



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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New Mexico Congresswoman discusses Chaco Canyon National Historical Park with Eastern Agency Council Delegates

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council representing chapters from the Eastern Agency hosted a teleconference meeting on Friday with Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández (NM-03) on the future of the Chaco Canyon National Historical Park. Discussion topics included rights-of-ways for roads and land access issues, the concerns of land allottees in the region, the Build Back Better Act, and the proposed \$3.5 trillion dollar infrastructure bill in Congress.

“Chaco Canyon has traditional and cultural significance to the origin stories of the Navajo people. Everything must be done to protect this sacred landscape so that it remains here for generations,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Łichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). “These conversations with New Mexico congressional leaders are important to the national dialogue on the protection of sacred sites in Indian Country. We must respect the rights of the allottees to develop their land and ensure the Navajo people are the first priority.

In 2019, the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee passed NABIJA 05-20, which established the official position of the Navajo Nation that settled a 5-mile buffer zone within and around the greater Chaco Canyon area and allows Navajo allottees to further advance any development as landowners while protecting its natural resources.

During a meeting with the U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) back in June, various council delegates discussed the proposed Chaco Canyon Heritage Area Protection Act of 2021 (CCHAPA). The act established rules of conduct around the region and outlined the potential impacts Navajo citizens could face with ongoing oil and gas development.

“Roadways that were federally established should be maintained and upgraded for use and access from the surrounding communities,” said Chairman Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor). “The Eastern Agency Land Commission passed a resolution to be reviewed and taken into consideration on these issues by the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee soon.”

Congresswoman Leger-Fernandez reported that the CCHAPA passed the Natural Resources Committee and will be heard in the House of Representatives this fall. She reaffirmed her commitment to having open conversations with Navajo residents being impacted.

“We must do everything possible to listen to all of our people and take their concerns into strong consideration,” said Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Lake Valley, Náhodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint). “We are planning an in-person meeting with New Mexico leaders so they can hear directly from chapter officials, allottees, and the families being affected. Their voices are important to make the best decisions going forward.”

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