



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Nation Hopi Land Commission received update from Washington Office on BIA transition and ONHIR responsibilities



The Navajo Hopi Land Commission received an update report from the Navajo Washington Office regarding transfer of ONHIR responsibilities to BIA.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Thursday, the Navajo Hopi Land Commission (NHLC) received an update from the Navajo Nation Washington Office (NNWO) regarding ongoing coordination with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) following the transfer of responsibilities from the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation (ONHIR). The report outlined federal transition efforts, pending obligations, and next steps needed to address relocation matters and land management issues affecting Navajo Nation citizens.

NNWO Executive Director Vince Redhouse reported that ONHIR formally transferred its obligations and authorities to the BIA through a memorandum of understanding before the agency's retirement. The transition occurred shortly before the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history, which delayed initial coordination efforts and halted federal activity for several months.

Redhouse explained that the BIA is currently working to obtain and review ONHIR records, many of which were not digitized and were archived in Riverside, California. Because the BIA does not yet have complete information on ONHIR's operations and responsibilities, the Navajo Nation convened a listening session with federal officials to begin outlining outstanding obligations.

“The Bureau of Indian Affairs is still determining the full scope of responsibilities transferred from ONHIR. Because of that uncertainty, the Navajo Nation held a listening session to outline the issues we believe must be resolved as this transition moves forward,” Redhouse said.

According to the Washington Office, the Nation presented a framework of priority actions for the federal government to address. These include certification of pending relocation applicants, completion of housing construction obligations, continued Navajo Nation land selections estimated at approximately 13,000 acres, and the forgiveness of a \$16 million federal loan associated with relocation activities.

Redhouse also reported that the Nation requested any remaining federal relocation funds be transferred to the Navajo Rehabilitation Trust Fund and that all leases, rights-of-way, and property interests currently held by ONHIR be transferred to the Navajo Nation. Additional requests included the transfer of buildings on Navajo lands and financial support for operations and maintenance of those facilities.

Federal officials participating in the listening session included BIA Director Brian Mercier, Acting Chief of Staff Matt Kelly, and Adam Blackstone from the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of the Solicitor. The officials recently met with Navajo Nation leadership and visited the Padres Mesa Demonstration Ranch, which has been transferred to Navajo Nation oversight.

Redhouse said the BIA has begun internal reviews related to leases and property records and is coordinating with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to move forward with documentation and verification of federal obligations.

Commissioner Arbin Mitchell asked about the timeline for federal approvals related to grazing tally counts and homesite lease activities, noting that ranchers and residents are awaiting action from the BIA.

Mitchell also raised questions about federal funding levels and whether building infrastructure on the Navajo Nation is adequately insured or documented following the transfer of responsibilities.

Redhouse reported the BIA received approximately \$7 million for Fiscal Year 2026, a significant increase from prior years but still insufficient to complete housing construction and certify all remaining relocation applicants.

Commission members acknowledged the ongoing federal coordination and emphasized the need for continued communication with the BIA and other federal agencies as the transition proceeds.

The Navajo Hopi Land Commission accepted the Washington Office report with a vote of seven in favor and none opposed.

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