and Fish, 2020). These initiatives allow the tribe the ability to maintain cultural connection to the way they manage land. This is a form of sovereignty, which although challenged by the federal government, has been maintained.

These indigenous peoples took different approaches; however, they all managed to successfully incorporate tourism into their economies while still preserving their sacred

spaces/practices. The Navajo Nation is in a position where they could do the same if they choose to do so.

## 4.2 Sacred Lands in Diné Bikéyah

In engaging a review of literature regarding Navajo spirituality, two concepts reveal themselves as predominant: *hózhó*, which has been defined as balance, or the centering of all things. The other concept which has predominance is *k'e* which can be roughly translated to connection, often around family units. However, for many individuals, *k'e* can mean connection to all things. The literature also makes it clear that certain spaces are more than a place; they are viewed as animate. Where Euro-Americans might conceptualize sacredness as pertaining to a place, the Navajo people might argue these places are sacred beings (Dunstan, A., 2016).

In the Fundamental Law of the Diné at the beginning of the Navajo constitution the law mandates a respecting of spiritual practices and beliefs of the people. These laws codify that:

[A]ir, water, light/fire, earth/pollen, the six sacred mountains [the four sacred peaks which provide the boundaries of Diné Bikeyah, and two sacred peaks within the Nation] and its attendants must be respected, honored, and protected. All living things on the Earth and in the universe have a right and freedom to exist and Diné peoples have a sacred obligation and duty to respect, preserve, and protect all. (Lee, L., 2012).

This law gives an example for Navajo people to live by based on their culture. This understanding of the world rooted in Traditional Ecological Knowledge and deepens the significance of lands for many Diné.

In scholarly work that has been written on sacred places of Navajo lands by non-Navajo scholars it became known that certain spaces are viewed as disrespectful to approach, especially

for non-Navajo peoples (Jett, S., 1992; Jett, S.; 1995; Blake, K., 2001). Although there was an effort to inventory these places, these initial studies often revolved around the gathering of stories of the people.

A study which was conducted by Kara Kelley and Harris Francis (1993) made an effort to more successfully identify sacred spaces within the Navajo homeland. The study was able to identify many areas of specific importance connected to stories told by the tribe. However, this concept might be partially flawed in the viewpoint of many Diné who hold all lands as sacred. However, elders' stories which are a way to share culture and reverence often include certain places which hold additional meaning (Kelly, K., & Francis, H., 1993). A quote that stands out from the inventory by Kelly and Francis speaking to a Navajo elder was:

“We desecrate everything we touch. The immortals are going to destroy us as a people one day and replace us with another people. We are put here on Mother Earth for only a short time. This is Changing Woman's land, only she can say, ‘It is my land.’ Only hell is everybody's land” (Kelly, K., & Francis, H., 1993).

The tribal elder was speaking of the coal mining that was occurring on Black Mesa, which brutally affected the landscape held in esteem. However, the idea of the holiness of all space is obviously held by the elder and many Diné.

How relationship to the sacred is manifested varies for individuals. However, Navajo students and professionals who leave the boundaries of the four sacred mountains have often been noted to experience psychological trauma which is deeper than homesickness. Being placed in an environment which is foreign and devoid of meaning has been identified as the source of trauma for students, or professionals who have left the Nation (Griffin-Pierce, T., 1997).

In a study done by Turco (1999) regarding tourism development there was little tolerance for inclusion of tourism into sacred spaces and religious ceremonies. This is consistent with other studies conducted regarding promotion of tourism on Western Indian Reservations. There has been almost complete consensus regarding the idea that certain spaces and cultural traditions which should be kept “off limits” to tourists (Browne, R., & Nolan M., 1989). Although these works are certainly dated, yet the sentiment that there should be sovereignty over what spaces and cultural traditions the area wants to share remains imperative.

In reviewing the literature there is a general consensus regarding the economic potential of tourism, along with the sensitivity of certain spaces and cultural practices. This boundary needs to be respected. The next sections address the context which the Navajo Nation confronts and explains both the governance that is currently in place, the economic potential of outdoor recreation and the considerations which experts deemed necessary to address regarding outdoor recreation development in the Nation. Outdoor recreation potential has not been studied in the Navajo context, although there has been a scholarly effort to critique the history of recreationists in the Navajo Nation (Boggs, K., 2016). The Navajo led initiatives that are currently underway in the Nation to promote outdoor recreation take into consideration the importance of culture and sacred lands, this thesis seeks to illuminate these processes.

## 5. Economy and governmental structure of the Navajo Nation

The economic situation on the Nation is important to discuss to illuminate the context which the Nation confronts. In light of the closures of the Navajo Generating Station (NGS), a coal fired power plant, and the Kayenta Mine, a coal mine there is need to think critically about generating livelihoods for the tribe. Notably these two facilities provided approximately 43% of revenue for the Navajo Nation. There is a significant opportunity to explore the sustainable

expansion of the outdoor industry on Navajo land. Options to generate local revenue and employment will be a significant challenge. In addition to potentially filling a portion of the gap in local employment and revenue generation for the tribe, the outdoor industry could create a number of benefits including for public health, language, and cultural revitalization.

The Navajo Nation is situated within some of the most iconic landscapes of the American Southwest consisting of 27,000 square miles of territory in between Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico and is the largest Native American Indian reservation in the United States. Within the Navajo Nation reside 375,804 tribal members, and 162,208 members live outside tribal lands. With high poverty rates, and little economic opportunity many tribal members have chosen to leave the Nation.

In a document produced by the Navajo Nation's Division of Economic Development the division sums up the challenges succinctly:

“[T]he Navajo Nation is facing extraordinary challenges, including health and social disparity, poverty, as well as language and cultural pressures. Yet, as the Navajo Nation evolves, the Navajo people continue to balance culture, tradition, language and modernism. Despite the hardships, the Navajo people continue to strongly practice, respect and value their cultural teachings, traditions, language and way of life” (Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development, 2018).

The Navajo Nation has been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the factors leading to the challenge of the pandemic being particularly significant for the Nation are: 30-40% of households lack access to running water or electricity; widespread food insecurity is present; and a large number of multi-generational households exist on the Nation. These factors in combination have caused the impacts to have been felt broadly. The infection rate has been

the one of the highest in the country. Although the trends seem to be improving, the impact has been significant not only for the health of the community but also for worsening economic trends (Doshi, S., et al., 2020). The economic cost of lost wages within the Navajo Nation as of June, 2020 from the coronavirus was nearing 1 billion dollars. This continues to deepen economic pain as more employees are being laid off at businesses such as the local casinos (Quintero, D., 2020).

## 5.1 Governmental Structure

The Navajo Nation's governmental structure is divided into two levels of governance; at the tribal scale there is a council along with tribal president and vice-president. On local levels the governance is done at the "Chapter" level. It is the responsibility of the Chapter to interface with the tribal government. The nation is divided up into 110 Chapters. Each Chapter has the ability to pass resolutions that are relevant to their lands (Navajo Nation government, 2020).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) during much of recent history has also had a presence in regards to the management of lands. There are certain areas which are inholdings that are held by the BIA and hence are within control of the federal government.

## 5.2 Land Management

Land Management on the Navajo Nation has several elements to it, which center around the Fundamental Laws of the Diné (FLD) which is based on the Navajo values of: *hozhó* ("beauty, or balance"), *k'e* ("relations"), and *áná'áál'ii' nítl'iiz níná'nil* ("atonement by putting things in place") (Powell, D. & Curley, A., 2008). Codified in Navajo Nation law is the idea that "Mother Earth and Father Sky is part of us as the Diné and the Diné is part of Mother Earth and Father Sky; The Diné must treat this sacred bond with love and respect without exerting dominance for we do not own our mother or father..." (Navajo Nation Code, 2010). These values are regulated by both a tribal Land Office along with more local jurisdiction through Chapter Grazing

Committees. The lands within the nation held as Tribal Trust Land are governed by the Nation but are held as Department of the Interior lands and managed through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. There are also Federal inholdings within the nation producing a complicated checkerboard of different jurisdictions.

