



## The 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council

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### Resources Committee hears proposal from Papillion Airways, Inc., directive issued to move forward with negotiation

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** – On June 16, the Resources Committee of the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council and Navajo Department of Parks and Recreation convened for an update meeting to discuss various projects under the auspices of the Navajo Department of Parks and Recreation (NDPR).

Among the topics for discussion was the proposal submitted from Papillion Airways, Inc., for commercial air tours of the East Rim of Grand Canyon National Park and the Little Colorado River corridor.

According to Irit Langness, vice-president of sales and marketing, Papillion proposes to develop two operational Ramada landing sites along the East Rim overlooking the confluence of the Little Colorado and build two landing pads along Highway 89 at Cameron, Ariz. The Cameron site would feature an office and visitor center counter. Two tours from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and Cameron would be the initial tours to start operations. Over a three to five year period, \$8 million is expected to be generated from the project.

“It has been Papillion Helicopters goal since discussions began with the Navajo Nation’s Parks and Recreation to be a valuable asset and a strong partner in the development of the Nation’s tourism initiatives,” the proposal stated.

“We are eager and willing to have the opportunity to partner with the Navajo Nation and start operations from the Grand Canyon,” Langness said. “We have also committed our resources, time, fleet and staff to move ahead. We are very bullish on what is ahead for this project and think the timing is a good time right now.”

Council Delegate Phillip Harrison Jr. (Red Valley/Cove) asked what direction the Navajo Nation would have to go to negotiate a deal as well as possible expansion into unknown markets throughout the Navajo Nation.

In response, Langness said it is possible for Papillion to promote other areas on the Navajo Nation. She cited cross promotion and packaging of other parks as a way to reach other tourism markets on the Navajo Nation.

“From the sales and marketing end and from the day we get the green light, we will assemble our team and announce to the world this tour is available and we could operate as soon as next week,” added Langness.

Langness also said Papillion and NDPR would develop overlooks of the East Rim. “Specific to the Cameron Chapter, Papillion agrees to conduct a feasibility study for two projects – hotel complex and vocational training facility for hospitality and tourism - in the vicinity of Cameron that has the potential to create jobs and assist in drawing tourism in the area,” the proposal read.

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"Papillion is in it for the long overhaul," Gary Scaramazzo added, who is the Papillion Liaison to the Navajo Nation. "What is important is going ahead and basically taking the bull by the horns. We are looking for direction from the Navajo Nation. Every week, every month that passes by is lost opportunities for the Nation and Papillion."

Council Delegate Harry Williams, Sr. (Coalmine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi) raised concern of how Cameron and Bodaway Chapters refused the proposed development and said, "The Council is going to ask what are the two chapters saying as well as the land users. We do not want to get hung up on that issue -- those things need to be addressed."

Council Delegate George Arthur (T'iistoh Bikaad/San Juan/Nenanezad), however, said the project can move along without Chapter involvement and Council approval as he explained why the project had not progress to fruition.

"About two years ago, we said we were going to go through with this project," Arthur said, chairman of the Resources Committee. "The mistake we made was that we gave the project to the wrong person within the Navajo Nation government. The only way this will happen is if we do it ourselves and move the initiatives forward."

According to 19 N.N.C. § 2, the Resources Committee is authorized to "set aside and withdraw areas of Navajo land for use as parks, monuments and recreation sites, upon recommendation of the Parks Commission and the Parks and Recreation Department, after proper clearance from the Navajo Land Department and the local chapter." Resolution CN-72-92 established the Resources Committee as the entity whose purpose is to ensure utilization of all resources of the Navajo Nation.

Thus, in this case, Papillion and NDPR do not need chapter approval to proceed with development because chapters consented to the withdrawal of lands for the NDPR through Resolution ACMA-36-62.

In 1962, the Navajo Tribal Council's Advisory Committee enacted Resolution ACMA-36-62, which "established the Little Colorado River Navajo Tribal Park and authorized the Parks Commission to make rules and regulations for such Park." It is through this resolution that 360,000 plus acres of land were set aside for park and recreation development in the Western Navajo Agency for the beneficial use of Navajo people.

Ray Russell, division director for NDPR, said, "We are ready to come up with the terms. If that is going to happen, I would like to have a couple of Resources Committee members to come with us to be part of the negotiations."

A negotiation of the proposal is expected to be finalized by next week when NDPR officials and members of the Resources Committee meet with Papillion representatives in Las Vegas, Nev.

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