



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 19, 2016

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### **Eastern Navajo Land Commission seeks to amend land acquisition policy**

**LEUPP, Ariz.** – Last week, members of Council and the Eastern Navajo Land Commission met to consider proposed changes to Navajo Nation Code Title 16, regarding land acquisition and the establishment of a Navajo Acquisition of Lands Commission.

According to ENLC chair Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), the aim of the proposed amendments to N.N.C Title 16 is to improve and expedite the Navajo Nation's land acquisition process to minimize the lengthy bureaucratic processes that often hinder land purchases.

On April 8 and 9, the ENLC members held a work session and met with the Fort Lewis College president Dr. Dene Kay Thomas, to discuss the commission's interest in purchasing land area near the college to possibly construct additional student housing for Native American students.

"We are talking about land acquisition today, and we are wanting to buy land around the Durango area to possibly put up Native American student housing. We understand that a large number of Native students attend Fort Lewis College," said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie said although tuition is waived for Native American students at Fort Lewis College, he said that the Navajo Nation could aid in alleviating housing costs due to higher cost-of-living rates in the city of Durango.

ENLC vice chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááhááíí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), an alumnus of Fort Lewis College, said that the college experiences housing overflow resulting in students having to seek housing off-campus, which can be expensive.

"There is an overflow of students who have to find housing off-campus. We can figure out how to create better living situations for Native American students," said Delegate Damon. "There is a role, responsibility, and relationship that is lacking between the tribes and colleges."

On April 12 and 13, the ENLC met to further analyze Title 16 and developed proposed amendments to expedite the land acquisition process.

A proposed amendment would establish the Navajo Acquisition of Lands Commission as a quasi-independent commission for the purpose of carrying out acquisition and disposal of land. The commission would be comprised of appointed members from the Navajo Nation Council, Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources, and qualified public members.

Oversight of the proposed commission would be the Council's Resources and Development Committee, and would authorize the commission to purchase land up to \$10 million. Land acquisition or disposal over \$10 million shall have the recommendation of the commission for signature approval from the Navajo Nation President, and in the absence of the president, the Speaker of the Navajo Nation, according to the proposed amendment.

Delegate Tsosie said that the current land acquisition and disposal process can take up to two years to complete, which has resulted in the loss of land purchasing opportunities, such as tracts of land near the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort.

"We want to ensure that this process is efficient to meet the needs of the Navajo Nation and expanding its assets for investment opportunities, and to encourage economic development for our Navajo people," said Delegate Tsosie.

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