In Navajo Nation legal code, the right to manage lands is given to the Navajo Nation Council, specifically the Community Development Committee which is charged to “review and approve comprehensive community land use plans and zoning ordinances and amendments or modifications thereof, including land withdrawals necessary for the implementation of such land use plans.” Along with the Resource Committee, the Parks and Recreation department is given broad jurisdiction to provide jurisdiction to make use of the laws as deemed necessary. “The Navajo Parks Commission is authorized to adopt rules and regulations and do all things necessary to implement or supplement the provisions of this Chapter” (Navajo Nation Code, 2010). In the management of recreation, the Navajo Parks and Recreation department is the primary institution involved in the management of outdoor recreation and control of spaces on tribal lands. Other land management decisions involve other institutions.

To explain land management, it is important to understand land titles are not a concept within the Navajo Nation. Therefore, there are several governing bodies that manage the use of lands. However, individuals can hold power over landscapes. The lands are divided into grazing districts in which grazing permit holders hold power over any decision that happens on their permitted lands. Therefore, if a development project were to pass through a landscape, the holder of the grazing permit, be that the Chapter or an individual, would hold power of allowing or negating the project (Rosser, E., 2019).

To give an example of land management on the Nation. Developing projects to support tourism on the Navajo Nation would require multiple steps that will vary depending on the type of development. Imagine a highly motivated individual who wanted to develop a trail: the first step would be a concept design and the mapping of the project; following this, the individual seeking to build the trail would need to seek Chapter approval as all of the subsequent interactions need to emanate from the Chapter Level. The approval of the grazing permit holder is critical in any development project; this will be negotiated through the Chapter. Because the Navajo Nation is a checkerboard of land management, it is also important to understand if the land that the trail would pass through has already been “withdrawn” for other projects. If the area is already “withdrawn” the project could move forward without subsequent clearances, assuming approval of the entity managing the land. However, if the land has not been withdrawn, the Chapter will then send a letter of application to the Navajo Land Department (Navajo Land Department, 2020). In the subsequent level of approval, the trail developer would need to get several clearances; first, a biological clearance for the trail development needs to be granted by the Navajo Department of Fish and Wildlife. The trail also needs to be approved from an archaeological standpoint, and this survey needs to be done by the Historic Preservation Department. It is important to note that this archaeological clearance also includes consultation with elders to avoid any desecration of sacred lands. Finally, an assessment needs to be done by Navajo EPA to confirm that the project will not impact water quality (Navajo Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2020; Navajo Historic Preservation Department, 2020; Navajo EPA, 2020). The acceptance or rejection of any project will vary depending on the lands’ classification and any one of these institutions can stop the development from taking place. The United States

Federal government also has the power to intervene if any of the landscapes are managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Something notable about the level of governmental oversight is that construction of an oil pipeline on the Navajo Nation requires exactly the same steps that the construction of a trail requires with the only additional approval necessary being that of the Navajo Economic Council. This comparison is important to note, as the ecological impact of a pipeline is much more significant than that of a trail. An understanding of land management reveals that the process for developing recreation infrastructure could be time consuming and complicated. These processes are in place to respect the landscape and serve a purpose; however, the complexity is important to note as it has implications for the sovereignty of landscapes which is discussed further later in this thesis.

### 5.3 Navajo Nation Tribal Parks & Recreation

The Navajo Nation Tribal Parks commission was founded in 1957, partly resulting from general frustration regarding the role of the film industry in Monument Valley and partly in an effort to prevent the U.S. government from establishing control over a larger section of the Nation (Sanders, J., 1996). The Navajo Parks and Recreation division is one of the oldest components of the tribal government. However, there are obvious challenges that these individuals face. The staff of this agency is only four individuals who are responsible for managing the entire system of tribal parks and maintaining a high level of visitor experience. These individuals are also responsible for protecting cultural resources which makes their job incredibly complex.

The Tribal Parks Commission was formed in part due to the tribe's uneasy relationship with the federal government at the time and reluctance to see any more land ceded to form

protected areas within the Nation. The commission also saw the benefit of preserving and controlling particularly meaningful locations both for cultural significance and economic benefit. This organization from its inception was responsible for hosting recreational activities and coordinating what happened in the landscapes set aside by the tribe (Sanders, J. M., 1989). This tribal government organization is important to discuss as the regulations the tribe imposes will be regulated by this organization.

## 5.4 Permitting

Although there is certainly an economic case for this type of tourism, when not regulated properly, outdoor recreation can be damaging to environmental conditions. In the context of this case study improper environmental management can also have implications for desecration of sacred lands. The following section will describe how the Navajo Nation manages permitting and some of the intricacies of the land management system on the Nation.

The Navajo Parks and Recreation office requires a distinctive “backcountry permit” to access hiking trails on Navajo lands outside of federal jurisdiction. The backcountry permit allows access to be granted to visit more remote areas and requires a slightly more complicated process. The user has to send their itinerary to the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation department along with vehicle information and contact information. Accompanying this itinerary, the visitor must send in a money order or cashier’s check made out to the Navajo Nation. Following approval, the permit will be mailed to the individual. There is also an option to receive a permit at any of the five parks and recreation offices on the Navajo Nation which eliminates the necessity for mailing in information. The Navajo Parks and Recreation Department makes it clear that the users are not to use drones, rock climb, or desecrate Navajo Lands by spreading remains of cremated persons. The fee is 12 dollars per day per person. There is no specification for type of

backcountry activity (Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation, 2020). This permitting process is a mechanism for the tribal government to regulate what happens in the spaces that they manage although it is complicated.

Hunting and Fishing are regulated through the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife. This requires the hunter to purchase tags and will be discussed in further detail later in this thesis (Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2020).

To access several of the tribal parks including Monument Valley Tribal Park, there is a general admission fee which covers entrance. Monument Valley being the most famous tribal park in the system has the highest fee, which is \$20. This can be purchased online or in person. However, other spaces also require entrance fee including Four Monument among others, these serve as a source of revenue for Tribal Parks.

The regulations the Navajo Parks and Recreation have put in place state that most Navajo Nation trails are closed to non-Navajo individuals without a valid backcountry permit. Visitors to these trails without a permit are considered trespassing. While traveling on Navajo Lands it is asked that visitors stay on trails, as soil erosion can cause serious long-term implications. This also is in place to avoid unknowing desecration of sacred lands. Also, the office requests that respect be paid to residential spaces and visitors to be respectful of the people who live in the Nation. For instance, no photographs should be taken of people without permission. Pets should be maintained on a leash as the backcountry is open range for livestock. There is also no tolerance for alcohol, firearms, or drugs. Beyond this there is an expectation that hikers follow leave-no-trace principles, leaving very little impact on the land, including packing out anything brought into the backcountry and not disturbing any fragile habitat or archaeological zones. There are also areas that are considered sacred and are off-limits to the general public; for

instance: Navajo Mountain. Disrespectful visitors have prompted the Navajo Parks and Recreation to close the following areas: Upper Kaibeto, Navajo Canyon, Chaol Canyon, Kaibeto Creek, Peach Wash, and Butterfly Canyon. Beyond this, the area around the Inscription House community and Tsegi Canyon (Dowozhiebetto and Long Canyons) are closed. (Navajo Parks and Recreation, 2020).

Although no data was collected to objectively analyze the effectiveness of the permitting system; the experts the author spoke to were very critical of this process, stating that it is overly complicated. Due to the complex nature of the permitting system, they noted there have been many individuals who have ignored the process altogether. It was also noted that the number of individuals to patrol landscapes is incredibly limited, which complicates enforcement (personal communication, 2021). The permitting process, although complex, is one of the main tools that the Nation has in controlling who has access to spaces; giving the Nation sovereignty over who enters and how this mediated.

## 5.5 Federally Managed Lands within and surrounding the Navajo Nation

A notable feature of the Navajo Nation is the presence of federal inholdings within the Nation. There are several National Monuments and National Park Units within the Nation. In these units there is a requirement to have a backcountry permit to access specific spaces; however, in general these spaces are open to the public. To obtain a permit, the process requires a form that must be delivered to the National Park Service either electronically or in person. National Park Units located on the Nation are “No Fee Zones,” however, fees are required for certain amenities such as campgrounds and/ or backcountry permits (nps.gov, 2020). Although these landscapes are not under the direct control of the tribe, their presence can serve as a mechanism of economic potential.

