



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee commends watershed studies agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



PHOTO: (left to right) Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Col. Kirk E. Gibbs, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd, Council Delegate Walter Phelps, Coconino County District 4 Supervisor Jim Parks, and Director of Tribal Engagement for Congressman Tom O'Halleran Jack Jackson, Jr. at Leupp Chapter on Dec. 6, 2017.

LEUPP, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Resources and Development Committee members welcomed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers colonel Kirk E. Gibbs and his regional staff to the community of Leupp and shared their appreciation to the officials for initiating the watershed studies, which resulted from a successful intergovernmental partnership between the Navajo Nation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Army Corps of Engineers plans, designs, constructs, and manages projects for national, economic, and environmental security and they are the world's premier engineering organization, with more than 37,000 professionals in technical centers, and regional and field offices worldwide. Additionally, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a unique trust relationship with

tribes based on the U.S. Constitution, treaties, statutes, court decisions, and executive orders to protect and preserve tribal resources.

In September, the Navajo Nation and the Army Corps of Engineers signed a cost-share agreement, which allows the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct activities related to surveys and to provide technical planning and design assistance for watershed management, restoration, and development on the Nation. The study areas include Window Rock, Ft. Defiance, Chinle, Many Farms, Kayenta, and Tuba City.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii), who played an instrumental role in working with the Army Corps of Engineers to initiate the watershed projects, expressed his appreciation and stated that the project would guide future investments in natural resources and infrastructure.

“This amazing project is the first of its kind and it would provide many opportunities and benefits for the people and livestock. Watershed is the key to maintaining, servicing, and preserving our Nation’s water resources. This is only the beginning to improve water quality, range management, land use planning, and infrastructure development,” said Delegate Phelps.

According to Col. Gibbs, the final product of the watershed studies would help objectives such as reducing flood risk, improving natural sediment balance and conveyance, restoring native vegetation, improving range management and land use planning, removing and managing invasive species, and improving water quality in ground and surface waters.

RDC vice chair Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) emphasized that the data collected from the studies would help with future developments.

“The Nation has been lacking comprehensive flood plane studies, but now we will have access to reliable data that would provide many opportunities for the local chapters. This could not have been possible without the support and assistance from the Army Corp of Engineers,” said Delegate Bennett.

RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) commended the Army of Corps of Engineers for working closely with the Nation and the chapters.

“Intergovernmental partnerships made this possible, which is a goal of the Navajo Nation Council. Without the enthusiasm from community members, chapters, and local leadership, this project would not have been possible or initiated,” said Delegate Shepherd.

“This project marks the first steps to future partnerships with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” added Delegate Phelps, adding that the completion of the watershed studies is expected within three years.

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