



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**MEDIA CONTACTS**

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253  
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174  
nmb.communications@gmail.com

### **Naabik'iyátí' Committee adopts plan of operation for the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission**

**WINDOW ROCK** – The Naabik'iyátí' Committee on Thursday unanimously adopted a plan of operation for the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission, which was officially established through a separate legislation approved by the Navajo Nation Council on April 22, and signed into law by former President Ben Shelly on May 4.

The 15-page plan of operation outlines the commission's purpose and objectives, findings related to the history of uranium development on the Navajo Nation, staffing, organization, and authorities of the commission, and it also describes how the commission will be guided by Diné Fundamental Law.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) stated that the purpose of the commission is to study and reach conclusions about the impacts of uranium mining and uranium processing on the Navajo Nation, and to make recommendations to the President and Council for policies, laws, and regulations to address those impacts.

"We have numerous abandoned mines across the Navajo Nation and it is a major issue. We have a long way to go in addressing the existing problems that currently plague our homelands and this is a step toward empowering our communities and to be more proactive," stated Delegate Perry.

In 2005, the Navajo Nation adopted the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act, which prohibits uranium mining and uranium processing on any sites within Navajo Indian Country. Additionally, the Nation adopted the Radioactive and Related Substances, Equipment, Vehicles, Persons and Materials Transportation Act of 2012, which prohibits the transportation of radioactive materials on or across the Navajo Nation without consent from the Nation.

According to the findings outlined in the plan of operation, thousands of Navajo people were recruited by the federal government and private industry to engage in uranium mining, processing, ore transportation and related jobs between the early 1940's through the mid-1980's— primarily for military purposes such as the production of weapons. This resulted in the contraction of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases at much higher rates than other populations.

Decades of uranium activity left over 500 discrete mines and five uranium mills, or processing plants, on or next to the Navajo Nation. Overall, more than 1,100 uranium mine features have been identified in the Navajo Nation including uranium waste, according to the legislation.

The commission will be comprised of 11 members including an executive director, appointed by the president and confirmed by the Council, who will be tasked with overseeing daily operations to ensure timely completion of established operational goals.

The other members will include the executive director of the Navajo Nation EPA, the director of the Navajo Superfund Program, the manager of the Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Department, and six community members from six regions identified by the federal EPA as being affected by past uranium mining. The seventh member will be a youth member under the age of 25 with a demonstrated continuing interest in issues pertaining to the commission.

“This commission provides a place for impacted communities to sit at the table when discussions and decisions are being made,” said Delegate Perry. “This does not happen much, but the Navajo Nation has taken a positive step to ensure that impacted communities have an active role.”

The plan of operation also directs the executive director of the commission to seek initial funding through grants from the federal EPA, from funds available to the Navajo Nation for investigation and remediation of uranium mines and mills, and from the Navajo Nation Council.

The commission will operate under the Executive Branch and under the legislative oversight of the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee. The legislation was approved by a vote of 13-0 with the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee serving as the final authority for the bill.

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