However, the relationship between the National Park Service and the tribe, very much akin to the relationship that the tribe has to the federal government in general, has at times been riddled with conflict. The first monument on the Navajo Nation was founded in 1907. Chaco Culture National historic site and later Navajo National Monument in 1909 were both designated because of the perceived threat of plundering of Anasazi archaeological sites within the area. Many of the monuments on the Navajo Nation contain a wealth of historical objects and the Department of the Interior (DOI) has attempted to preserve these locales (Rothman, H., 1991).

The governmental agency has often had complex goals in the Navajo Nation. The responsibility to protect the natural resources had to be balanced with development projects with the potential of supporting livelihoods of those surrounding these areas (Rothman, H., 1991). Notably in the establishment of these national monuments, the tribe lost control of these spaces even though they are within their reservation. This was usually done by a land exchange in which other lands were ceded over to the tribe (Brugge, D., & Wilson, R., 1976).

There is one notable exception to this, Canyon de Chelly, is the only National Park in the United States in which a tribe owns the lands. The Park Service had to maintain a complicated relationship with the tribe to respect the wishes of the people inhabiting the canyon. The monument is a very popular tourist attraction in the region, and important to the local economy. Although the history of the monument contains moments of tension, there has been a conscious effort at co-management of this landscape (Brugge, D., & Wilson, R., 1976).

An example of successful collaboration was the planning process which involved the local Chapter government for Canyon de Chelly alongside the National Park Service (National Park Service, 1989). This process established many of the Parks and Recreation Division norms to guide themselves today (personal communication, 2021). In more recent history, the Navajo

Nation joined other tribal nations in advocating for protection of landscapes as national monuments, with the understanding that these landscapes would be co-managed following the example of Canyon de Chelly.

Generally, the Park Service has attempted to be a resource for the local community, and in the case of many of these National Monuments, they have been predominately run by and under Navajo leadership for much of recent history. Some of the surrounding National Parks and National Monuments are some of the most famous segments of the public land system within the United States. Also, notably at the end of the Obama administration in collaboration with the tribes in the region, the Navajo people advocated for the designation of Bears Ears which was designated as a national monument. The executive action that designated Bears Ears National Monument codified this space's co-management by the inter-tribal coalition and the federal government into law. Since this time, the monument has been reduced in size by 85 percent under the Trump administration. However, there is movement within the current political environment to restore the former boundaries of the National Monument, and hence restore co-management with the tribal coalition (Nordhaus, H., 2021).

According to a local park ranger, there is currently a positive relationship between the Park Service and the local community. The community often benefits from these protected spaces by having an area to sell their artisan crafts. These spaces also support the surrounding hospitality industry (personal communication, 2020). The Park Service has made attempts to address economic shortfalls by providing direct jobs to local peoples and attempting to be conscious regarding economic development in the Nation.

There is growing pressure to move towards co-management of more of these landscapes and including more indigenous voices, recognizing the significance of these areas to local tribes.

There certainly has been conflict in the way that the federal government managed the park units, and currently the tribe does not have complete control over these spaces. Although there is an integration of Navajo people in certain aspects of these spaces, there should be further efforts to incorporate the vision of the people into the management of these spaces. A contemporary example is the temporary closure of the Malpais during periods to respect religious practices (Grimm, L., 1997).

The federal lands within the Navajo Nation are not under the complete control of the Diné which provides a challenge in protecting spaces held as important to the tribe. Although there is opportunity for co-management, this lack of control is a barrier to the sovereignty for the Nation, however, these protected spaces are important as they are a primary source of visitation on the Nation.

## 6. Economics of Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor Recreation and the development of economies based around these activities is becoming a strategy for the western United States as a way of addressing lack of economic opportunity, in many cases transitioning away from extractive industry (Maples, J. et. al, 2019; Sausser, B., & Smith, J., 2018; Outdoor Industry Association, 2017). This type of industry is associated with several benefits, which range from attracting spending at local businesses to increasing property values and improving quality of life (Perkins, C., 2021). However, relevant to this discussion it is important to note that planning should be implemented to make sure the quality-of-life gains for developing outdoor recreation tourism are maintained for the community (Vogt, C., et. al, 2020). How this type of development occurs differs throughout communities all around the world; however, providing opportunities for individuals to access natural spaces is becoming ever more important.

In a broad sense, outdoor recreation has been in the national conversation since 1924 when the first National Conference of Outdoor Recreation was convened. Although the thinking regarding these pursuits has changed drastically, the guiding principles of the individuals who were involved in these activities has remained relatively consistent. This original conference summed up the sentiment when started to plan a national strategy for outdoor recreation:

“Outdoor recreation, . . . above all, has a direct beneficial influence on the formation of sturdy character by developing those qualities of self-control, endurance under hardship, reliance on self, and co-operation with others which are so necessary to good citizenship” (Revelle, R., 1967)

One of the most important changes in the thinking regarding these pursuits is the growing scientific consensus regarding the health benefits of outdoor recreation. There is also a growing recognition that the paradigm that these activities have been managed under could be flawed in that it seeks to limit access. The current paradigm attempts to reduce impact on the environment from these pursuits. Although there will always be a need to address the environmental impact of recreation, there is a growing consensus that broadening the accessibility for communities, and especially underserved people, is critical moving forward (Selen, S., et. al, 2020). An example of this manifesting in public policy is the New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund, which is designed to broaden access to recreational pursuits throughout the State of New Mexico (New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division, 2020). Nationally across the U.S. this initiative is broadening, and a similar proposal proposed by Senator Martin Heinrich among others, the Outdoor Future Act, would provide resources for disenfranchised communities to have access to outdoor spaces (office of Martin Heinrich, 2021). Many of these initiatives have indigenous communities in

mind in their development. This changing paradigm fits into the potential of developing outdoor recreation in places such as the Navajo Nation.

Outdoor recreation and tourism, although intrinsically connected, are two distinct types of traveling through landscape. While outdoor recreation is predominately based on nature-based activities; tourism is more all-encompassing to include both cultural and commercialized experiences. The Outdoor Industry Association, -whose study is referenced subsequently, defines 34 activities which they view as all-encompassing of outdoor recreation including but not limited to: water sports, trails sports, wheel sports, snow sports, hunting, fishing, and camping (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017).

Tourism has been a part of the Navajo economy since the late 1800s and has been a major focus in various periods for the tribal government (Jett, S., 1990; Ryan, C. & Aicken, M., 2005; Zeppel, H., 2010). For instance, the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1955 commissioned Stanford University to do a research study regarding the potential of tourism development, which prompted the tribe to open hotels in Window Rock and Shiprock. The planning for this development has been intermittent, however. Notably in 1972 the tribe developed a ten-year plan pushing for tourism developments. The effects of tourism on the Navajo Nation have been mixed, with many negative consequences resulting from the superficial engagement of cultural tourists. Although there is certainly an economic benefit, the costs are often many and hard to quantify (Jett, S., 1990). In the present day it is hard to deny a burgeoning tourism industry exists within the Navajo Nation. In the federal national park units surrounding the Navajo Nation there were more than six million visitation days in 2019. A visitation day is defined as one person visiting a site for one day (National Park Service, 2020). In a comparative study of tourism on the Nation two million people visited the Navajo Nation the year prior in 2018 -- that

study determined there is room for expansion. This larger market of individuals visiting public lands could indicate a market for such expansion (Budruk, M., et. al., 2019). It is important to note that the study done on the Nation was commissioned by Navajo Tourism, a branch of the tribal government that seeks to generate economic development through tourism.

Attractions such as Monument Valley, Horseshoe Bend, and Lake Powell, attract tens of thousands of visitors each year. However outdoor recreation opportunities on the Navajo Nation are limited by a variety of factors including complex permitting processes, jurisdictional challenges between Chapters, the central Navajo Government outright banning certain activities, and limited support for entrepreneurs within the nation (Albert, MK 2008; Zeppel, H., 2010). Although there is no universally accepted definition of outdoor recreation, the typical conception of these activities would differ from the predominant type of tourism that is occurring in the Nation currently (Smith, S. & Godby, G., 1991). There are multiple benefits associated with the industry; however, the need for careful consideration is apparent.

