



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Navajo land bill signed into law

**WINDOW ROCK** – The San Juan Settlement Implementation Act, a Navajo land bill, was signed into law today as part of a massive bipartisan public lands bill, S. 47, aimed at protecting millions of acres of federal lands. This bill resolves a 30-year Navajo land issue.

President Nez said today, "The San Juan Settlement Implementation Act finally resolves a long-standing Navajo land issue after decades of effort to pass a bill. We extend our gratitude to Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., for his leadership in championing this bill. We also thank Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for her support on this measure, Assistant House Speaker Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., for his support on this bill in the House chamber, and Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M. for backing this measure well."

As part of the Navajo Hopi Land Settlement of 1974, the Navajo Nation was allowed to select lands in Arizona and New Mexico to replace land that was ceded to the Hopi Tribe. During the 1980s, the Navajo Nation selected several pieces of land in New Mexico that were subject to coal mineral rights owned by a third-party coal company. Because the land was subject to these mineral rights, the federal government could not put them into trust for the benefit of the Navajo Nation making them unusable.

The San Juan Settlement Implementation Act authorizes deselection of these lands and allows Navajo to reselect new lands from the Bureau of Land Management. Several legislative proposals have been put forth within the past twenty years to rectify this problem, and none of them had been able to pass into law until now.

"We commend Congress for its action on this important measure. We look forward to selecting new pieces of land that could support range management, economic development, or other priorities important for Navajo communities," Vice President Lizer added.

The bill also allows the coal company to receive bidding rights in exchange for relinquishing its coal mineral rights. It also makes the deselected lands a part of the Ah'shi'sle'pah and Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness areas.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer also thanks the Navajo Hopi Land Commission for their advocacy and leadership to get this bill through the Congress for the benefit of the Navajo Nation.

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