Budget and Finance Committee receives update on feral horse roundup

WINDOW ROCK – The Budget and Finance Committee received a report on Tuesday, regarding the feral horse roundup on the Navajo Nation, which included a status update on expenditures and the number of horses rounded up.

Leo Watchman, director of the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, stated that the Navajo Nation Department of Natural Resources received approximately $3 million, which was approved on July 18, 2013 by the Navajo Nation Council. The appropriation went towards their program to address the extreme drought conditions and feral horse problem on the Navajo Nation.

“Of the $3 million allocated to the NNDNR, the NNDA received around $1.4 million and have expended about $862,000,” said Watchman. “This has resulted in a carryover amount of [approximately] $535,000 and we are hoping to have that processed soon.”

BFC member Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huervano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) voiced his frustration in regards to the carryover process and budget transfers by the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller and Office of Management and Budget.

“It should not take two to three months to process a carryover. OOC and OMB should process these transfers as soon as possible,” said Delegate Simpson. “Especially important programs such as this, they should not have to wait this long, or any other program for that matter. Timelines need to be established.”

According to Watchman, $250,000 went to the veterinary program that aided in castrating stud horses and administering contraceptive drugs to mares. To date, Watchman said they have rounded up roughly 7,000 feral horses, which has contributed to the decrease in overgrazing that affects the foliage on Navajo land.

“At this point, 72 chapters have passed resolutions to receive aid in rounding up feral horses in their areas and we are trying to get to all of them as soon as we can,” said Watchman. He added that they are currently waiting for the carryover to be approved and processed so they can continue their efforts to round up the feral livestock.
BFC chair LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tíis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) reminded the committee that Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly had halted the roundup of feral horses in Oct. 2013, and requested an update on the President’s current stance on the issue.

“We need to know whether the President will continue to support this initiative, especially given that you have captured over 7,000 feral livestock and it is definitely a significant progress,” said Delegate Bates. “We need to make sure we are all on board if it is our goal to continue the roundup program."

In support of the initiative, BFC member Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tse Ch’izhi) commended the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture and Department of Resource Enforcement for not only rounding up the wild horses, but also capturing other feral animals such as livestock, cats, and dogs.

BFC members voted 2-1 to accept the report.

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