## 6.1 The Outdoor Industry in the Southwest

A 2018 study by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) calculated the size of the outdoor industry to be over \$373 billion in annual consumer spending -- around 2.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the U.S. (BEA, 2018). This GDP figure places the outdoor industry on the scale of construction (4.3%); legal services (1.3%); agriculture (including farming, forestry, and fishing) (1%); and mining, oil, and gas extraction (1.4%) (BEA, 2018). The BEA report also highlights that the outdoor industry in 2018 was growing at 3.8% per year, faster than the overall US economy.

The Outdoor Industry Association in 2018 released a breakdown of the BEA numbers at a state level to assess the impact of the industry at a finer level (Outdoor Industry Association,

2017). This analysis did not delineate state level numbers as to how they applied to tribal lands. However, the potential for the Navajo Nation is significant given the size of the economic impact in surrounding states. While the potential economic outcomes for the Navajo Nation could be significant, there are notable ancillary benefits to public health outcomes, culture and language revitalization (Griffin-Pierce, T., 1997; Knez, I., & Eliasson, I., 2017). Table 1 shows the breakdown of the size and impact of the outdoor industry in the region surrounding and including the Navajo Nation.

**Table 1: Economic impact of the outdoor industry in the four states bordering the Navajo Nation; Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis via the Outdoor Industry Association (2018)**

State	Annual Consumer Spending (in billions)	Direct Jobs	Wages & Salaries (in billions)	State and Local Tax Revenue (in billions)
Arizona	\$21.2	201,000	\$5.7	\$1.4
Colorado	\$28	228,000	\$9.7	\$2
Utah	\$12.3	110,000	\$3.9	\$0.7
New Mexico	\$9.9	99,000	\$2.8	\$0.6

To provide a context of the economic impact that specific types of recreation have on National Forest lands, the Forest Service conducted another study to understand management implications of the outdoor recreation on forest lands which calculated the value added per day on average per activity usage (one day of stated activity). This was calculated through estimating the consumer surplus or what the participants would be willing to pay, per person per

activity day. Table 2 shows these results. For the purpose of this study the only two Forest Service regions that have been included are Forest Service Region 2 which includes Utah, and Region 3 which is encompassed by Arizona and New Mexico. Although there are many contributing factors to this generalization, this gives some glimpse into the possible economic impact of these pursuits.

**Table 2:** Estimates by of the average economic value of recreation benefits by activity in the corresponding Forest Service region (average profit per consumer surplus per person per activity day) (Rosenberger et. al, 2017).

	R2 (Includes UT)	R3 (AZ & NM)
Backpacking	\$32.81	\$40.89
Biking	\$86.4	\$94.48
Cross-country skiing	\$56.18	\$64.26
Developed camping	\$35.28	\$43.36
Downhill skiing	\$81.89	\$89.97
Fishing	\$71.18	\$79.26
Hiking	\$84.12	\$92.2
Hunting	\$77.08	\$85.16
Motorized boating	\$58.04	\$66.12
Nature Related	\$59.79	\$67.87
Nonmotorized boating	\$108.59	\$116.67
Off-highway vehicle use /	\$50.11	\$58.19

snowmobiling		
Other recreation	\$64.67	\$72.75
Picnicking	\$48.84	\$56.92
Weighted average	\$71.88	\$76.2

These studies do not include the added health benefits or potential environmental benefits that result from people recreating in natural spaces. Although much of the previous discussion revolved around the economic impact of visitation to these spaces, the promotion and investment in outdoor recreation opportunities would ideally necessitate improvement of infrastructure and address access issues for community members. Initiatives such as the trail system being developed outside of Crownpoint and the Rails to Trails initiative very much have both of these purposes in mind (personal communication, 2021).

It is important to note that the economic contribution from these activities is felt in many sectors. Although the primary goal of the recreationist may be to explore the natural spaces of a specific region, he or she has the possibility of using capital in a variety of different ways. This spending can range from direct expenditures in equipment or guide services to indirect expenditures from food bought in restaurants, gasoline, or souvenirs. In an earlier study Southwick et al. calculated the total expenditures of outdoor recreationalist in different regions of the United States.

**Table 3:** Mountain Region (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY) total expenditures on outdoor recreation (Southwick et. al, 2009).

	Trail	Bicycle	Camp	Snow	Paddle	Total

	(in billions)					
Trip-related	\$6.3074	\$3.7152	\$13.9918	\$6.5013	\$0.8602	\$31.376
Equip. & Services	\$0.3611	\$0.429	\$0.8641	\$0.4897	\$0.1752	\$2.3191
Total	\$6.6685	\$4.1442	\$14.856	\$6.991	\$1.0354	\$33.695

Although understanding the economic impact of this industry is important, it is important to note economic development on Native American reservations is something which has unique characteristics. One of the leading groups that studies economic development on native lands is the Harvard project on American Indian Economic Development. Their research regarding effective measures can be summarized into three themes: 1) promoting tribal sovereignty 2) supporting strong institutions and 3) culturally-rooted development that makes sense to the population (Taylor, J., 2008). When discussing Native Nation building often there is not enough attention brought to the remnants of settler colonialism which have manifested in forms of political, economic and cultural domination. Many of those remnants are still present today (Krausova, A., 2018). The imbalance of power between the United States and Native Nations often leads to a dependent relationship. Very much in line with the previous scholarship on this topic, there have been too many instances in which development has been imposed on tribes which has resulted in both wealth not being shared and the relationship being extractive. There have been many instances in which the cultural context of the development has not worked.

Therefore, it is crucial to ensure the ability of tribal members to make decisions regarding economic pursuits to promote success (Duffy, D & Stubben, J., 1998). There are numerous studies which reveal similar themes; for example, Cornell and Kalt did a comparative economic analysis to evaluate tribal governmental effectiveness. The results revealed that when the tribal government was viewed as culturally representative, the management of economic activities was more effective (Cornell, S. & Kalt, J. P., 1995). Although this will vary in every different tribal context, the growing interest in this type of development in the Nation shows potential.

Within the Navajo Nation, there have been two general economic impact studies of tourism on the Nation with the first completed in 2011 and the most recent in 2018. Although a smaller number than the visitors in the surrounding federal lands, more than two million visitors traveled within the Nation in 2018, spending approximately \$212 million dollars over the year. The research also indicates that overall visitors were satisfied with their trip to the Navajo Nation, and the conclusion of the authors is that there is potential for expanding tourism within the Navajo Nation (Budruk, M., et al., 2019). The economic potential of this industry which has often been underestimated is becoming more understood, but how this could be translated onto the Nation is yet to be fully explored. However, how this has evolved in other spaces gives an example of potential.

## 6.2 Implications for Public Health

A growing aspect of outdoor recreation literature addresses the beneficial aspects of these activities regarding health. In a recent systematic review of literature regarding 'wildlands recreation' Thomsen, Powell and Monz found that outdoor recreation has a positive influence for both physical and mental health. This is caused by increased levels of physical activity, improved self-esteem, and reduction in perceived stress (Thomsen, J., et al., 2018).

The Navajo Nation in 2009 had a prevalence of diabetes that was two to four times higher than the prevalence of diabetes in non-Hispanic whites. The rates among young people were especially high from ages 15-19 with a rising percentage of this young demographic were inflicted with diabetes (Dabela, D., et al., 2009). In a different study conducted in 2007, it was found that 26 percent of Navajo youth were overweight with an additional 16 percent defined as obese (Eisenmann, J., et al, 2007). In the Navajo Health and Nutrition study done in the early 1990s, 75 percent of Navajo adults were found to be obese (White et. al, 1997; Story et al. 2003) and it was found that obesity trends in all Native American reservations were increasing. However, Arizona was the most dramatic example. The wellness benefits that outdoor recreation provides could be a part of the solution in confronting these challenges. In traditional Navajo society the concept of *Hózhó* requires living in balance with both physical and spiritual qualities of life. In her doctoral dissertation Rachelle Jones found that many people believed that young Navajos have lost sight of this concept, and many argue the poor health outcomes are a result of this (Jones, 2015).

