



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 24, 2015

## President Shelly provides welcome address at Navajo Land Summit



President Shelly said the Navajo Nation has grown by leaps and bounds with the Navajo Land Title Data System, which provides layers and layers of data ranging from infrastructure, grazing lands, home site leases, business site leases, water wells, roads, forests and other important data. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

TWIN ARROWS, Ariz.—Pay attention. Listen. Take notes.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly's advice to the more than 800 registered attendees of the 2nd Annual Navajo Nation Land Summit was straightforward.

"Please be sure you attend the sessions and take good notes to take back with you to your offices," President Shelly said. "There's a lot of good information that will be shared with you over the next few days.

For a second year, the Navajo Land Department provided information on the rigors of tribal land management and the

numerous layers of data that will be available to Navajos and non-Navajos alike. Once again, the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort played host.

The Navajo Nation Land Title Data System, a new database with exceptional firewall protection and countless tiers of information providing real time data on everything from roads, infrastructure, forested areas, water wells and right-of-way areas, is the crown jewel of the Land Department.

President Shelly said, "This new database will automate services for chapter members,

tribal officials, and the general public. People no longer have to travel to Window Rock to find information."

Data is literally at the fingertips of the general public, as the NLTDS will be accessible on desktops, iPads and even smart phones. The database works in tandem with the Navajo Nation General Leasing Act of 2013, which was enacted by the U.S. Department of the Interior in the summer of 2014.

"The Navajo Nation now has authority over all leases on the Navajo Nation, with the exception of minerals and

right-of-ways. Those two are still under the jurisdiction of the BIA," President Shelly said.

The Navajo Nation is vastly different from the tribal government of 15 years past, he said, noting that technology savvy chapters are finding self-determination and transparency through online tools like the Woven Integrated Navajo Data System.

"Chapter officials attending the land summit will learn about creating the most effective Community Land Based Plans that serve as blueprints to their communities," President Shelly

said. “Gone are the days of building anywhere on the land.

“Everything is now recorded, monitored and protected to ensure we are getting the most of our tribal lands,” he added.

### Paradigm Shift

“The Beginning of a Paradigm Shift that Promotes Independence” was the theme of the summit. Attendees included chapter officials, council delegates, tribal enterprises, community land use planning committees, grazing officials and land boards.

Moroni Benally, executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources, provided the welcome address and encouraged the audience to realize that “land is life.”

“This is an incredibly important summit, not just for what’s happening now, but for the future of the Navajo Nation,” Benally said. “The information you leave with becomes power.”

He said it’s the power to change existing laws and policies, the power to change the way communities are organized, the power to change the way people use land.

Dissecting the theme of the summit, Benally explained that a paradigm is a set of rules or guidelines, whether it’s federal or tribal policies, school board directives or the Red Book that governs the Eastern Land Board.

Presently, a paradigm shift is occurring at DNR, he said, ever since he took over the reins to the division earlier this year.

“I began reviewing programmatic agreements with the federal government and realized that a lot of times, the Navajo Nation is in the back seat,” Benally said.

Updating outdated policies can be done with a little hard work and persistence, he said, because federal regulations are not carved in stone.

“There’s always creative ways around existing law. That’s what I kept telling the federal officials

and now, we are changing the criteria for selecting contractors that are working on the Navajo Nation,” Benally said. “This did not require Navajo Nation Council or Congressional approval.”

Benally challenged the attendees to take control of the land so cities, towns, schools, factories and hospitals could be created, all which create a tax base to draw money from for services to the people.

“Listen carefully. This is the beginning. It all starts with land,” he said.

### Navajo Nation Strategic Plan

Arbin Mitchell, chief of staff for the Office of the Speaker, said the land is our Mother.

“As Navajo people, we have a simple idea, a simple plan,” Mitchell said. “There are four items in our strategic plan: *Nitsáhákees*, *Nahat’á*, *Iiná*, and *Sihasin*.

“(The plan) goes around and around. You plant it out, you think it out,” he said.

The four concepts of thinking, planning, life and hope are the foundation for the Navajo Nation.

Mitchell said his decades of experience serving at the highest levels of the Navajo Nation Executive Branch has taught him that progress begins at the local level.

Citing Title 26 of the Navajo Nation Code, the Local Governance Act, he said certified chapters have an opportunity to issue their own business site or home site leases.

“Any plan that starts in Window Rock is hard to finish. If it starts from the community, it’s not that hard to complete. Local empowerment is about doing for yourself,” Mitchell said.



Moroni Benally, executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources said, “Land is life.” Grazing officials, he said, are one of the most powerful groups on the Navajo Nation because they control the land. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Legislative Branch chief of staff Arbin Mitchell said traditionally, Navajos are taught to respect the land because she is our Mother. He said the simple Navajo plan of thinking, planning, life and hope hold the answer. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Mike Halona, department manager for the Navajo Land Department, provided an interactive history of land on the Navajo Nation. His presentation included land impacts, land use planning and chapter boundaries. (Photo by Rick Abasta)