

## Navajo Nation and State of New Mexico finalize land exchange



*Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and Commissioner Ray Powell of the New Mexico State Land Office both said the land exchange was a win-win situation for all parties involved. The Navajo Nation received land near Tse Bonito, N.M. for the Navajo Division of Transportation's new complex and the State of New Mexico received land in Silver City, N.M. for economic development opportunities. (Photo by Rick Abasta)*

SANTA FE-The Navajo Nation and State of New Mexico have successfully completed a land exchange benefitting both sovereign governments in the spirit of economic development, employment and mutual collaboration.

The Indian Affairs Committee of the New Mexico Legislature convened on Nov. 27, at the State Capitol for a signing ceremony between the Navajo Nation and the New Mexico State Land Office.

The signing marked the end of a long process to acquire land for the Navajo Transportation Complex. It also signaled the continuation of government-to-

government relations between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico.

Plans for the land exchange began in earnest on March 2, 2011, when Navajo Division of Transportation Director Paulson Chaco and NMSLO Commissioner Ray Powell met to discuss the matter.

Eventually, Senator John Pinto sponsored Senate Memorial 45, requesting the Commissioner of Public Lands and the NMSLO to study the benefits of a land exchange with the Navajo Nation.

Under terms of the agreement, the Navajo Nation received 85.6 acres of land in

McKinley County, near Tse Bonito, the Arizona-New Mexico border and the boundary of the Navajo Nation. These lands are in the process of being taken into trust by the U.S. on behalf of the Navajo Nation.

The State of New Mexico received 3.6 acres of land in Silver City, which was purchased by the Navajo Nation on Nov. 19, 2012 for exchange with the NMSLO. The land is located within Silver City and is expected to yield high commercial development.

The exchange parcels were appraised at equivalent values.

In Mar. 2012, the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation

celebrated the grand opening of their new complex, an \$18 million investment in green energy construction and technology.

The energy efficiency and high environmental standards of the new facility have garnered the Navajo Nation Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design gold certification.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly praised the hard work and dedication of staff on both sides for completing the agreement.

"We are very happy to have concluded this exchange with the State Land Office," Shelly said. "This action furthers the ongoing commitment of the Navajo Nation and the State Land

Office to work together and resolve the issue of land consolidation.

“This is a good day for the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico in the area of partnership and I would like to see that continue,” he added.

The symbiotic nature of the trade was reiterated by Paulson Chaco, director of NNDOT.

“The land exchange between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico has set a new precedent and fosters the opportunity to complete projects for the benefit of two sovereign governments,” Chaco said.

As echoed throughout the room, the trade was a win-win situation for the Navajo Nation and State of New Mexico, he added.

Commissioner Ray Powell of the NMSLO said that the revenue generated for the State from the exchange will benefit N.M. school children.

The land in Silver City is near a Wal-Mart and affords the state an opportunity to access highway frontage and develop commercial opportunities.

“This is a win-win situation for the State Land Office and the Navajo Nation,” Powell said. “This creative partnership with the Navajo Nation will benefit our public schools, create jobs for New Mexicans, and reduce the burden on our tax payers.”

“I sponsored this bill last session to get that land acreage to the Navajo Nation, where the (Navajo) Transportation Complex would be built,” Pinto said.

Sen. Lynda Lovejoy extended thanks and gratitude for the work from all parties involved.

She noted that the NNDOT serves to improve roads and bridges on the Navajo Nation, creating jobs and economic development in the process.

“It’s a win-win situation for everybody, not just Navajo,” Lovejoy said.

Representative Ray Begaye agreed the symbiotic relationship from the exchange will only improve chances for future collaborations.

“Thank you for participating in this really great partnership and moving forward,” Begaye said.

Representative Nick Salazar agreed with his colleagues and lauded the cooperation the committee received during the exchange process.

“It’s been a win-win situation for everybody and that’s what we want: government-to-government, working together and doing things for everybody,” Salazar said.

Representative Jane Powdrell-Culbert noted that transportation and its significance to the state were a somewhat contentious issue during the previous legislative session.

“Transportation is the one thing that makes or breaks a state. It’s the one thing that makes businesses succeed or fail,” Powdrell-Culbert said.

With the successful passage of SM 45 she said there was only one outcome: for the two sovereigns to benefit financially and develop jobs.

Before the signing and finalization of the exchange, the senator who got the ball rolling was given the floor to speak.

“This will help the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico by working together for the future of our children and grandchildren,” Pinto said. “I vote for this and I make the motion to approve it.”



Commissioner Ray Powell stands with NDOT Director Paulson Chaco during the signing ceremony. President Ben Shelly and Senator John Pinto were seated during the ceremony. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Reporting to the Indian Affairs Committee of the New Mexico Legislature were NDOT Director Paulson Chaco, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, Commissioner Ray Powell and Senator John Pinto. The unique land exchange was praised as a win-win situation for all. (Photo by Rick Abasta)