The interviews conducted for this thesis spoke to these health challenges on multiple occasions, indicating that the development of outdoor recreation could provide an aspect of equity which allows for greater access to the community (personal communication, 2021).

Deyo wrote about this, specifically arguing the beneficial aspects in regards to public health indicates that outdoor recreation and specifically trail infrastructure is significant rationale for this type of investment (Deyo, N. et al., 2014). There is an increasing body of literature which draws the connection between public wellness and outdoor recreation. Several of the individuals the author spoke to told stories of how these pursuits helped them, on personal levels. They also argued how the development needs to take into account the social needs of the

community (personal communication, 2021). Outdoor recreation can result in a reduction of stress, management of weight, controlling of blood pressure; decreasing the risk of a heart attack by boosting good cholesterol; lowering the risk of a stroke; reducing the risk of breast cancer and Type 2 diabetes; avoiding the need for gallstone surgery; protecting against hip fractures; preventing depression, colon cancer, constipation, osteoporosis, and impotence; along with lengthening lifespan, lowering stress levels, relieving arthritis and back pain, strengthening muscles, bones, and joints. improving sleep, and elevating overall mood and sense of well-being (Godbey, G., 2009). There are currently many initiatives to promote time in nature as a preventative prescription, especially for young people (Messiah et al., 2016).

Although developing outdoor recreation opportunities does not immediately address public health concerns this could serve as a partial solution to address goals within the community.

## 7. An Overview of Outdoor Recreation in the Navajo Context

This section provides a brief overview of the outdoor recreation resources on the Nation. This includes infrastructure and human capital. This section focuses on seven categories: Trails, Cycling, Watersports, Snowsports, Climbing, Equestrian Activities, and Hunting and Fishing. This section is included to indicate potential for recreation development, and some of the intricacies and challenges each of these pursuits contain. The development of these activities could potentially be used to further the social objectives which have been discussed earlier.

Included at the start of each section are quotes in italicized text which speak to the potential of these pursuits for deepening cultural connection. This connection with these pursuits and relationship to culture is a theme the research illuminated. These quotes were obtained from

both the interviews that were conducted along with two instances in which a quote was pulled from literature and in one instance from a podcast which is publicly accessible.

## 7.1 Trails

*“The biggest component of starting a guiding company for me was getting permission to be out on the trails” (personal communication with Diné cultural informant, 2021).*

Trails form the basis of most outdoor activities serving as an access point for walkers, bikers, climbers, or any recreationist to explore landscapes. Although not an exhaustive list, this study has identified 27 popular trails used for tourism within the Navajo Nation, ranging in length from 0.8 miles to a 60-mile bike trail that is currently under development. Recently there have been several closures of trails due to lack of respect from visitors (Navajo Parks and Recreation, 2020). Yet, in contrast to the closures there are also new trail projects that are currently in development including: Navajo Mountain, Cameron, LeChee, Birdsprings, Leupp, Steamboat, Tuba City, Tonalea, Shonto, Tshahbikiin, Kaibeto, Chinle, Sheepsprings, Crownpoint and more.

The development of trails as it intersects with sacred spaces and tourism is something that needs to be thought of consciously. In an interesting case, the development of a trail system out of Crownpoint, New Mexico was named the *k’e* trail system which pays homage to the Navajo concept of connection to family, but more broadly connection to all things. In the development of this project, which is partially funded by the National Parks Service Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistantship program, the community leaders who took charge of this initiative made an effort to engage the community deeply before any trail development took place. One of the interviewees spoke to this concept stating that, “there was a conscious effort to understand which areas were held as sacred, to avoid situations in which visitors unknowingly desecrated

sacred spaces,” (personal communication, 2021). This type of deep community engagement is a way of preventing misunderstanding and balancing economic goals while maintaining respect for worldview and culture.

The process of involving community in decisions such as where to construct trails allows for spaces viewed as sacred to be protected. This is in accordance with rules that have been established by the Navajo Parks and Recreation Department (Navajo Parks and Recreation, 2020). These rules allow general control of visitors and protection of sacred lands in the Nation.

## 7.2 Water Sports

*“As I was on the river, I woke up looking out to the east looking up at the sun, first thing I am thinking is I got to jog towards the sun. It connected me to mother earth, which my grandmother taught me” (personal communication, 2021).*

Navajo Nation has several areas in which people recreate on water including but not limited to: kayaking, rafting, swimming, and tubing. Within the resource inventory nine areas of importance were identified, four of which are access points to the San Juan River. There are initiatives for Navajo run guide services to begin operating on the San Juan river. Water is also an incredibly important resource in the southwest in general and is very important in Navajo culture. The San Juan functions as the border for the Nation, and any trip which stops on the Navajo side of the river needs to have a permit (Navajo Parks and Recreation, 2020). This river is also home to several archaeological sites which are viewed as important to many people. Currently at least one Navajo owned guiding company is attempting to acquire a commercial permit from the Navajo Nation (personal communication, 2021).

### 7.3 Snowsports

*“In recent years I have felt an urgency to summit and ski the mountains that shape my identity as a Navajo person. By reconnecting with the mountains, I tried to create a buffer between myself and an impending dispossession.” (Necefer, L., 2020).*

There are several areas on the Navajo Nation where there is potential for snow sports including: skiing (resort, cross country, back country), snowshoeing, and tubing.

However, the relationship between the tribe and skiing is contentious as has already been noted, Arizona Snowbowl's use of reclaimed water to create snow on the Kachina Peaks is a source of conflict for the Navajo Nation (Cole, C., 2011). Snowbowl often struggles to have a consistent ski season from November until April (Bark, R. et al, 2010; Arizona Snowbowl, 2020). This type of development on the landscape has been viewed as desecration of a sacred site and has resulted in protests (Dunstan, D., 2016). Snowbowl has been involved in a legal conflict with the tribes since 1979 and in 2015 the Navajo Nation filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that the US government was disregarding their human rights in the actions that they have taken that purport to disregard the sacred space (Finnerty, M., 2018).

This could lead to the assumption of skiing being viewed as negatively by the Navajo people. However, in contradiction, Necefer writes about skiing as a mechanism of connection to tribal heritage and tribal stories (Necefer, 2020). The views of the tribe, however, are not monolithic regarding this topic, and many tribal members recreate at this resort. There has even been discussion of purchasing the resort because of the senior water rights the Navajo tribe holds within the area (personal communication, 2021).

It is important to mention that as our global climate evolves because of anthropogenically caused climate change ski resorts will have to confront a new reality. According to a review of

current literature of the ski industry in many cases if these resorts lose operating ability for two to three weeks within a season the operation will not be financially profitable, and ski operations which often have significant amount of faith in snowmaking potentially are overly optimistic (Steiger, R. et al, 2019).

Although there certainly has been confrontation within the development of ski resorts on Indigenous landscapes, Ski Apache, which was discussed earlier, provides an example of a successful economic venture. Within the nation there are several spaces that could be used for cross country and backcountry skiing. Notably, recreation on snow does not have the risk of causing erosion or other environmental issues which can be possible in other outdoor pursuits.

## 7.4 Cycling

*“Being on the bike makes me think, when you are out there you are really out there.” – Shi Hasin bike project (York, J., 2018)*

A study done by Statistica found that approximately 47.5 million people in 2017 were riding bicycles with regularity within the United States. To break this statistic up further, approximately 39.39 million rode on paved surfaces whereas 8.62 million participated in mountain biking or riding on unpaved surfaces (Gough, C., 2018).

Road cycling has been focused on as an attraction for tourism recently by many different localities, viewing this as an economically viable form of tourism that has very little economic and social cost in development of the infrastructure which can make a locality a destination for this activity (Simonsen, P. et al., 1998). Certain cities have chosen to invest in cycling infrastructure to promote bicycling as a commuting method alongside promoting bicycle tourism with relative success. The investment required centers for designated cycling routes, providing barriers between motorists and cyclists, good pavement quality, a low number of intersections

and basic infrastructure development with cyclists taken into account i.e., parking areas and toilets (Deenihan, G. & Caufield, B., 2015). Surveys done regarding cyclists' preferences found a clear preference for avoiding traffic, road safety, and scenery. In the case of cycling events, other factors to consider include activities for travel companions to consider alongside the quality of the event (Buning R., & Gibson, H., 2016).

