



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 5, 2014

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Resources and Development Committee approves legislation supporting the Fort Wingate Land Division Act of 2014

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Resources and Development Committee approved Legislation No. 0122-14, accepting the Fort Wingate Land Division Act of 2014, a Congressional bill, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Ben R. Luján (D-NM) that proposes to divide approximately 21,000 acres of parceled land known as the former Fort Wingate Army Depot between the Navajo Nation and Zuni Tribe.

The former Army depot was constructed in 1870 and was used for storage and disposal of missiles and ammunition. The Army depot closed in 1993 and the land opposition between both tribes has ensued since.

The proposed land division would give the Navajo Nation approximately 50% of parceled land and the Zuni Tribe approximately 40% of the parceled land.

The remaining land would remain under the U.S. Department of Defense due to high levels of contamination in the area.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) urged the approval of the legislation, emphasizing that the proposed land division stalled for years because both sides have not reached a consensus.

“The Fort Wingate issue has been discussed since I’ve become a delegate and has probably been discussed prior to the 18th and 19th Council. Since the closure of Fort Wingate, as a whole, the

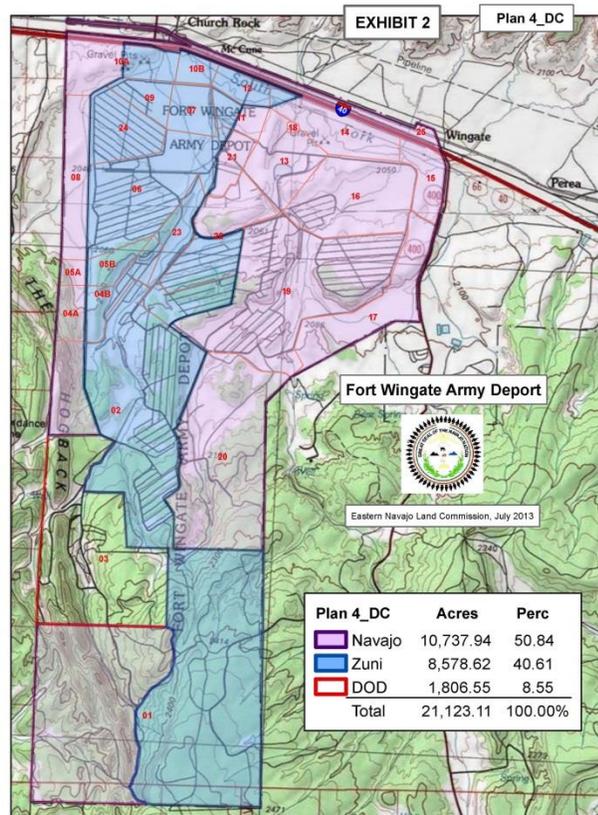


Photo: Exhibit 2 of Legislation No. 0122-14 shows the proposed land division between the Navajo Nation and the Zuni Tribe.

lands have become available and for many years this issue has been discussed by many delegates,” stated Delegate Simpson.

On July 8, 2013, a meeting in Washington, D.C. took place among Reps. Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.), Steve Pierce (R-N.M.), Don Young (R-Alaska), Pueblo of Zuni Governor Arlen Quetawki and members of the Fort Wingate Army Depot Task Force to negotiate a resolution that would divide the parceled land.

Negotiations concluded, however, Navajo people residing in nearby communities continue to voice their disagreement with the proposed land division, many of which have said the Navajo Nation should receive a larger portion or all of the land.

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) voiced the concerns of his constituents.

“When this issue was first brought up for this land exchange, the Zuni tribe was supposed to get the southern part not the northern part of the land. Also, in a 1942 letter by the Army, it stated that once the Army is done with the land, they would give it back to the Navajo,” stated Delegate Yazzie.

RDC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) spoke in support of the legislation, adding that local community members are taking an “extreme position” by demanding that the Navajo Nation receive 100% of the disputed land, while offering no recommendations.

Following the discussion, RDC chairperson Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) said that the Navajo Nation needs to stand up against the Zuni Tribe.

“I want to see that letter that the land belongs to the Navajo Nation. Bring that letter forth, and I will stand with you,” stated Delegate Benally to Delegate Yazzie.

RDC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0122-14.

The legislation now goes to the Naa’bik’iyati’ committee and to the Council for final consideration.

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