



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Navajo leadership to meet with Former Bennett Freeze Area residents**

**WINDOW ROCK** – The Navajo Nation Council’s Naabik’iyátí’ Committee and the Office of the President and Vice President will meet with residents in the Former Bennett Freeze Area on Sept. 24 at 10:00 a.m. at the Greyhills Academy Auditorium in the community of Tuba City.

The focus of Thursday’s meeting will be to hear directly from impacted communities and to discuss the rehabilitation of the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

The “One Nation, One Voice” agreement, signed by each of the Nation’s three branch chiefs in July, outlined the Nation’s nine priorities which encompass the recovery plan for the Former Bennett Freeze Area to aid impacted residents with infrastructure development, such as homes and community facilities.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To’ii), who serves as the chair of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, noted that the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee received a report from Donald Yellowman, president of the “Forgotten People” grassroots organization on July 19.

In response, Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members issued a directive to have Council members and the OPVP meet with impacted communities.

“The focus is to basically hear and get a better understanding of all the issues surrounding the Former Bennett Freeze Area – the impacts, needs, challenges – regarding the nine chapters that are involved. There were restrictions placed on those communities in which they could not develop or rehabilitate their homes or facilities for over 40 years,” said Delegate Phelps.

In 1966, commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Robert Bennett ceased development of approximately 1.5 million acres of land that was in dispute by the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe, which prohibited Navajo families from making any improvements to their homes or to construct new homes in the area.

Congress later passed the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act and in 2009, President Obama lifted the freeze on development in the area. The nine impacted chapters include Tuba City, Tonalea/Red Lake, Coppermine, K’ai’Bii’To, Bodaway/Gap, Cameron, Coal Mine, Tolani Lake, and Leupp.

Yellowman issued a letter of appreciation for scheduling the meeting and stated, “We have lost many of our people over 40 plus years, forced to relocate waiting for help to improve their living conditions. The Navajo Nation’s action is a historical event and rare opportunity for the people to begin working in cooperation with their leaders.”

Council and the NHLC also met with top officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on Sept. 11, to address several issues including the development of housing, youth centers, and other facilities in the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

Last week, Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K’ai’Bii’To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake), who is also a member of the NHLC and represents four of the impacted chapters, issued a radio message inviting the public to attend the Sept. 24 meeting.

The message from Delegate Slim will air this week on local radio stations to inform the public of the meeting. The audio message is also available on the Council’s homepage at [navajonationcouncil.org](http://navajonationcouncil.org) or you may click [here](#) to listen to the message.

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