## 7.5 Mountain Biking

*“I ride on the land... a place touched, respected, honored and stewarded by Indigenous peoples for millennia until the present day” (Hutchins, R., 2021).*

Mountain biking, although not participated by as high of percentage of the general population, is a sport which often is the impetus for recreational trips. A study down by Reiter et. al, outside of Moab, UT on the Slickrock trail found that the majority of the riders had traveled specifically to recreate in the area and mountain biking was one of the primary activities that drew them to the region (Reiter et al., 2011). Beyond this, the community was willing to pay for services such as access to parking and usage of public restrooms etc. However, mountain biking is generally acknowledged as more impactful to trails and local environmental conditions than running or hiking (Evju, M. et. al, 2020). The International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) in acknowledgment of the impact of the sport has proposed simple rules which build upon Leave No Trace principles which have become common throughout public lands in the United States. The IMBA rules are: (1) Ride on open trails only; (2) Leave no trace; (3) Control your bicycle; (4) Always yield the trail; (5) Never spook animals; and (6) Plan ahead (Mason, P. & Sarah Leberman, 2000). There is also a growing consensus regarding the need of specific infrastructure for mountain biking as there often is conflict between participants of this sport and other user groups (Mason, P. & Leberman, S., 2000; Goeft, U. & Alder, J., 2001).

Currently the non-profit Navajo Yes is working on an initiative to push for a rail to trails project which would accommodate both hiking and cycling in the historic railway operated by Peabody Coal. There are also current initiatives working with communities in the Chuska mountains to develop a multi-day cycling experience which would pass through 12 communities and has broad community support; the Chapters involved have all passed resolutions to indicate their support for this mountain bike project. Navajo Yes, has continued this work and plans to install infrastructure such as toilets and addressing trail improvements this upcoming summer (personal communication, 2021). As bike packing or multi day bike trips gains in popularity nationally, these trips could have immense importance. Another actor that is working on the Nation to help promote cycling is the International Mountain Bike Association. The international organization mentioned above developed a plan for four communities. Alongside this there are several initiatives which are pushing to get kids on bikes from the Silver Stallion coffee shop based out of Gallup, NM which has been providing mobile bike services to the Nation, to the Sih Hasin bike project which was developed to promote holistic living within the Nation (Navajo Outdoor Recreation Conference, 2021).

The landscape of Southern Utah which is considered a mecca for mountain biking is very similar to the landscapes which are found within the Nation. Because the market of outdoor recreation in Southern Utah is potentially over-saturated, a case can be made for the viability of developing this sport as both a resource for people in the Nation and as an attraction for others to travel to the Nation.

As the Chuska Mountain bike route is being developed, there is a centering of collaborative conversations to prevent misinterpretation and protection of lands considered sacred. The nonprofit Bikepacking Roots ran into a slight conflict with individuals when they

attempted to develop a route through the Navajo Nation. However, this has been resolved by a simple small re-route (personal communication, 2021).

There are two guide services that offer bike touring and day trips within the region, and if investments were made in trails and infrastructure, this market could expand. Although there is certainly an overlap between bike packing and trail infrastructure, development specifically geared towards bike packing has occurred in recent years. Several guided routes are becoming popular within the Nation. The study identified 15 different packages or events that were related to this growing sport.

## 7.6 Climbing

*“There was this connection that was really beautiful that I shared as a Navajo person who started rock climbing, how it really strengthened my identity and provided a path for me”* (personal communication, 2021).

The sport of rock climbing has gained a huge amount of popularity in the last several decades. According to Statistica there were 9.89 million rock climbers in the U.S. in 2019 (Lange, D., 2021). There are several disciplines within the sport of rock-climbing including: bouldering, sport climbing and traditional climbing. Bouldering was developed initially as a training tool. The relatively low amount of financial commitment with this discipline has prompted bouldering to become very popular. Bouldering involves short routes that often require gymnastic movement. Another genre of climbing, sport climbing, involves a climbing area which has had pre-established routes established via the placement of metal hangers into the rock to protect the climber as they ascend the cliff. Sport climbing’s expanded popularity resulted in the sport’s recent inclusion in the Olympic Games (Bautev, M. & Leigh Robinson, 2018). The last genre is traditional climbing in which the climber moves up the rock face

carrying equipment which has been designed to protect the climber. Aid climbing is the use of this equipment, or in other cases the use of bolt ladders to assist in the climbing of a route that is too difficult for ascension without mechanical assistance. Recreational climbing initially was developed in the Alps of Europe and has spread to climbing in mountains in diverse parts of the world; however, it has subsequently become a very common recreation activity all around the US and internationally.

Rock climbing, because it is located in generally small areas has a relatively small impact on local environmental conditions. However, there can be impacts on bird populations or other animal inhabitants of cliff faces (Bourdeau, P. et al., 2000). Climbing was outlawed within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation by Charles Damon the director of Navajo Parks and Recreation in 1972 after an accident in which two climbers died on Shiprock (Burns, C., 1995). Climbing initially became an issue when several of the features within Canyon de Chelly National Monument were ascended which many tribal members viewed as offensive. In the 1960s, there was a push for the park service to ban these activities within the monument, and following the accident the ban came to affect the entirety of Navajo Nation (Brugge, D. & Wilson, R., 1976). One of the interviewees speaking of this accent, compared the death to a theoretical death in the Sistine Chapel in a Christian worldview (personal communication, 2021). Even though this ban exists, many climbers both from the Navajo Nation and other localities have scaled some of the sandstone features that make the landscape so iconic.

Formations exist which relate back to the stories that are integral to Navajo culture and are viewed as 'holy' to many people. To give an example, there are stories which relate to the formations of Shiprock, the Totem Pole, and Spider Rock, all of which have "potent significance

to Navajo culture.” However, the question of how to agree what formations could be used in this capacity is incredibly difficult to approach (personal communication, 2021).



Figure 2: Image of Spider women taken by Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel  
Several Chapters including the Leupp Chapter are looking to develop rock climbing as a

possible draw for tourism. Speaking of this project, one of the interviewees spoke of this conflict, saying, “there is support in the Chapter, however, the gentleman who had been involved in this initiative approached in an inappropriate manner.” This was to draw attention to the fact that the lines were developed which included installation of bolts before he had approached the Chapter. However, the Leupp Chapter did pass a resolution in 2019 to support climbing development (personal communication, 2021).

There have been 60 identified routes published on the popular climbing website mountain project which serves as an informal guidebook (Mountainproject.com, 2020). It should be noted that the leadership currently working on promoting this activity strongly discourages this type of activity taking place until there have been further conversations with the both Chapter and Tribal Leadership (personal communication, 2021). This will allow the tribe to have time to be

conscious about what spaces they want to open up to this type of recreation, and what others they feel should continue to prohibit climbing to avoid desecration.

## 7.7 Equestrian Activities

*“A trip on a horse could bring the outsider to our world; being on a horse in a place, you experience the place differently. That potentially could be meaningful and people’s understanding of why it is important to respect sovereignty.” (personal communication, 2021)*

The relationship between the horse and the Navajo people is complex and very much intertwined with the culture. In the Navajo stories the horse was created through the sun, and although archaeological and historical evidence dates the arrival of the horses to the time of the Spanish, the pastoral Navajo people have incorporated horses into their culture for hundreds of years. However, the tribe faces a unique challenge in regards to horses. As of 2016 there were more than 30,000 feral horses on the Navajo Nation, and the attempts of the tribal government to address this have been met with skepticism and even resistance (Wallace, Z et. al, 2017). These animals further complicate the environmental damage that has been caused by overgrazing. There is not a complete understanding of the impacts of these animals within the habitat, but there is an understanding that the presence causes a higher amount of competition which has negative ramifications for local wildlife (Beever, E., et. al, 2018). However, there is a general distrust of livestock reduction resulting from the historical precedent in which the federal government forced families to cull a large portion of their livestock to address erosion control during the dust bowl era, which caused an immense amount of suffering. (Shebala, R., 2018). Generally, a human emotional connection to horses has been noted, which makes addressing feral horses impacts more difficult (Scasta, JD., 2019). The cultural connection could potentially make addressing this problem more difficult. The attempt by the Navajo government to address

this problem was met with strong resistance. Although there would have to be a certain amount of work dedicated to training feral and semi-feral horses, the potential for further rationale for horse usage could potentially be a factor in addressing this problem. No research has been conducted into this question, and the quantity of feral horses is far beyond what would be needed for equestrian tourism. Yet, conversations with the experts revealed that many of the horses that are considered “feral” are connected in some way with tribal members, and rationale for their use has the potential to be beneficial in solving this issue (personal communication, 2021).

