



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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Navajo-Hopi Land Commission reviews grazing reissuance progress, trust fund balances, and land planning initiatives



During a recent leadership meeting, the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission addressed grazing permit reissuance, trust fund allocations, and strategic land development planning.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — During a recent leadership meeting held at Twin Arrows Casino and Resort, the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission (NHLC) convened to review initiatives related to Navajo Partitioned Land (NPL) grazing permit reissuance, trust fund allocations, and strategic land development planning, with a strong emphasis on data-driven analysis and interagency coordination.

Commissioners received a briefing on the status of grazing permit reissuance on NPL, a process governed by federal regulations under 25 CFR Part 161. The Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture reported that 243 applications for 1,055 canceled grazing permits have been submitted for review, with approximately 50% meeting eligibility requirements. Currently 44 applications have been processed though several remain pending due to documentation gaps or legal review requirements.

NHLC Chair Otto Tso emphasized the need to address long-standing unspent balances and discussed potential strategies to recapture and redistribute funds for current community needs. The data indicated that multiple chapter-level projects remain inactive despite prior allocations, highlighting the importance of improved oversight and timely utilization of resources.

“Back in 1972, the federal government canceled all grazing permits in that area. From that time up to now, those permits were never reissued, so for over 50 years, our people have been without valid grazing permits,” Tso said.

The current reissuance effort is part of a structured CFR regulated process guided by federal regulation, emphasizing that restoring permits requires compliance with established procedures rather than immediate distribution.

Tribal officials emphasized that the reissuance process has been complex and time-intensive, with only 28 permits successfully reissued over a seven-year period during Phase 1. Under Phase 2, efforts will focus on identifying legally recognized heirs of original permit holders, extensive verification of family lineage documentation, residency confirmation, and compliance with federal eligibility standards.

Broader land management challenges continue to impact grazing capacity. Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture Manager Jesse Jim highlighted a significant decline in sustainable livestock levels from over 500,000 sheep units historically to approximately 150,000 sheep units today, indicating current grazing pressures exceed environmental carrying capacity. It was noted that drought conditions, land use conflicts, and increasing development pressures continue to strain available rangeland, requiring careful planning and regulatory compliance.

The Office of the Controller presented financial updates on trust funds that support relocation and land-related programs. Controller McCabe reported the Diné Relocation Trust Fund holds approximately \$9.7 million in unreserved funds which are available for future allocation.

Discussions included updates on land acquisition efforts under federal legislation with the Navajo Land Commission Office identifying 24 parcels totaling approximately 4,207 acres across 12 chapters for potential development. Over 70% of the acreage is concentrated in four key areas, allowing for strategic planning focused on housing, grazing, and economic development.

The Navajo-Hopi Land Commission later opened the floor for an informal public hearing where participants highlighted the real-world impacts of policy decisions, including limited access to grazing resources, challenges with relocation status, and the lack of alternative grazing lands.

Council Delegate Germaine Simonson also highlighted ongoing challenges in navigating complex processes tied to land use, funding oversight, and interdepartmental collaboration. She expressed concerns of setbacks on communication between Navajo Nation programs, federal partners, and local chapters.

"We're dealing with multiple layers of federal requirements, tribal policies, and community needs. There are still gaps in communication and coordination, and that's something we need to address to make sure these services are reaching the people they were intended for," Simonson said.

The Navajo-Hopi Land Commission reaffirmed their commitment to incorporating public input into future decision-making and emphasized the importance of transparency, accountability, and proactive planning as the Navajo Nation continues to address complex land and resource management issues.

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