



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**MEDIA CONTACTS**

Jared Touchin | 928.221.9253  
Jolene Holgate | 928.308.4174  
Chrissy Largo | 928.637.5603  
nrlb.communications@gmail.com

**Resources and Development Committee receives report  
regarding the proposed Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act**

**WINDOW ROCK** – Last Tuesday, the Resources and Development Committee received a report regarding the draft of the Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act from the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture.

In 2012, the Resources and Development Committee directed the Department of Agriculture to initiate solutions to address the long-debated issues surrounding grazing regulation.

“There are a lot of misconceptions of this process that we are undertaking and it does complement a lot of concerns in our culture and Navajo way of life. The purpose of this legislation is trying to provide Navajo grazing codes to address drought,” stated Leo Watchman, Jr., director of the Department of Agriculture.

The Naabik’iyati Committee recently held a meeting in regards to the proposed Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act. In addition, a total of six public hearings were conducted across the Nation to gain input and to address questions from the public.

“All of these comments, suggestions, recommendations that were made at all of the six public hearings, were held in regards to the existing Navajo Grazing Act. We wanted to share with the full council what the draft was so that we can have an impact on why those changes were recommended,” stated RDC chair Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta).

The proposed act will apply to all of Navajo Nation and the new grazing permits will be issued solely by the Navajo Nation. This will have no impact on current valid grazing permits, according to the report.

However, grazing permits will no longer be renewed automatically and will require the permittee to apply to have their permit renewed, if the proposed changes are implemented.

“There was a discussion pertaining to grazing fees. It was recommended that there needs to be some kind of fee imposed. The general public said they are willing to pay a grazing fee as long as they know where the money is going and it goes back to the improvement of the land. Currently, Eastern Navajos pay a grazing fee,” stated Watchman.

The proposed Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act also proposes to end permit probate which means that grazing permits will no longer be eligible for probate in a Navajo Nation court. For example, if a permittee is deceased, their grazing permit reverts back to the Nation upon co-permittee designation.

According to Watchman, there are approximately 11,000 grazing permits within the Navajo reservation and roughly only 3,000 of those grazing permits are active.

“There is a concern that what we have is inactive permits that should be probated but haven’t been probated for whatever reason. If a permit has not been probated, there should be no activity but as we know our Navajo people continue to raise livestock,” stated Watchman.

Changes to the proposed Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act drew skepticism from RDC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) regarding the probate issue.

“Every probate of grazing permits has ended up in dismantle. Every one of them. In some cases, relatives do not talk to each other anymore because of it. Which is the better thing to do? Do you want Navajo K’é to be lost? Or should we do away with the probate issue?” asked Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Benally added that stronger enforcement by grazing officials needed to be implemented as well as making them full-time employees, rather than elected officials.

“The problem is enforcement. We do not have proper enforcement and the grazing officials are the enforcers of all of the grazing laws. Make them full-time employees. It is because they are part-time the services are not adequately provided,” stated Delegate Benally.

According to the report, it proposes that the Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act will hire qualified range technicians that will be responsible for helping permittees to manage stocking rates, improve grazing practices, and to mediate grazing disputes.

“We need to know the number of misleads that are happening out there. This is why we need to seriously reexamine the whole system. We should be telling the Navajo people that this is why we are changing the system so we can do better. Also, bringing to attention that grazing permits is not a feasible land ownership,” stated Delegate Tsosie.

RDC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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