



# NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

March 15, 2016

The Honorable Bill Cassidy  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Parks  
U.S. Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Parks  
U.S. Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
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## NCAI HEADQUARTERS

1516 P Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20005  
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202.466.7797 fax  
[www.ncai.org](http://www.ncai.org)

## RE: NCAI OPPOSITION TO S. 2039, AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGING THE NAME OF "DEVIL'S TOWER" TO THE BEAR LODGE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Heinrich:

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest, largest, and most representative organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, I write to express our opposition to S. 2039, *A bill to designate the mountain at the Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming, as Devils Tower and for other purposes*. During NCAI's 2015 Annual Convention in San Diego, CA, our membership adopted Resolution #SD-15-001, "In Support of the Name Bear Lodge National Monument (Currently "Devils Tower")". NCAI Resolution #SD-15-001 was originally forwarded for consideration by our membership from the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association.

Throughout history many areas of tribal cultural, religious, and historical importance received different name designations by early non-tribal settlers and the federal government. These names either attempted to reflect the English translations of tribal designations, or entirely replaced them with an unrelated non-tribal description. However, in the case of "Devils Tower" early documented evidence has shown this area labeled as "Bear Lodge" by early settlers, commissioned cartographers, and the U.S. military. The Bear Lodge area also holds immense sacred, religious, and cultural importance to tribes in the region, which has been thoroughly documented by the National Park Service.<sup>1</sup>

For over a century tribes in the region have repeatedly stated that the 1906 "Devils Tower" name is not the correct translation. The designation of "Devils Tower" upon a sacred and culturally significant area to tribes in the region is patently offensive and we are hopeful that you will stand with Indian Country in opposing S. 2039, and instead focus efforts on renaming the area to the Bear Lodge National Monument.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Pata  
Executive Director  
National Congress of American Indians

<sup>1</sup> See National Park Service. "How is Devils Tower a Sacred Site to American Indians". Available at <http://www.nps.gov/deto/learn/historyculture/sacredsite.htm>.



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## The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #SD-15-001

### **TITLE: In Support of the Name Bear Lodge National Monument (Currently “Devils Tower”)**

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**WHEREAS**, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

**WHEREAS**, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

**WHEREAS**, religious freedom is an inherent right for all people, guaranteed by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and affirmed under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978; and

**WHEREAS**, centuries before the creation of the United States of America, Indigenous people have revered the mountains commonly referred to as the Black Hills as sacred, including several rock features located in present-day parks in South Dakota and Wyoming; and

**WHEREAS**, Indigenous communities claim their origin in the Black Hills and archeological evidence has revealed that the area was inhabited by some tribes at least as far back as 1000 A.D.; and

**WHEREAS**, the Black Hills sacred places are intricately intertwined with traditional spirituality and culture as demonstrated by ongoing personal rituals (prayer offerings, sweat lodge ceremonies, vision quests), group ceremonies, and sacred narratives including the origins of People, the origin of ceremonies, sacred objects, hero legends); and

**WHEREAS**, the Antiquities Act of 1906 authorizes the President of the United States through executive order to proclaim "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" as national monuments, in order to preserve public land without waiting for legislation to pass Congress; and

**WHEREAS,** On September 24, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt used his authority under the Antiquities Act to protect an igneous rock tower in Wyoming as the first national monument, and formally designated the site through Executive Order as “Devil’s Tower National Monument;” and

**WHEREAS,** prior to this designation early white explorers, commissioned cartographers, and United States military leaders consistently employed the name “Bear Lodge” when referring to the site because of its widespread written and oral use of this name by Indigenous people as well as by the incoming federal military, pioneers, miners, and settlers; and

**WHEREAS,** the labels “Bear Lodge” and “Mato Tipila” are the written inscriptions on the earliest photos of this rock feature and the label on the earliest non-Indigenous maps drawn and published by the U.S. Army or commissioned for the United States Geological Service; and

**WHEREAS,** the “Bear Lodge Mountain Range,” remains the officially recognized name for the mountains located immediately east of this geological feature and many established businesses and historical areas identify under the “Bear Lodge” distinction; and

**WHEREAS,** Indigenous people have for over a century repeatedly stated that the 1906 “Devils Tower” name is not the correct translation of the rock’s name and that the Devils Tower name is offensive, insulting, and disparaging because it equates Indigenous cultural and faith traditions practiced at this site to “devil worship,” in essence equating Indigenous people to “devils;” and

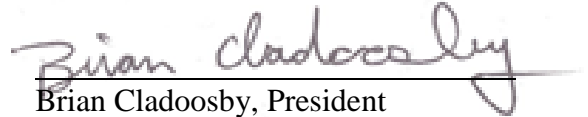
**WHEREAS,** nine of the eighteen national monuments established by President Theodore Roosevelt have either been abolished or no longer retain their original monument designation, and almost half of the current national parks have undergone a significant change in their name, agency or boundaries, showing historical precedent for enacting change to reflect the nation’s values, and priorities.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,** that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) supports and requests changing the name of “Devils Tower” to “Bear Lodge National Monument” because the 1906 United States’ action to establish a national monument at a historical and existing sacred place is patently offensive, and based on faulty translation; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

**CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2015 Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Town and Country Resort, San Diego, CA, October 18-23, 2015, with a quorum present.

  
Brian Cladoosby, President**ATTEST:**  
Aaron Payment, Recording Secretary