

## Navajo chapters face road damage from monsoon rains



*Heavy rainfall on July 19 resulted in floods that damaged roads in the Northern Navajo Agency. Pictured here is the heavy damage on Navajo Route 5081 near Burnham Chapter. Navajo Division of Transportation crews conducted 55.2 miles of roadway assessments last week and are now mobilizing for road repairs this week for chapter residents. (Photo by Cornelius Kenny)*

BURNHAM, N.M.-The monsoon rains have been a godsend for many Navajo communities over the past month.

However, these heavy rains have also created challenges for chapters across the reservation, as local dirt roads are often washed out from the flash floods.

Last week, Navajo Division of Transportation Road Department crews began assessing road washouts in the Northern Navajo Agency.

Safety is the priority in these efforts.

Paulson Chaco, NDOT director, advised motorists

to be safe when traveling the damaged roads.

“We have our crews out on the roads conducting assessments and mobilizing for road repairs. However, we must also be prudent in preventing our equipment from getting stuck or damaged during these repairs,” Chaco said.

On July 17, heavy equipment operators Cornelius Kenny and Orren Lee conducted road assessments near Tiis Tsoh Sikaad and Burnham on Navajo Routes 5080 and 5081 for a total of 55.2 miles.

For N5080, they assessed 15.2 miles of road and encountered a low water crossing area

that needed work but was still passable; a washout that was repaired by the chapter with a backhoe and was passable; washouts that needed some grading; a cattle guard that needed cleaning; and miles of washboard.

They noted areas that needed graveling from the washout conditions.

For N5081, they encountered water on the roadway but passage was still possible in two wheel drive; several areas of roadway that had the shoulders washed out and are in need repair; one area that was damaged and merges into one lane; heavy damage on

one portion of the road that was washed out and is passable only with four wheel drive; and two areas that need to be completely rebuilt from major flood damage.

Senior heavy equipment operator Roscoe Tsosie said his crews are out working on the washout emergencies throughout the reservation and noted many chapters are demanding immediate response.

However, he said NDOT crews must still wait on pools of water to dissipate and for mud to dry before heavy equipment can be taken in for roadway repairs. This is to ensure equipment does not get

stuck in the muddy conditions.

“There are some chapters that are taking matters into their own hands and using backhoes to repair the roads,” Tsosie said. “We don’t advise this because sometimes they damage the roadway further and we have to go back in there for repairs.”

He said crews understand the immediacy for repairs and are working to address these needs as expeditiously as possible.

N5081 near Burnham faced several areas of heavy erosion

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from the floods. Some culverts were exposed from the heavy rain and some were crushed and heavily damaged. The assessment phase identified areas in need of repair and crews are onsite this week to conduct maintenance activities.

On July 16, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad Chapter president Lester Begay declared a state of emergency for his chapter.

He stated some homes were flooded and others had damaged roofs. Nine earthen dams serving as water reserves for livestock were compromised.

His biggest concern was that 90 percent of school bus routes washed away.

“Emergency vehicles will not be able to reach remote families fast enough,” Begay said.

The severe thunderstorms on July 19 created floods, he said, and noted one car was stuck in the flash flood and required emergency intervention.

The Chinle Navajo Agency faces similar circumstances.

Heavy rains on July 19 resulted in a waterline break in the Burnside area; a four-inch mainline was exposed and damaged west of Pinon rodeo grounds; power outages in two areas of Pinon; two-inch waterline in Kitsillie was leaking near the wash; and some residents in Smoke Signal were without water.

Navajo Tribal Utility Authority crews were not able to access some of the areas for repair due to the flooding. Again, the emergency situation is acknowledged, but approach must be taken with proper precautions to prevent crews from getting stuck.

NDOT advises travelers in these affected communities to use common sense judgment in navigating these routes until repairs can be made. If it looks like passage is not possible, then do not attempt to drive through the flooded areas.

Again, crews are onsite and working on repairs of these flooded areas. NDOT is working with our partners at the BIA, counties and state DOTs to address these issues.

Information: [www.navajodot.org](http://www.navajodot.org)



*Navajo Route 5081 faced the worst damage from the flooding. NDOT advises motorists to avoid roads like this all together. Exercise common sense and do not attempt to cross roads that are impassable. (Photo by Cornelius Kenny)*



*Navajo Route 5080 did see flooded roads but damages are not as severe as N5081, also located in the Northern Navajo Agency. NDOT crews are mobilizing this week for road maintenance activities. (Photo by Cornelius Kenny)*



*While the monsoon rains have been a blessing because of drought conditions, they brought challenges like the flash floods that have hit many Navajo chapters. NDOT is working on road repairs. (Photo by Cornelius Kenny)*