

TRIBAL CULTURAL AREAS PROTECTION ACT

The lands and waters now known as the United States are the ancestral homelands of Indigenous Peoples. Despite forced removal and displacement from these traditional territories, tribes' cultural connections to these places have never been extinguished. Tribal nations and their citizens continue to exercise treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather on public lands. They continue to access public lands to pray, conduct ceremonies, visit burial sites, and gather plants for traditional purposes.

Although these activities are protected legal rights, current laws and regulations fail to adequately protect tribal government interests on public land. Too often destructive activities, like mining, road construction, and other forms of development are allowed, or public lands are not managed in a way that adequately respects and preserves Indigenous cultures and religion or prevents theft of cultural items.

THE TRIBAL CULTURAL AREAS PROTECTION ACT WILL ENHANCE PROTECTIONS FOR CULTURAL AND SACRED SITES ON PUBLIC LANDS BY ESTABLISHING A TRIBAL CULTURAL AREAS SYSTEM:

Current law has established national systems of protected lands for parks, wilderness, and other purposes, but no such system exists for tribal cultural sites. The *Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act* will correct this deficiency by establishing a national Tribal Cultural Areas System. Tribal cultural areas would be established by Congress and managed to preserve their cultural value while also allowing for traditional tribal uses. Mining and other forms of development that would impact the area's cultural value would be prohibited.

The *Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act* would also direct land management agencies to survey their holdings to identify potential tribal cultural areas, and to recommend, after considering public input, that such areas be designated by Congress. Tribes would be authorized to propose tribal cultural areas to land management agencies.

The Badger-Two Medicine region of northern Montana is a sacred landscape to the Blackfeet Nation and is just one of many places that could be permanently protected under the Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act.



The bill would also empower tribal nations to play a role in the management of tribal cultural areas. Through cooperative management agreements known as self-determination contracts and increased consultation with land management agencies, tribes can share their traditional knowledge, and help ensure that tribal cultural area management protects cultural resources.

Ancient petroglyphs in southern Utah, where vandalism and looting continue to threaten sacred cultural sites.