There is no mention of horses on the Parks and Recreation website, and the cultural usage of these animals on the landscape allows for the conclusion that horses would be permitted on the trail infrastructure of the Navajo Nation. However, horses as noted previously have an inherent ecological impact, and usage of horses on trails can be the cause of erosion and deteriorating trail conditions and can also have a significant social impact on recreational visitors (Newsome, D., et al., 2008).

Equestrian tourism is an activity which has been common in the Navajo Nation for years. Although there are only a select number of guide services, a considerable history both in this type of tourism and in equestrian activities more generally exists. Several anthropological studies have shown equestrian activities to be beneficial for mental health and for connection to native culture (Plume, J., 2016; Lawrence, E., 1998). Six guide services provide equestrian services in the Nation, predominantly based around the large tourist attractions of Monument Valley, and Canyon de Chelly. However, there is also a diverse offering around the Navajo Nation.

## 7.8 Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing are managed by the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The hunting tags very much resemble the process that takes place in other parts of the country.

Tags are offered for: Pronghorn, Black Bear, Mountain Lion, Deer, and Elk along with waterfowl. The application for a tag costs \$40, and the subsequent fee if the tag is drawn is \$160 (NNDFW,2020). Although there has been legal contention regarding tribal management of hunting and fishing, there is a legislative history that allows for tribal management of nonmembers on reservation, and there is a strong legal argument for tribal participation in the decision-making regarding conservation of these animals in non-reservation lands (Goodman, E., 2000; Wasmuth, E., 1984). The 1984 Supreme Court case in regards to hunting allowed different indigenous groups to manage hunting in distinct ways.

Although the Supreme Court's legal rationale could be interpreted differently in the future, the current precedent allows for tribal management of these lands; and in certain instances, the initial treaties made between the tribal nation and the United States government allow for further expanded rights regarding these resources (EagleWoman, A., 2009). The US government's treaty with the Navajo in 1868 gave the people the right to hunt on any lands which bordered the reservation. Although there is certainly a different set of circumstances that are encountered in the present day, the tribe maintains the right to operate hunts in the surrounding lands (Kessell, J., 1981).

Beyond this, several hunting services provide the hunter access to a cultural guide and allows for a smoother process. The Navajo Nation is divided up into several different units. The Navajo Nation Fish and Wildlife website lists 43 registered guides, and 16 different units.

## 7.9 Human Resources

More than 46 identified guide services operate on Navajo Tribal Lands. Many of these companies offer hiking, or canyoneering trips along with a large number offering vehicle-based tourism. Several associations within the Nation have been established to set standards regarding

the most common tourism destinations (e.g., Canyon De Chelley, Monument Valley and Antelope Valley.) It is also important to note that there is a growing group of skilled individuals that are developing skills necessary for the outdoor recreation industry. An example of this is the group Ancestral Lands which works on Conservation projects including trail development. Another example is the “train the trainers” model that the Silver Stallion Bike project is employing to allow for the training of bike mechanics throughout the Navajo Nation (Navajo Outdoor Recreation Conference, 2021). These individuals are often incredibly aware of sacred landscapes, and often establish rules of respect in their trips (personal communication, 2021).

## 8. Synthesis

The themes that emerged from this research revolved around the need for community sovereignty over decisions, the need to strengthen governmental institutions which manage and support recreation, and the potential for these activities to produce cultural revitalization. It is clear that the Navajo Nation has an opportunity to become a destination for outdoor recreation, as it already is for tourism. Although the timing of this study in the context of COVID-19 necessitates a slightly different approach to thinking about this development, potential undoubtedly exists. Management decisions regarding outdoor recreation need to be analyzed because recreation has an environmental impact on both proximate landscapes and can be a contributing factor to global climatic change (Pickering, C. M., & Hill, W., 2007; Bourdeau, P. et al., 2002). Impact is generally greatest when there has not been sufficient time to plan for the negative consequences (Mason, P., & Leberman, S., 2000). The element of sacred lands is also important to consider when approaching this type of development. As has been discussed in depth the interviews made it clear that for certain individuals there are spaces the community holds as places which should not be approached. The concept that recreationalists could

“unknowingly desecrate” a space was a concept that was made clear. However, there were also other spaces that could be viewed as appropriate for this type of development (personal communication, 2021).

However, it should be noted that in the interviews the author conducted, the way that individuals have approached the topic of sacredness varied significantly. Many individuals have indicated that the pursuits that the document is focused on have been a way to deepen their relationship with landscapes and cultural beliefs. A question that a cultural informant asked the author in a conversation about outdoor recreation seemed to cut to the core of the matter: “How are these activities beneficial to the place?” (personal communication, 2021). This idea of reciprocity with the landscape originates from traditional ecological knowledge advocates that when anything is taken from the land including experiences, it is important to give back to the landscape (personal communication, 2021). This way of respecting place, which emanates from the belief in “...the personhood of all things” necessitates a deep respect to be given in relation to the land (personal communication, 2021).

As the Diné often view themselves as part of the landscape, a key insight gleaned from these conversations is that if this development is to occur it needs to be focused on addressing the many social needs that the Navajo Nation faces including public health challenges. This was a priority of many of the individuals that the author spoke to. A particularly relevant quote that speaks to this is: “Development should be done for, and by [the] Diné people” (personal communication, 2021).

## 8.1 Barriers

Although the economic potential of outdoor recreation is something that is being seriously considered by the tribe, which interviewees spoke directly to this potential. A quote

which summarizes the common sentiment is: “The tribe is starting to pay attention, they are starting to understand that outdoor recreation ... can be really viable for healthy economies” (personal communication, 2021). There are certainly barriers which need to be addressed if this development is to occur.

Some of the barriers to the pursuit of this type of development, in the views of the experts were: “needing example,” “needing more communication,” “education,” among others. These speak to the work of groups like the Sih Hasin bike project, the Silver Stallion bike mechanic training program, Ancestral Lands, and Navajo Yes, all of which work to promote outdoor recreational opportunities in the Navajo Nation. Many of these initiatives specifically work to get young people outdoors. This work seems to be bearing fruit, with outdoor recreation initiatives popping up all over the Nation. One of the individuals the author interviewed called this moment a “trails revolution” in the Navajo Nation (personal communication, 2021). There are many young people excited to get involved in the growing movement that is happening. Initiatives such as a mountain bike team and races have an important place in addressing this barrier.

Another barrier which was spoken to was the historical relationship that the tribe has had with outdoor recreation. As has been mentioned several times in this thesis there have been many instances in which recreationists have been involved in actions which were considered offensive to Diné individuals. The tribe dismissed these activities historically resulting from this difference of worldview. Speaking further to this, the interviewee spoke of how this history manifests itself in lack of infrastructure, lack of management plans and human capital to be able to incorporate this type of development on Navajo lands (personal communication, 2021).

Another concept that was a common theme was the need for bridging of cultures. The traditional ecological knowledge which advocates for a reciprocal relationship with the

landscapes could lead to regulations for visitors who come to Diné lands to contribute to initiatives to protect landscapes and the Navajo community (personal communication, 2021). This is directly in line with a central theme of Diné traditional ecological knowledge. Mirroring the initiatives that the Maori tourism operators engaged in, in which part of proceeds were used for the benefit of both landscapes and the community (Ransfield, A. K., & Riechenberger, I., 2021).

