



## NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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### **\*\*NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS\*\***

## **On the Use and Preservation of Sacred Sites**

*"What do Navajo citizens want to do to ensure the passage of this knowledge for future generations?"*

ST. MICHAELS, Ariz.—The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission will hold public hearings to give Navajo citizens an opportunity to give oral testimony, give written information, or send written testimony to NNHRC about sacred sites as they relate to location, use, need for preservation, protection and other issues associated with the fundamental law, conflicts or community suppression on sacred sites.

The public hearings start at 10 a.m. and end at various times according to chapter availability at the following locations: July 20, Crownpoint, until 3:30 p.m.; July 21, Fort Defiance Chapter, until 4 p.m.; July 22, Chinle Chapter, until 4 p.m.; July 23, Tó Nanees Dizi, until 3 p.m.; and July 27, Shiprock Chapter, until 4 p.m.

**Public Hearing at 10 a.m.:**  
-July 20 at Crownpoint Chapter  
-July 21 at Fort Defiance Chapter  
-July 22 at Chinle Chapter  
-July 23 at Tó Nanees Dizi  
-July 27 at Shiprock Chapter

### **Origin of Sacred Site Hearings**

Beginning in December 2008, NNHRC held 25 public hearings on and off the Navajo Nation about race relations between Navajos and non-Navajos. From those hearings four recurring themes resurfaced from Navajo citizen's testimonies, sacred sites being one of them. The other three recurring topics were unresolved death injustices, relocation injustices and environmental injustices.

From the 25 public hearings, a race relations report was generated from the testimonies. NNHRC approved it on July 2, 2010. The title of the report is the "2008 – 2009 Assessing Race Relations Between Navajos and non-Navajos: A Review of Border Town Race Relations."

The full report on race relations will be available to the public following NNHRC oral report to the Navajo Nation Council during its Summer Session starting July 19, 2010.

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Navajo citizens who provided testimonies at the race relation public hearings from 2008-2009 had concerns about the economic benefits superseding the “protection use” and “preservation of” sacred sites.

“Sacred sites have been recognized and held in great reverence for generations,” said Lauren Bernally-Long on the July Current Events live broadcast on Native America Calling call-in radio program.

Now, “the Commission is seeking your input and participation,” said Bernally-Long.

The Commission is requesting input from Navajo citizens residing on and off the Navajo Nation to present their thoughts, positions and comments on sacred sites. NNHRC staff members want to hear the issues surrounding and encompassing sacred sites.

*Navajo citizens who provided testimonies at the race relation public hearings from 2008-2009 had concerns about the economic benefits superseding the “protection use” and “preservation of” sacred sites.*

### **Not Sign Posts – Only Responsibility**

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“Instead, we are looking to Navajo citizens to be responsible in preserving and protecting sacred sites through voicing their concerns and solutions,” he said.

Sacred sites encompass land including subsurface, water, and air.

“Input is necessary first and foremost for our children and grandchildren to embrace their legacy which is often conveyed through sacred sites,” said NNHRC Commissioner Steven Darden.

### **Input, Testimony for our Children and Grandchildren**

NNHRC expects a vast range of testimonies.

Testimony should address individual and collective concerns on sacred sites. Individual concerns, for example, mean burial sites and collective concerns like the protection of Dook’o’osliid.

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Charlene Smith, NNHRC staff recorder, recommends that you organize what you will say, so the message is clear.

Here is an example of guidelines for a testimony but not necessary: introduce yourself, state the problem, give the chronological history of your concern, state the problem, if you have tried to resolve the issue, explain the solutions you have attempted; and lastly, propose a solution like this is what I want to make it right.

*Bernally-Long said, “We look forward to hearing from the public on this important topic.”*

Gorman hopes that Navajo citizens will address what sites have been recognized as sacred sites in previous generations, the sites that are recognized today and how these sites must be preserved for future generations.

For instance, for time immemorial Diné have recognized Dook’o’osliid as a sacred site and that statement recognizes the origin. Presently, Dook’o’osliid is managed by local, state and federal government. Lastly, Navajo citizens should convey how will Diné reflect on Dook’o’osliid tomorrow and for future generations.

The UN Declaration states in Article 25 that “Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relations with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.”

“We need to know how Navajo citizens want to address these issues,” said Gorman and then asked, “How does the Navajo Nation meaning as a modern government address these issues?”

“In the world community, the cornerstone of indigenous rights center on lands, territories, resources and self-determination, of which spiritual relations with lands is a critical component. International experts have opined that without lands indigenous peoples’ future survival can be jeopardized,” said NNHRC Executive Director Leonard Gorman.

Gorman said, “What do Navajo citizens want to do to ensure the passage of this knowledge for future generations?”

### **Completing the Report**

At the end of the hearing schedule, staff members will compile the data from the testimonies and issue a report on sacred sites and submit the report and recommendations to the Navajo Nation Council. Following the Navajo Nation Council release, an open report will become available to the public.

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The aim of the NNHRC report is to maintain and strengthen the spiritual relationship to the traditional land base of the Diné and to uphold Diné responsibility to future generations, both in individual sacred sites of Navajo citizens and collective sacred sites of the Navajo Nation.

Bernally-Long said, “We look forward to hearing from the public on this important topic.”

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## **NNHRC Origin & Mission**

The origin of the NNHRC began when a fatal shooting of a Navajo man by a Caucasian, Farmington Police Officer in a Wal-Mart parking lot, caused people to question the state-of-affairs between Navajos and non-Navajos in and around the Navajo Nation.

The shooting and preceding events that began in the 70’s led the 20<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council to enact the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Act in October 2006 for the purpose of creating a commission to collect data regarding discrimination acts against citizens of the Navajo Nation by private citizens, businesses, organizations and foreign governments (state, federal, and foreign nations) within and outside the Navajo Nation.

NNHRC is established under the legislative oversight of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, within the Legislative Branch of the Navajo Nation government.

NNHRC advocates for recognition of Navajo human rights and directly networks at the local, state, national and international level to assess the state-of-affairs between Navajos and non-Navajos by conducting public hearings. NNHRC also investigates written complaints involving discrimination of Navajo citizens and addresses the public about human rights and the Navajo Nation’s intolerance of human rights violations.

The mission of the NNHRC is “[t]o protect and promote the human rights of Navajo Nation citizens by advocating human equality at the local, state, national and international levels based on the Diné principles of Si’a Naaghai Bik’eh Hózhóó, Hashkéejí, Hózhóójí and K’é.” The Diné principles translate to being resilient, content, disciplined and maintaining peaceful relationships with all creation.

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*If a willing participant cannot make the hearing, NNHRC will accept a written testimony by mail. Be sure to include your full name, date, and chronological history of events pertaining to your concern about sacred sites, also, state the problem, and state the solution you want if you have one to recommend. Send your testimony to: Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, P.O. Box 1689, Window Rock, AZ 86515.*

*For more information, call the NNHRC at (928) 871-7436 or visit the NNHRC website at [www.nnhrc.navajo.org](http://www.nnhrc.navajo.org).*

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