



**JOE SHIRLEY, JR.**  
President

**FRANK J. DAYISH, JR.**  
Vice-President

## THE NAVAJO NATION

**For Immediate Release**  
Nov. 3, 2005

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### **Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., calls proposed Arizona Snowbowl development violation of Navajos' mother**

*President testifies in 'Navajo Nation et al vs. U.S. Forest Service'*

**PRESCOTT, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., told a U.S. District Court on Wednesday that proposed development of the sacred *Dook'o'osliid* would be like having a child witness the brutal violation of its mother, leaving it emotionally and psychologically scarred forever.

"It's like someone coming in and violating and raping our mother," he said. "It hurts me. She's already got scars."

In the fifth day of testimony in *Navajo Nation et al vs. the U.S. Forest Service* to prevent the desecration of the San Francisco Peaks, President Shirley said the Navajo people regard the Peaks as their mother.

Seeing one's mother violated would incalculably harm a person, he said.

"It affects the mind, it affects the psyche," he said.

Last March, Coconino National Forest Supervisor Nora Rasure approved a plan to allow the Arizona Snowbowl to expand its ski resort and use reclaimed



**Brandon Kline of Channel 12 News interviews President Shirley following his testimony at U.S. District Court in Prescott on Wednesday. The President said the large showing of people demonstrates to the world there is support for the Navajo position to protect the San Francisco Peaks from development and desecration.**

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**First Lady Vikki Shirley, President Shirley, Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr., and Speaker Morgan greet people after the Navajo Nation press conference at the Hassayampa Inn on Wednesday.**

effluent to make artificial snow. To Navajos, the use of effluent on one of its four sacred mountains surrounding the Navajo Nation is an outrageous desecration of a holy site.

“A Navajo person like myself is raised on the mountain,” President Shirley said. “It’s very much an integral part of our lives. We’re taught songs, we’re taught to respect it. It’s our home... it’s our essence.”

The President added that he would oppose the project even if fresh water was used to make artificial snow.

“The whole mountain is sacred,” he said. “The teaching is that you cannot just voluntarily go up on this mountain at any time. It’s the holiest of shrines. You have to sacrifice. You have to sing sacred songs, do offerings.”

Attending the trial with President Shirley was First Lady Vikki Shirley, her parents Victor and Gladys Begay, Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, several council delegates and dozens of Navajo people, many whom had to wait outside the courtroom because of lack of space. Navajo Vice President Frank Dayish, Jr., arrived with several Navajo Nation Council delegates by motorcycle.

Meanwhile, dozens of demonstrators who support the Navajo Nation and other tribes’ position against desecration of the Peaks chanted on the Prescott Courthouse Square across the street from the federal building.

The Navajo Nation holds that the Forest Service’s decision to permit the development violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which prohibits government from burdening a person’s exercise of religion, and that it did not comply with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Attorney Howard Shanker represents three of the six Native Nations suing the Forest Service. These include the Navajo Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe and Yavapai-Apache Tribe. He is also representing the Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity and the Flagstaff Activist Network in the case.

President Shirley testified that he opposed the proposed project “because it’s a desecration of my mother. That’s the way I see it. These songs are teachings, very sacred teachings.”

While testifying, he sang two verses of the Navajo Blessingway to illustrate how *Dook’o’osliid* is intricately tied to the culture and beliefs of the Navajo people, and has been for generations.

“This is a song that says everything is holy, and everything was put in this world harmoniously,” he said. “These (four sacred) mountains are part of one another. They are all related. They see each other. They talk to each other.”

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Learning the songs and stories related to *Dook'osliid*, he said, is a part of Navajo life. Contained in the songs, prayers and stories are teachings that speak of reverence and the holy nature of the Peaks. He said there are more than 100 songs related to the sacred mountains of the Navajo people.

"We use the teachings found in these songs to navigate through life, to take on challenges in life," he said.

However, if the proposed development is allowed to take place, the President said, it would have a permanent debilitating effect on the Navajo people to continue their traditional way of life.

"I'm very much afraid that there might be irreparable harm done to her that she might not be able to help me anymore," he said.

At a press conference during the noon recess, the President told dozens of Navajos, including many elderly, that he was pleased they came to support the Navajo Nation.

"It gives a lot of strength to have you here in numbers," he said. "I think it's very important to be together on this. We need to let the world out there know that Navajo people are together in protecting the San Francisco Peaks."

He said that when Navajo veterans go to war to protect other Americans' freedoms, it's unfortunate that Navajos must go to court to protect the Navajo way of life and spirituality.

"Why are we even talking about protecting, pleading, begging not to do an expansion of the ski lift already there on *Dook'osliid*?" he asked. "We shouldn't even been talking. It should be a given that our way of life is protected."

His sentiments were echoed by Speaker Morgan, who thanked the people who traveled by bus, motorcycle and car to be in attendance.

"We are all supporting the sacred mountain," he said. "Not only the mountain, not only the site, but rejuvenating our sacred belief. That's why we're all here."

Speaker Morgan said that whatever the outcome, Navajos believe things happen for a reason.

"It is difficult for me to say, much less believe, that the court case will decide our fate once and for all," he said. "This case should not define our destiny. Our destiny should be defined by what we are and what we believe in."

The Navajo Nation has historically defined its national boundary according to spiritual tradition, which places the San Francisco Peaks as a geographic cornerstone and spiritual monument. The Peaks have served as a place of pilgrimage, inspiration and spiritual protection for Navajo people over centuries.

The Navajo people view the San Francisco Peaks as the residence of Holy People who have influenced, guided and supported Navajo people for centuries. Misuse of the Peaks, such as through desecration, is viewed as gross sacrilege by the Navajo people.

The Navajo Nation has expressed deep concern over the lack of adequate tribal consultation on the part of governmental and commercial interests involved in expanding commercial activity on the San Francisco Peaks. The Forest Service conducted meetings at just six of the 110 Navajo chapters.

The Navajo government and people as a whole reject further commercial exploitation of the San Francisco Peaks and, in particular, strongly object to the outrageous profane violation of the sanctity of this holy place as envisioned by commercial interests.

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