



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Resources and Development Committee meets in Aneth to hear community concerns with proposed sale of Elk Petroleum



RDC Chair Brenda Jesus said all partners need to be at the table to address Aneth Chapter concerns.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On August 18-19, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) met with Aneth Chapter residents to hear concerns regarding the proposed sale of Elk Petroleum, the current leaseholder and operator of the Aneth Oil Field.

RDC Chair Brenda Jesus said the committee has been consulting with the community to prioritize concerns and previously toured areas with exposed oil pipes and flare towers near residential areas.

“The Navajo Nation is working to resolve these issues using best practices,” Chair Jesus said. “We need our federal partners, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Executive Branch, community members, and chapter leadership at the table to fully address these challenges.”

Discovered in 1956 in southeastern Utah, the Aneth Oil Field has undergone decades of drilling and flood recovery methods to maintain production. Multiple operators have managed the field over time; Elk Petroleum took over from Resolute Energy, while the Navajo Nation retains interest through the Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company (NNOGC). Elk Petroleum is now seeking to sell its operations and associated leases.

Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Director Stephen Etsitty noted that liability for the oil field has been shared among successive operators, underscoring the need to

review each owner's compliance record. He added that, under this leasing action, the Navajo Nation Council has given NNEPA statutory responsibility to enforce environmental regulations, including the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act.

Aneth Chapter President Dr. Carma Claw reported on longstanding community concerns tied to Elk Petroleum, citing past agreements and pointing out that impacts extend back more than 70 years. "In Aneth, we've seen health issues, environmental harm, and division," Dr. Claw said. "We're here today to restore balance and to act within accordance of our laws and not the laws of extraction."

Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw voiced her support for local communities gaining greater control over their resources, emphasizing cultural ties to the land and encouraging residents to continue pushing for change. She also pressed for clarity on how much oil is currently being extracted from the region.

In response, Rowena Cheromiah, Minerals Manager with the Navajo Division of Natural Resources, explained that while San Juan County tracks production, the Nation must also account for its own figures. She reported current estimates ranging between 1,200 and 3,800 barrels per day, with approximately 400 million barrels in untapped reserves.

Residents shared accounts of health issues, environmental damage, and family relocations caused by drilling. They raised alarms over spills, unsafe pipelines, and the lack of cleanup, stressing that oil companies must take responsibility. Speakers also called for an enforceable action plan that includes an exit strategy, production data, and resources for impacted communities.

"The Resources and Development Committee has made every effort to address these issues across the Navajo Nation," said Chair Jesus. "We will continue working with our communities and the Executive Branch to bring about meaningful change and ensure that your concerns are addressed."

RDC members assured the community that they will return to provide updates and hold additional forums to continue addressing the issue.

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