



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Joint committee meeting addresses grazing regulations and enforcement of agricultural management policies



Members of the Resources and Development and Law and Order Committees held a joint meeting to hear concerns regarding agricultural management enforcement and solutions from department heads.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Resources and Development Committee (RDC) and the Law and Order Committee (LOC) convened a joint meeting Monday to address matters pertaining to enforcement of grazing permits and violations of the current Agricultural Resource Management Plan.

RDC Chair Brenda Jesus (Oaksprings, St. Michaels) said several concerns raised during the meeting could be addressed through amendments to Titles 3, 11, and 17 of the Navajo Nation Code. She noted that Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture Manager Jesse Jim is developing proposed amendments to Title 3, while the LOC is advancing revisions to Title 17.

“This joint meeting was necessary because many of these issues fall under the oversight of both committees,” Jesus said. “As amendments to Title 3 move forward, they may help align with changes being considered elsewhere in the Code.”

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) said the committee is preparing legislation to amend Title 17, which governs law and order, with plans to bring it forward during the 2026 Summer Council Session.

“As the committee works on amendments to Title 17, it continues to hear concerns related to grazing violations, cattle rustling, and homesite leases,” Charles-Newton said. “The joint meeting provided an opportunity to hear from department leaders and law enforcement.”

The committees heard presentations from Jesse Jim, manager of the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, Navajo Nation Police Department Director Michael Henderson, and Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources Director Mike Halona.

Jim outlined challenges hindering enforcement of grazing regulations, including limited education for permittees, noncompliance with livestock head counts, unclear permit boundaries, and the growing presence of feral horses and unbranded livestock.

Jim also addressed unauthorized grazing by livestock owners without permits and explained how unbranded and feral animals contribute to overgrazing.

"There is widespread misunderstanding of the grazing permit process," Jim said, noting that NNDA's horse management team has faced resistance in the field, including a recent incident in Black Mesa where staff were shot at while responding to unbranded livestock.

Jim added that the Agricultural Resource Management Plan, issued in 1947, no longer reflects current forage conditions on Navajo Nation rangelands. "In 1947, about 133,000 sheep units were recommended," Jim said. "Today, the Nation exceeds 600,000 sheep units because of limited enforcement."

Chair Charles-Newton asked Jim to identify where law enforcement support is falling short. Jim said NNDA continues to face challenges securing law enforcement assistance during domestic disputes related to grazing matters and obtaining support for livestock inspectors.

Navajo Resource Enforcement Manager Hope Wilson said requests for assistance during domestic altercations are often transferred between the Division of Natural Resources and the Navajo Nation Police Department, creating uncertainty over response authority.

"We issue citations and work with the prosecutor's office, but these cases are often not treated as a priority," Wilson said. "We need stronger coordinated support across agencies."

NNPD Director Henderson said officers do respond to these calls, though not always immediately due to staffing shortages.

Chair Jesus said she continues to hear concerns from constituents and fellow delegates about weak sentencing and inconsistent enforcement of agricultural laws.

"Sentencing for theft is not strong enough in regard to cattle rustling," Jesus said. "There are questions about whether jail time is actually served, and confusion about enforcement roles."

Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Region Director Deborah Shirley attended the meeting and said enforcement of grazing violations on Navajo trust lands is a responsibility delegated to the Navajo Nation.

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs manages grazing permits, but enforcement rests with the tribe," Shirley said.

Delegate Shawna Ann Claw said that while enforcement falls under the Nations authority, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has not fully met its trust responsibilities, particularly regarding infrastructure pertaining to culverts and cattleguards.

Chair Charles-Newton said the committees will pursue more comprehensive enforcement through a memorandum of agreement to cross deputize officers and introduced a motion directing the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to develop a cross deputization program.

The Resources and Development Committee and the Law and Order Committee will hold a follow up leadership meeting on these issues on Feb. 19 at 10 a.m.

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