



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Resources and Development Committee accepts the Bureau of Indian Affairs recommendations for the Navajo Partitioned Lands

TSE BONITO, N.M. – On Wednesday, the Resources and Development Committee considered Legislation No. 0075-18, which seeks to implement the Bureau of Indian Affairs recommendation of equal distribution of 10 sheep units year long for the Navajo Partitioned Lands. The legislation also directs the Navajo Department of Agriculture to implement the BIA recommendations.

In 1940, administrative control of livestock grazing on the NPL began with the issuance of the first formal grazing permits on the 1882 Executive Order Reservation. Pursuant to federal regulations, grazing permits were cancelled by court order in Oct. 1973 and never reissued within the NPL.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii), who sponsored the legislation, asked for his colleagues' support to initiate the process of reissuing the grazing permits within the NPL.

“This issue has been an on-going issue for many years. If approved, the legislation would allow the process to accept the BIA recommendations and reissue the grazing permits to families and individuals who meet the eligibility criteria. We need to return the livelihoods of these families within the NPL,” said Delegate Phelps.

According to the legislation, the BIA issued a letter dated Feb. 3, 2017 to President Russell Begaye regarding the notification of the NPL carrying capacity and stocking rate recommendation. The BIA recommended the NPL grazing permits to be reissued at the above stocking rate and a carrying capacity of 10 sheep units.

RDC vice chair Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) raised concerns regarding the 10 sheep units and questioned why the recommended sheep units were low.

“A 10 sheep unit is a low number compared to the number of sheep units these families had before the cancellation of their grazing permits. Will 10 sheep units be enough to sustain a livelihood within the NPL?” asked Delegate Bennett.

According to the BIA, the 10 sheep units were recommended based upon review and analysis of range inventory information and grazing permit data within precincts one, two, and three of the NPL.

In support of the legislation, RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) expressed that the families whose permits were cancelled by the federal government are entitled to grazing rights on the NPL.

“This problem has been going on too long and long over due. It is time to move forward with the recommendations and begin reissuing the grazing permits. The committee will continue to monitor the process to ensure that the grazing permits are reissued,” said Delegate Shepherd.

In a letter dated March 16 to the BIA, Delegate Shepherd requested the BIA to provide a list of all cancelled grazing permits for NPL precincts one, two, and three and to begin establishing and implementing a process to reissue grazing permits in a fair and timely manner.

The Resources and Development Committee approved Legislation No. 0075-18 with a 3-1 vote with one amendment. The committee serves as the final authority for the bill.

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