

Navajo DOT enhances Navajo Nation Zoo parking lot



Zoologist David Mikesic of the Navajo Nation Zoo, right, presents Paulson Chaco, director of Navajo Division of Transportation, with a plaque designating appreciation for NDOT's donation of equipment, material, and manpower to gravel the zoo parking lot and entry way. Mikesic presented the award at the Navajo Transportation Complex in Tse Bonito, N.M. in June 2013. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK-To say David Mikesic loves animals is an understatement.

Mikesic is the zoologist for the Navajo Nation Zoo. Educated as a biologist and zoologist, he spent most of his free time working with animals before moving to the Navajo Nation.

His passion for helping animals in need brought him to Window Rock in Oct. 1994 to work for the Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department as a zoologist. Mikesic was eventually promoted to zoologist for the Navajo Nation Zoo in 2010.

Since then, he has been squarely focused on improving the living conditions of animals at the zoo and enhancing the zoo experience for visitors.

Recently, one such improvement elevated the Navajo Nation Zoo experience exponentially.

The Navajo Division of Transportation graveled the zoo parking lot and roadway in early 2013 and made the facilities accessible for employees and visitors alike.

NDOT director Paulson Chaco was awarded a plaque in appreciation for donation of goods and services in completing major

renovations to the Navajo Nation Zoo parking lot and entry road.

Mikesic presented the award to Chaco in June 2013 at the Navajo Transportation Complex in Tse Bonito, N.M.

"The graveling effort for the Navajo Nation Zoo was another improvement project completed by the Navajo Division of Transportation," Chaco said. "We continue to move forward with the mission of NDOT, which is to improve transportation infrastructure on the Navajo Nation."

Project costs for the Navajo Nation Zoo were in excess of \$15,000 when manpower, equipment, and materials are factored in together. Over \$10,000 in general funds covered the cost of gravel.

Mikesic said the zoo was greatly improved for employee access and parking. Previously, employees and visitors had to slog through mud during adverse weather. Compounding the challenges for the zoo was mud and dirt tracked inside the facilities as well.

"It has reduced our need to clean mud from the office space as often. When it rained or snowed, the parking lot was difficult and

dangerous to drive into,” Mikesic said.

The zoo was officially opened on July 4, 1977.

Today, it features over 100 animals from 50 different species. Most of the animals are native to the Navajo Nation and were taken in as injured or orphaned animals.

Six permanent staff members operate the Navajo Nation Zoo, in addition to dedicated volunteers from the Office of Youth Development, Workforce Development, and Program for Self Reliance.

Over 40,000 people visit the zoo annually, which is nestled into the sandstone rocks by the Arizona-New Mexico state line. Educational tours are provided to over 3,000 school kids each year.

Popular exhibits at the zoo include the Golden Eagles, Black Bear, Raccoons, and Cougars.

Mikesic has a vision of modernity for the future.

“Within 10 years, I want to see the zoo as a more modern zoo with renovated animal enclosures and more education and recreational opportunities for the Navajo people and visitors from around the world,” he said.

Plans include an eagle aviary, nocturnal mammal house, duck pond, and other additions.

The Navajo Nation Zoo welcomes donations from the public.

People can sponsor an animal through the zoo’s Adopt-an-Animal program. Organizations can also contribute by sponsoring



Top photos, before the NDOT graveling project was completed, employees and visitors of the Navajo Nation Zoo had to slog through mud during adverse weather to access the facilities. Bottom photos, NDOT crewmembers graveled the parking lot and entry way to the zoo, which made a major difference for access to and from the zoo. (Photos by David Mikesic)

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renovation or construction projects via funding or labor. Donations are also accepted.

On July 6, the zoo will celebrate their 36th Anniversary with a party, free birthday cake, and 25 cent hotdogs. The public is welcome to attend.

The Navajo Nation Zoo continues to provide a sanctuary for nature and the human and animal spirit.

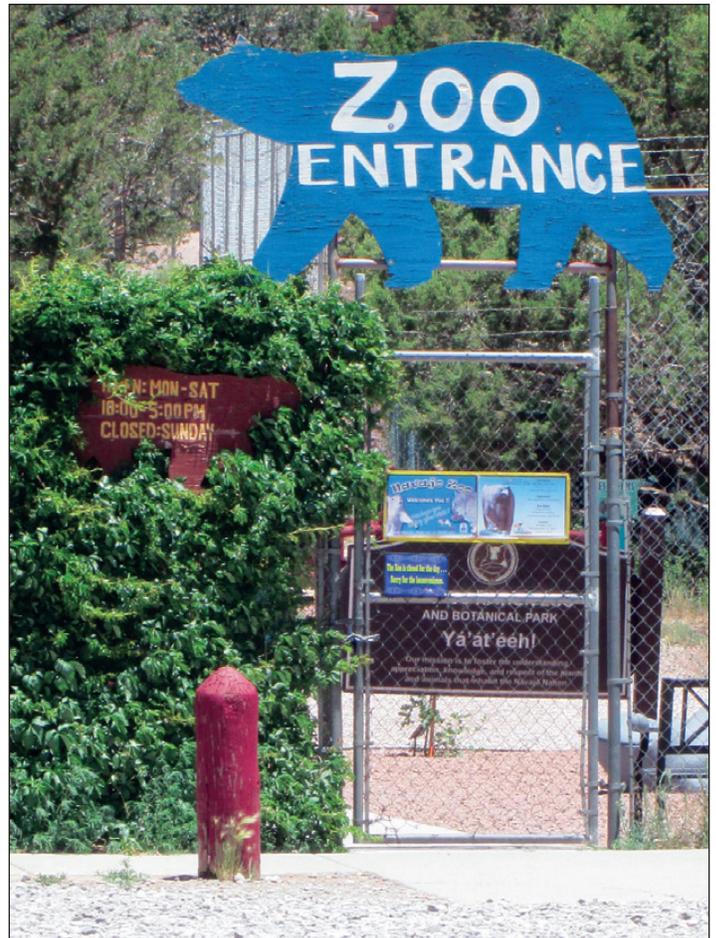
“We provide people with an opportunity to make a connection and learn about the plants and animals of the local Navajo lands,” Mikesic said. “We provide a quiet place in Window Rock to just calm the spirit among our wildlife.”

New additions to the family of injured and orphaned animals at the zoo are Abbey the Black Bear and Mule Deers Jasmine and Bella. They were adopted into the family in November 2012 and found a permanent home in Window Rock.

The Navajo Nation Zoo is the only full-scale zoo owned and operated by a Native American tribe.

The zoo is open Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is open on most major holidays.

Information: www.navajozoo.org or www.navajodot.org



The Navajo Nation Zoo was enhanced with a gravel parking lot and entry way leading to the facility. Zoologist David Mikesic said the gravel made a big difference for access to the facility for employees and visitors to the facility. The zoo is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and admission is free. (Photo by Rick Abasta)