



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee approves increase of grazing fees

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, the Resources and Development Committee approved Legislation No. 0351-18, amending the Navajo Nation tribal ranches grazing fee from \$4 per animal unit per month to \$6 per animal unit per month. Pursuant to the Navajo Nation Code, RDC has the authority to establish lease fees based on the recommendations from the Navajo Nation Ranch Program, Department of Agriculture, and the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources.

The Navajo Nation Ranch Program oversees designated ranch lands and ensures that sufficient revenues are generated to pay taxes, land use fees, and the cost of administration.

RDC vice chair Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill), who co-sponsored the legislation, asked the committee to increase the grazing fees to financially sustain the ranch program.

“The last fee adjustment was made 17 years ago. The fee needs to be increased due to the rising costs of managing ranch lands. Currently, the ranch program lacks financial stability, which hinders them from doing their duties and responsibilities,” said Delegate Bennett.

During the discussion, RDC member Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) recommended that the grazing fee be gradually increased annually for the courtesy of tribal ranchers.

“The first year grazing fee increase should be five dollars per animal unit per month, then gradually increase it to \$5.50 and six dollars over a year or two. The tribal ranchers would need adequate time to adjust to the new fee charges. The fees should also be determined by drought conditions,” said Delegate Filfred.

The legislation states that the fees may be adjusted annually due to unforeseen natural disasters and adjusted every five years based on the recommendations of the ranch program.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tside To ii) stated that the increased grazing fee is feasible.

“This is the cost of doing business. I assume that the tribal ranches file taxes every year and their operating expenses and livestock are claimed as deductibles. I do not understand why the tribal

ranches are complaining about a two-dollar increase. Initially, it was a four-dollar increase and six-dollars is a reasonable fee,” said Delegate Phelps.

The Resources and Development Committee approved Legislation No. 0351-18 with 3-2 vote and serves as the final authority for the bill. The increased fee will take effect in 2020.

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