Another critical component - the financial burden on any individual pursuing these types of activities – which often creates barriers for Diné individuals to participate in these activities should be addressed. Although there are initiatives from the outdoor industry to support access into these pursuits this was another theme that was consistently brought up in the interviews the author conducted. The work of two of the individuals that the author spoke to specifically revolves around addressing this barrier. A statement that was made in conversation stands out: “The decision if kids on the reservation have a bicycle in their life has been made for them,” (personal communication, 2021). There is a place for the outdoor industry to support initiatives such as those discussed in this paper among others.

Beyond this it is important to note that the Search and Rescue (SAR) system on the Navajo Nation is relatively limited. The Navajo Nation fire services has stations in nine locations in the Nation, and operates out of four districts (Navajo Department of Fire & Rescue, 2021). Beyond this, law enforcement also is typically involved in search and rescue operations out of four districts on the Navajo Nation. In the wilderness setting SAR operations can be complex and costly. To give an example in the years 2001- 2005 the average cost of a search and rescue operation in the Utah National Park units was \$1,100 (Heggie, T., & Heggie, T., 2008). A full discussion of best practices for search and rescue operations is beyond the scope of this

document. However, the lack of infrastructure for safety was noted as a major concern in more than one of the conversations that the author conducted with the identified experts (personal communication, 2021). Broadening this discussion, it is important to note that many of these SAR operations are caused by visitor error; 65.7 percent of all SAR operations in National Parks in 2009 were responding to individuals who were neither ill nor injured. A breakdown of factors which resulted in the operation was conducted by Travis Heggie and Michael Amundson which revealed that the primary causes were: errors in judgment (22.3%); fatigue and physical conditioning (16.8%); insufficient equipment, clothing, or experience (15.6%); falls (8.9%); and weather (7.4%) (Heggie, T., & Amundson, M., 2009). The death that occurred on Shiprock which was viewed as offensive enough to ban all climbing on the Navajo Nation, highlights the importance of proper safety protocols (personal communication, 2021).

Although the barriers that are present in the Nation are significant, they are certainly not impossible to overcome. Efforts such as the Outdoor Equity Fund in New Mexico go a long way in attempting to address some of these issues. The tribal government has the opportunity to also address many of the problems that could arise in the development of this industry in the Nation.

## 8.2 Community Sovereignty

In the highly acclaimed work *State of Native Nations*, it was found that economic development is consistently strongest when sovereignty is present (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2008). This resonates with the research within this thesis project.

A common theme that was discussed is the need for communities to be able to make their own decisions based on how they want to move forward. This is critical to address as it speaks to the central question of this research. A quote from a cultural informant stood out to me: “If the work intrinsically promotes our ability to make decisions about our land and our families, it is

intrinsically good” (personal communication, 2021). A specific example of this could be allowance for Chapters to be able to make decisions whether or not to adopt the climbing ban.

Specifically speaking to this, a procedure exists in which individual Chapters can apply for a special status to be designated a “self-governing Chapter” which could potentially be the mechanism for certain Chapters to develop a loophole for the climbing ban if they have an interest in pursuing climbing as an economic strategy (personal communication, 2021).

If a Chapter determines that a certain landscape should not be approached or if there is not community interest in this type of development, this decision absolutely needs to be respected. This allows for the communities to have control over their sacred lands. Where this could theoretically become complicated is if landscapes are viewed as sacred by individuals who reside outside of a Chapter that decides to allow recreation to occur. Although this concern was not addressed in the conversations, the variance in viewpoints regarding the sacred would indicate that this could be theoretically possible. Sovereignty for both local communities over their landscapes and respecting the beliefs of individuals throughout Diné lands is important. The central tribal government allows for a forum for these conversations to take place.

### 8.3 Strengthening Governance

Another common theme that was spoken to was the need for strengthening the tribal governmental presence in managing recreation. As was noted previously, Navajo Parks and Recreation is understaffed and has the large task of managing the spaces that have been protected along with issuing permits and managing the resources. It was also noted that the permitting process could be streamlined. Although it is incredibly important to respect the ability of the government to regulate these spaces, the process could be refined to be more user friendly while offering the same or higher levels of oversight and protection.

There is also a need to improve infrastructure. Non-profit organizations are doing some of this work now, and there are other examples in which the tribal government has expressed interest. How this occurs will require forethought, and planning. There is, for instance, interest by the tribal government in investing in a rails-to-trails project in the closed rail line which was historically used for transporting coal.

Existing funds have been used for these purposes. For example, the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program is funding one of the projects currently underway in Crownpoint; the New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund is funding another project based out of Gallup; -and there are several more grants available, a notable example being the Catena Foundation (Navajo Trails and Outdoor Recreation Conference, 2021).

## 8.4 Conflicted Management

As noted above there is an incredibly complicated system of land management on the Navajo Nation in which the tribe does not have total control over all of their sacred spaces. This becomes even more complicated when the lands that the tribe perceives as their homeland are included. In a potent example of this issue, the tribe does not have control of any of the four sacred mountains that they associate with their traditional borders (Dunstan, A., 2016). Even when landscapes are in control of the tribe, the process for management of landscape has the potential to create conflict. There are many examples of developments for the broader community which have been held up by grazing permit holders (Rosser, E., 2019). However, development practices mimicking the *k'e* trail system in Crownpoint or the work of Navajo Yes whom both worked on including the voices of the local communities and being conscious of sacred landscapes sets the project up to be respectful of these considerations (personal communication, 2021).

Even still, there are also not monolithic beliefs regarding the management of lands. A potential area of conflict could involve grazing. How to manage this effectively is beyond the scope of this paper as there are deep cultural ties to the pastoral lifestyle, yet finding ways of being mutually beneficial is critical to moving forward. As noted above the approval for any development requires an immense amount of community cooperation, which could be beneficial in the long run, but the process can also be the cause of failures of projects in the shorter term. It is notable that many individuals are frustrated with the current system (personal communication, 2021).

The author engaged in a conversation which he was told about the critical importance of water in outdoor recreation in the southwest and a potential for conflict with grazing holders. However, with forethought and resource planning, solutions could end up benefiting both groups. This pastoral lifestyle was noted almost as an attraction to certain recreationists by several interviewees. However, this interface would require planning and potentially investment (personal communication, 2021).

## 9. Conclusions

Thinking through the potential of outdoor recreation on the Navajo Nation is a complicated and multi-faceted question which has cultural, historical, and political implications to it. Although there is certainly potential to the development of this type of industry and exciting initiatives that are currently underway on the Nation, stakeholders need to think critically about the relationship to land and how to approach development.

If there is critical thought and strategic planning, this type of development could potentially bring much needed opportunities to an area which was recently struck by a devastating economic setback. However, there is also a risk of disrespecting cultural norms and

a relationship to the land. Saying this, these activities have the ability to connect individuals to cultural traditions and deepen their relationship with these landscapes if approached correctly.

If development of outdoor recreation is to happen in the Navajo Nation, it is important that community level involvement is centered in the process. The approach that organizations such as Navajo Yes have taken is something to be applauded as they have been conscious of the perspectives of the community when approaching development in the Nation. It is important to understand what type of recreation infrastructure is desired, if it should be geared to the community, or if it should be designed with a broader audience in mind. The current land management strategy favors consensus, and although it is incredibly burdensome, the advantage is that the community does have a say in what type of development happens. It is imperative that community input is centered in any development project, even if the case for a more streamlined process for certain developments is a legitimate concern.

This research echoed themes identified by other projects on Native American Economic development urging sovereignty and cultural appropriateness of the development (Taylor, J., 2008; Krausova, A., 2008; Duffy, D., Stubben, J., 1998). The need to respect the sacredness of landscape and the decisions about which landscapes can be used for this type of development are very much in line with respecting cultural elements. To manage outdoor recreation on the Navajo Nation effectively and fairly, it is important that communities have a say in what happens in their spaces. Providing opportunities for people to get outside on these incredible landscapes could provide a meaningful way to support gaining this sovereignty.

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