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Navajo President Shelly Meets with USDA Official

IGNACIO, Colo. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly outlined ways the United States Department of Agriculture could help the Navajo Nation during a meeting Thursday.

President Shelly outlined a need for a conservationist assigned to the Navajo Nation from the USDA, updated about drought conditions on the Navajo Nation, and the need for match funding from the USDA. He was one of more than 40 people who attended the Southwest Tribal Rural Council Roundtable presented by The White House Rural Council.

USDA Senior Advisor for Tribal Affairs Janie Hipp led the meeting that had tribal delegations from the Pueblo of Laguna, Cochiti Pueblo, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Pueblo of Zuni, and the Navajo Nation.

“A Navajo liaison service area would provide services to the Navajo Nation as a whole rather than as three entities in three states to assure unity in provision of services,” President Shelly said during the meeting.

President Shelly said the Navajo Nation is a large land based tribe that spans through three states and needs a conservationist.

“I know counties get their own liaisons,” he added.

June Roxie, senior programmer with Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, added to President Shelly’s point about being a large land based tribe.

Roxie said the Navajo Nation has about 17 million acres with more than 16 million grazing and farming acres and that drought and livestock overpopulation hinder people’s ability to make use of the farming and grazing lands.

“These factors create a vicious cycle, which requires active land management through conservation and increased water development,” Roxie said.

President Shelly said the USDA should fund projects and initiatives according to priorities of the Navajo Nation.

“Service provisions on the Navajo Nation by the USDA should match the priorities established by the Navajo Nation,” President Shelly said.

“Currently, USDA funding does not allow development of new irrigation nor new water wells nor funds for farms that have not been irrigated within a two year period. This must change in order for USDA funds to address the dry land farming on the Navajo Nation that have been abandoned, the irrigated lands that are in disrepair due to lack of funds, the support for more new farming and enlarging current farm lands,” President Shelly added.

President Shelly and Hipp are scheduled to be a part of a tour of Navajo Agriculture Products Industries Friday morning.

“I want to ask her what is going to come from these meetings,” President Shelly said.

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