



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 16, 2014

President Shelly declares state of emergency for Assayii Lake Fire



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—The Navajo Nation is on fire. More than 11,000 acres have burned after an unattended fire near Assayii Lake ignited on June 13 around 3:30 p.m.

Authorities are evacuating families in Sheep Springs and Naschitti due to fire danger and limited visibility from excessive smoke. Travelers are encouraged to avoid the area.

On June 12, Navajo Nation President issued an executive order calling for a fire restriction based on the advice of the Navajo Nation Forestry Department.

Forestry officials were preparing for the high fire danger due to low precipitation, high wind conditions, low humidity and high temperatures.

On June 16, the Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management passed CEM 14-06-16, a resolution declaring a state of emergency for the Assayii Lake Fire. President Shelly signed the declaration and ordered applicable tribal resources to assist with efforts to contain and extinguish the fire.

“I direct all Navajo divisions, departments and programs to commit resources to the Assayii Lake Fire. We need to do all we can to stop the fire from spreading further,” President Shelly said.

He said tribal employees have been working with the BIA Navajo Region to battle the blaze since the fire began. This included participation in several meetings over the past two days to mobilize forces to battle the blaze.

“Please use caution when traveling near the fire area. The heavy smoke makes it difficult to see and breathe,” President Shelly said. “We are asking that the public comply with the fire restriction.

“This is especially important because of the Fourth of July holiday right around the corner and the prevalence of fireworks stands,” he added.

On June 15, an initial meeting was convened at the Navajo Nation Museum in response to the fire, which was spread across 200 acres at the time.

Staff from the Office of the President and Vice President was in attendance along with the BIA Navajo Region, Crystal Chapter officials, and the Southwest Area Incident Management Team 3.

OPVP issued a public service announcement on KTNN restricted access to roads leading into Assayii Lake. Additionally, the Navajo Times Facebook warned area residents about the fire and smoke.

The same evening, a coordinators meeting convened at 7 p.m. at the museum to provide updates on the fire. During that briefing, the fire grew to more than 1,000 acres because of the high winds, which were in excess of 65 mph.

Hotshot crews from Arizona tied in with the Navajo Scouts to fight the fire, which increased the number of personnel to more than 250 people during the night. The winds pushed the fire again through the night.

The incident command team transition meeting convened at 6 a.m. at the Crystal Community Center on June 16. The jurisdiction for the fire was transitioned from the BIA Navajo Region to the Southwest Area Incident Management Team 3.

During the briefing, the fire burned more than 2,000 acres. A few hours later, during the daily cooperators meeting at 9 a.m., the fire increased to more than 10,000 acres.

Limited visibility and heavy winds have prevented crews from effectively fighting the fire. Wind gusts are currently between 60 to 70 mph, restricting any aerial crews from dropping flame retardant materials on the fire.

More than 700 personnel are expected to be battling the blaze tonight. Black Mesa, Blue Ridge, Ft. Apache, Globe, Mesa, Mormon Lake, Navajo, Payson, Prescott, Mt. Taylor and Zuni Hotshots are on location fighting the fire.

A community meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. at the Ft. Defiance Field House today.

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