FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 16, 2025

25th Navajo Nation Council mourns the passing of former Division of Natural Resources Director Dr. Rudy Shebala

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 25th Navajo Nation Council is mourning the passing of Dr. Rudy Shebala, 68, who died peacefully in his sleep on Monday, July 14, according to a notice from his family.

Dr. Shebala was a lifelong advocate for horsemanship, the equine history of tribal nations, education, and Navajo culture. He earned a Ph.D. and a Master's degree in Environmental Science, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science, all from the University of Idaho. From 2019 to 2022, he served as Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources.

Originally from Nazlini, Ariz., Shebala was Deeshchii'nii (Red Streak People) born for Naasht'ezhi (Zuni). His maternal grandfathers were Táchii'nii (Red Running into the Water)/ Nát'oh Dine'é (Tobacco People), and his paternal grandfathers were Naasht'ezhi (Zuni).
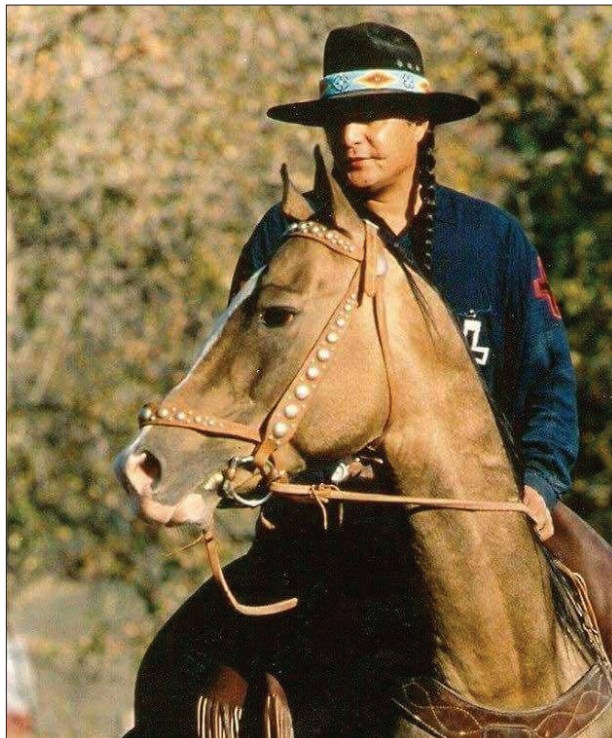

Photo courtesy of the Shebala family.

In 1998, Shebala collaborated with the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee to establish the Nez Perce Horse Registry, which developed a new breed by crossing the Appaloosa with the Akhal-Teke—resulting in the Nez Perce Horse.

According to his son, Sheldon Shebala, Rudy was an avid reader from a young age and was deeply rooted in traditional Navajo beliefs and Diné spiritual practices.

"He was always researching horses and fascinated by how they became part of tribal cultures and histories," Sheldon said. "We spent years researching Navajo culture, traveling to college libraries across the country to find rare books that documented our traditions."

Dr. Shebala is survived by his eight children and eight grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held on Friday, July 18, at 10 a.m. (MDT) at the Nazlini Cemetery in Nazlini, Ariz., with a reception to follow at the Nazlini Chapter House.

###