



OFFICE OF NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Historic Vote McKinley County Commission Board Approves new precinct boundaries for McKinley County, New Mexico.

St. Michaels, Navajo Nation (ARIZ) — The Office of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (“Office”) was involved in redistricting in 2011. Arizona and Utah have similar redistricting methods by carving redistricting plans using census block lines while New Mexico uses the precinct system to develop redistricting plans. As a member of the New Mexico Redistricting Task Force, the Office impressed on the task force to recommend the use of census blocks to redistrict, not the precinct boundaries. During the 2021 New Mexico legislative session, the New Mexico legislature adopted Senate Bill 304 which now requires that county precinct boundaries be aligned with Navajo chapter boundaries and Indigenous nations’ boundaries as much as practicable.

The Office worked with McKinley County's consultant to draw new precinct boundaries in McKinley County. Ever since the United States constitution was adopted, census count is conducted every ten years based on block lines instituted by the US Census Department. While the Census Department has been using what it refers to as Navajo chapter boundaries, Navajo Nation continues to request the Census Department to correct its chapter boundaries with the existing Navajo Nation's community service boundaries. The Census Department's Navajo chapter boundaries are a little off from the Navajo Nation's boundaries.

During McKinley County Commission Board Meeting on June 15, 2021, McKinley County made a historic decision to adjust its precinct boundaries so the boundaries conform with the Navajo community chapter service boundaries. Resolution JUN-21-054 Adjusting Precinct Boundaries and Creating new Precincts in McKinley County, was approved by vote 3 in favor and none oppose. Leonard Gorman, Executive Director for the Office of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, stated to the McKinley County Board of Commissioners that "McKinley County will be the first county in the history of the United States to adopt precinct boundaries that respect indigenous boundaries. In the history of the United States, New Mexico was the first state to amend its statutes in 2021 to respect indigenous nations' boundaries and subdivisions."

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Gorman further states that, "McKinley County's decision is not only a long time coming but a major overhaul to make it convenient for Navajo voters to stay in one area to cast their ballots. Navajo voters prefer to cast their ballots at polling places, not so much at voter convenient centers." During the November 3, 2020, general election, Navajo voters had to go to two locations to cast their ballots - one for state, county and federal elections at one polling place and the other at the Navajo chapter house for the Navajo election. Often times the distance between the two polling places range from 30 minutes to an hour and half driving time.

The Office will continue to work on redistricting efforts in New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. Next step for the Office is to address other New Mexico Counties' Precinct boundaries to comply with SB304. For more information contact the Office of the Commission at 928-871-7436.

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