



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Indian Irrigation Project Negotiation Subcommittee continues to advocate for the completion of NIIP

FARMINGTON, N.M. – On Friday, the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project Negotiation Subcommittee received reports from Navajo Agricultural Products Industry management, which included discussions on the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016, updates on the omnibus spending bill, formalities to request reimbursements from the Bureau of Indian Affairs for operation and maintenance costs due to funding shortfalls, and the NAPI master agricultural lease update.

In 1962, Congress passed Public Law 87-483, which established the NIIP for the purpose of furnishing irrigation water to approximately 110,630 acres of farmland on the Navajo Nation. NAPI, under a contract with the BIA, performs operation and maintenance, on-farm development, and agricultural testing research laboratory.

During his report, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) reviewed NAPI's three priorities including the completion of NIIP's Block 9, advocacy to increase BIA funding for the NIIP system, and to seek funding through the WIIN Act.

"The main focus continues to reflect our priorities. Currently, we are working closely with the BIA to complete the two year study of the Indian irrigation program and project management through Title III, Subtitle B of the WIIN Act," said Speaker Bates.

The purpose of Title III, Subtitle B of the WIIN Act, passed by Congress in 2016, is to help reduce the deferred maintenance impacts at specific Indian Irrigation Projects, such as NIIP. Through the WIIN Act, the BIA will provide a study of the Indian irrigation program and project management, which is due in December to Congress.

NIIP Subcommittee member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) recommended the BIA to include the overall improvement of NAPI's operation, maintenance, and deficiencies within the two-year study.

“The study also needs to address the breaching of delivery system, modernization plan of NAPI, and how NAPI could assist individual farmers within the Nation to address severe drought conditions,” said Delegate Tsosie.

According to BIA Branch of Irrigation and Power chief Dave Fisher, the study’s focus is improving the organizational structures within the Indian irrigation program and to fulfill the WIIN Act requirements by Congress. Hopefully, the study will result in WIIN Act funds being appropriated, added Fisher.

NIIP Subcommittee member Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) recommended the BIA to also include the completion of Block 9.

“One of NIIP priorities includes the completion of Block 9, which has been ignored by the U.S. Government. NAPI has a huge challenge developing the block, however, the federal government is mandated to finish it,” said Delegate Begay.

Along all other projects, Speaker Bates and NAPI delegated CEO Lionel Haskie, stressed that the subcommittee will continue to request reimbursements from the BIA for operation and maintenance shortfalls subsidized by NAPI over the past two years. If the BIA does not fulfill reimbursements, NAPI could possibly reduce their operated fields from approximately 65,000 acres to 40,000 acres.

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