



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Council approves the Navajo Partitioned Lands range unit boundaries and grazing districts**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On the fourth and final day of the 2016 Spring Council Session, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council adopted and confirmed the range unit boundaries and grazing districts established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the Navajo Partitioned Lands, which includes precinct one, two, and three.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), co-sponsor of the legislation, explained the need for the range unit boundaries and grazing districts to be confirmed within NPL.

“The main goal of this legislation is to address the reissuance of grazing permits to the people whose permits were cancelled or terminated in the 1970’s. This is one of the first puzzle pieces to assist with the reissuance of permits in precinct one, two, and three,” stated Delegate Tsosie.

According to the Code of Federal of Regulations, Navajo Partitioned Lands are land portions of the Former Joint Use Area, area that was divided between the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe, awarded to the Navajo Nation under the Judgment of Partition issued April 18, 1979, by the United States District Court for the District of Arizona, which now is a separate administrative entity within the Navajo Nation.

According to the executive director for the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture Leo Watchman, the precincts consist of the following communities:

- Precinct one consists of 19 range units, approximately 177,037 acres, in Tolani Lake, Low Mountain, Teesto, and White Cone.
- Precinct two consists of 17 range units, approximately 466,588 acres, in Forest Lake, Black Mesa, Hard Rock, Pinon, Blue Gap, and Whippoorwill.
- Precinct three consists of 15 range units, approximately 262,758 acres, in Tonalea, Shonto, Chilchinbeto, Kayenta, and Black Mesa.

The BIA with concurrence of the Navajo Nation, established range units, which is defined as a tract of land designated as a separate management subdivision of the administration of graving.

Range management plans can be developed to improve, maintain soil, and forage resources and the physical land features, watershed, drainage patterns, vegetation, soil, resident concentration,

problem areas, chapter boundaries, special land uses, and comprehensive land use planning will be considered in the determination of range unit boundaries pursuant to 25 Code of Federal Regulation part 161.202.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), who represents communities in precincts one and two, questioned whether the Department of Agriculture and BIA had provided public education regarding the proposal.

“Many of our constituents question the progress and process of the confirmation of the range unit boundaries and grazing districts from BIA. Many of our elders need their permits, but they are confused on the process of the reissuance of permits. Have the agents of the legislation visited the affected communities and provided information regarding the range units?” asked Delegate Begay.

According to Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), chair of the Resources and Development Committee and primary sponsor of the legislation, said the RDC hosted several work sessions with all of the impacted chapters and provided the chapters the opportunity to present resolutions or recommendations to reaffirm or change the range units and grazing districts.

The legislation included supporting resolutions from the Navajo Partitioned Lands Joint Precincts District Grazing Committee members, who supported the BIA grazing boundaries currently in place, which would become the official Navajo Nation grazing boundaries. Also, the supporting resolution authorized the RDC to change grazing boundaries when committee deems it to be in the best interest of the Navajo people.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) presented an amendment to allow NPL chapters 120 days to make proposed alignments for range units through chapter and grazing committee resolutions. It also directs the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources to provide chapters in precinct two with large maps of individual proposed range units and provide detailed information on number of cancelled permittee(s), living and deceased, for possible heirs who live in the range unit to get agreement on alignment changes through resolutions or the proposed alignment will stand for which exterior fencing will begin.

“Talking about land is a sensitive subject and we need to provide public information and education in a delicate manner because it regards the sacredness of the land and livestock,” addressed Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) during the discussion of public education.

At the conclusion of the two-hour discussion, Council members voted 19-0 to approve Legislation No. 0093-16 with one amendment.

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