



The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Hopi Land Commission receives update on proposed solar energy development at Paragon Ranch

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Hopi Land Commission received a report today on the planned solar energy project at Paragon Ranch near Crownpoint, N.M., from the Navajo Nation Renewable Energy Taskforce and Matinee Energy LLC.

The commission, through Public Law 93-305 or the Navajo and Hopi Relocation Amendments Act of 1980, has the power from the U.S. Congress to select and recommend land transfers to the Bureau of Indian Affairs – this includes the transfer of lands under the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), state and private lands into Navajo Nation trust land.

According to the act, the Navajo Nation cannot transfer more than 250,000 acres of BLM lands and it cannot exceed 150,000 acres in private lands into trust. These lands also need to be located 18 miles within the present Navajo boundaries in order to be transferred into Navajo Nation trust land.

The Paragon Ranch is a mixture of BLM and state lands; it was selected by the commission for the development of a solar farm for the economic benefit of Navajo-relocatees and the Navajo Nation. A land mass of 21,000 acres of the ranch has been selected for the proposed solar power project and is currently being conveyed into trust status.

The Navajo Nation Renewable Energy Taskforce recommends renewable energy developments and integrates technical and financial advice on the developments of Navajo Nation lands to the Resources Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council.

The taskforce has the ingredients to make the project at Paragon Ranch a possibility through its team members and the proposed developer Matinee Energy LLC. The taskforce includes: Council Delegate George Arthur (T'iistoh Bikaad/San Juan/Nenanezad), chairman of the Resources Committee; Arvin Trujillo, executive director of the Navajo Division of Resources; Attorney General Louis Denetsosie; Marty Ashley, executive director of the Navajo Nation Tax Department; and two Navajo consultants, Bill McCabe, president of McCabe and Associates, and Steven Gunderson, president of Tallsalt Financial Group. McCabe and Gunderson are the consultants applying technical and financial assistance on the solar project.

Matinee Energy has been in discussion with the taskforce and they have expressed the need to develop the project in phases and agreed to negotiations of the tribe being a majority owner or 51% of the project. This would allow for the Navajo Nation and the commission to receive taxes and market rates for leases, profits and industry networking.

Arvin Trujillo said the Navajo Nation needs to break-away from the landlord process for energy development.

"We are trying to break away from landlord partnership to be part-owners and to protect interests of the people and the Nation," Trujillo explained. "With solar, we are in the process of establishing guidelines to make opportunities available."

The proposed solar farm at Paragon Ranch would model the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority's Big Boquillas Ranch Wind Project and once representation from the commission is selected, a final negotiation will take place for the construction of the solar farm.

In an effort to help get this project in full swing, Council Delegate Amos Johnson (Forest Lake) recommended the taskforce endorse a commissioner to its team to improve communications.

"We really don't want this to be a trial and error project," Johnson said. "We hope that we can get cooperation on this project and move forward with the commission's help in working with the proposed developer."

The commission and the taskforce view this project as a viable opportunity for the Navajo Nation's future, which would create economic benefits for the relocatees and other energy development through maximizing land value.

"The idea here is how to create a viable economy for the Navajo Nation," Trujillo said. "How do we expand beyond land lease agreements and how do we go into other areas such as bringing manufacturing to the Nation. We want to tie in Navajo preference and business laws for this project. We want to make sure Navajos are involved -- Big Boquillas and NTUA is an example."

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