



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Budget and Finance Committee commends progress of the Tsaile/Wheatfields Agricultural Project



PHOTO: Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye and Budget and Finance Committee members tour the farm areas in Wheatfields, Ariz. on June 5, 2018.

TSAILE, Ariz. – The Budget and Finance Committee convened on Tuesday at the Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter to meet with chapter officials, Tsaile/Wheatfields Diné Water Users, and the Tsaile/Wheatfields Farm Board to receive an update report on the community's agricultural project, which was funded through the \$150 million Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan approved by the Navajo Nation Council in 2016.

The aim of the agricultural project is to revitalize farmlands and to implement land conservation efforts through the aid of Diné College's Land Grant, which conducted workshops for farmers and

ranchers on new agricultural industry methods for soil, harvesting, pest management, range management, and animal health/reproduction.

Managing the project is the non-profit Tsaile/Wheatfields Diné Water Users, who identified 127 farmers in the area and are actively working with 38 Navajo farming families. Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhí), who represents the community on the Council, said they worked collaboratively with the farm board to secure funding.

“This effort came full-circle as local leadership and community members came together to put this plan into motion. The farm board advocated for funding on behalf of the project, and the Diné Water Users are now implementing that plan. This initiative represents the true meaning of planning, collaboration, and diligence to not give up on their dreams of revitalizing farming in Tsaile/Wheatfields,” said Delegate BeGaye.

He added that the group encountered challenges such dealing with several farming permits that are in probate partially due to the reluctance of current permit holders to pass them on to younger individuals who want to continue their family farming operations.

Updates from the project include the installation of a perimeter fencing on the Lower Wheatfields Irrigation Project that is 95-percent complete, irrigation systems for the farms, and the completion of soil testing, land-leveling, deep root plowing on some plots, and plowing.

BFC chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááhááí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) commended the progress of the agricultural project and said the committee is pleased with its successful progress.

“I am very happy to say that Council supported 100-percent of the projects within the Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Plan Expenditure Plan, however this project was one that the Office of the President and Vice President did not support, and we are happy to see that the progress taking place in Tsaile/Wheatfields is indicative of a tremendous success,” said Delegate Damon.

Delegate Damon said the Budget and Finance Committee would continue to monitor all the projects that were funded by the five-year expenditure plan, including two agricultural projects in Many Farms and in the Northern Navajo Agency.

The five-year expenditure plan allocated \$30 million annually for water lines, economic and community growth, and agricultural projects. 95-percent of the fund income is allocated for the projects and the remaining five-percent is reinvested in the Permanent Trust Fund principal.

BFC members voted 4-0 to accept the update report.

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