



Naabik'iyáti' Committee addresses Gold King Mine Spill Settlements

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Yesterday, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0040-22 during the Regular Meeting with seventeen (17) delegates in favor and one (1) opposed. Several other legislation that were placed on the approved consent agenda were also passed.

Resources and Development Committee Chairman Rickie Nez (T'iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K'aan, Newcomb, San Juan) sponsored Legislation No. 0040-22 which will establish the San Juan River Mitigation Fund as a place to hold litigation and settlement funds caused by the Gold King Mine spill.

“Over 7 years has passed since the disastrous spill, yet, the Navajo Nation and its people are still facing the repercussions from it,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “As this lawsuit will continue for an unknown amount of time, I want to assure those impacted by the spill that the Navajo Nation will work to settle any remaining claims.

In 2015, the Gold King Mine located near Silverton, Colo., released approximately 3 million gallons of toxic acid mine wastewater into the Animas River which flows into the San Juan River impacting Navajo farmers and ranchers along the river. Resulting in water irrigation restrictions/damages that prevented farmers and ranchers from watering their crops and having drinking water.

“I am glad my honorable colleagues approved Legislation 0040-22, but it still needs an amendment in order to prioritize the funds for San Juan River Chapter for the purpose of restoring the irrigation canals,” said Delegate Nez. “The irrigation canals are in dire need of rehabilitation for farmers to utilize the water for agricultural purposes.”

The fund, if established by the Navajo Nation Council during the next Council Session, will finance environmental technical studies, water quality monitoring activities, and/or preventative and corrective measures to address potential contamination and related issues while implementing a Navajo Nation EPA strategy.

“The cost for litigating any case at the federal level is costly and time consuming and in order for the Navajo Nation and its people to be properly compensated for damages, we must reinvest funds to ensure we will have zealous representation,” said Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock). “This litigation fund can be used to hire the best attorneys who will fight for what the Navajo Nation deserves.”