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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan Said Navajos Were Never Conquered And Are Thriving Today

MARIANO LAKE, N.M. – Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) told a crowd of about 200 Navajos Thursday, June 14 during the Fourth Annual Navajo Treaty Day Celebration at Mariano Lake that “the Navajos were never conquered.”

Navajo elders from surrounding Navajo communities such as Standing Rock, N.M.; Smith Lake, N.M.; Crownpoint, N.M. and Thoreau, N.M. applauded when Speaker Morgan spoke about how the Navajo ancestors suffered at Fort Sumner (Hwééldí), N.M. during the 1860s. Speaker Morgan talked in the Navajo language as he talked about how the Navajo people suffered during the 1864-1868 “Long Walk,” period.

“The U.S. Calvary herded the Navajos to walk to Hwééldí,” Speaker Morgan said in Navajo. “The men, the women and the children. We ate very little because there was not enough food, we were starving, and it was a struggle. There was no water, no blankets to keep us warm. It was a difficult time.”

Speaker Morgan said the Navajo ancestors struggled to live for us, younger generations of Navajos to live.

“Today, we’ve come a long way,” Speaker Morgan said. “We have our Navajo language, our livestock, our material things, our children and our family.”

Speaker Morgan also shared with the crowd of Navajo elders and people how the Mariano Lake community was named.

Soon after the Treaty of 1868 was signed, a Navajo elder named “Chief Munyanna” made his home in the area.

When the bilagaanas (Anglos) asked Chief Munyanna his name, the bilagaanas couldn’t spell his name from the pronunciation so they renamed the elder, “Chief Mariano.”

The community didn’t have a name at that time, and Chief Mariano and his scouts began construction of an earthen embankment to catch rain and melting snow runoff. The workmen used arrows, saddle blankets and rugs to excavate the silt to build the embankment. Soon after, the dam created a lake. Because Chief Mariano, mobilized the construction of the dam.

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The lake became known as "Mariano Lake," and eventually, the community became known by the same name.

Eddie McCarthy, the Fourth Annual Navajo Treaty Day Celebration Chapter Planning Committee Chairperson, said he's "proud" of the number of Navajo elders and people who attended the event which he estimates will swell to 400 Navajo people.

"The Treaty Day is to celebrate life," said McCarthy who was born in nearby Smith Lake, N.M.

Council delegate Edmund Yazzie (Thoreau) was part of the Treaty Day motorcycle run along with his motorcycle companion, Nathan Harry of Thoreau, N.M. and Harry's mother, Katherine, who is a Mariano Lake, N.M. native.

"The (Treaty Day) celebration reminds me of the old days," said Katherine Harry who is a Community Health Representative at Pinedale, N.M. She added that it is her hope that community members are sharing and teaching with the young Navajo people.

This year was the first time, Nathan Harry, attended the Treaty Day celebration, and he observed that numerous members of his mother's family were at the Treaty Day celebration.

He believes that Treaty Day is about "all the different people from the different communities getting together, it's nice."

Visiting the celebration was also a first for Yazzie as well.

"Treaty Day means freedom and liberty for us, citizens," Yazzie said.

Council delegate and Mariano Lake native Young Jeff Tom (Mariano Lake/Smith Lake) told the crowd in the Navajo language to teach the Navajo children.

"It is through our prayers and our songs that they are strong," Tom added.