



NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IMPROVING THE UNITED STATES PROCOTOL ON SACRED SITES

Navajo Nation officials will provide testimony

ST. MICHAELS, Ariz.—Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission officials will attend the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service three sacred sites' listening sessions on the Navajo Nation from March 14 – 17, 2011.

Representatives from DNA Legal Services, the Diné Hataalii Association and the Diné Medicine Men Association met NNHRC staff members and NNHRC Commissioner Steve Darden on Thursday, March 3, 2011 where Toni Stanger for USDA Office of Tribal Relations, a new federal entity, who is also the lead coordinating officer for the USDA sacred site listening sessions, answered questions via teleconference. She explained that the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's initiative is to prevent adverse effects to sacred sites.



L-R: David John for DMMA, Dr. Anthony Lee for DHA, and Lavonne Henry for DNA Legal Services listen to Toni Stanger, Program Specialist for the USDA Office of Tribal Relations, in teleconference. "We want everyone to have a part. We don't mean to be disrespectful by opening this up," said Stanger in the teleconference.

Said Stanger in the teleconference,

"Even if the [U.S.] Supreme Court disagrees with what we're doing, USDA will have the authority to halt it"—situations adversely effecting sacred sites on USFS.

Stanger explained that the sacred site information from the listening session will be added to the federal register for the USDA Forest Service, National Forest System Land Management Planning: Proposed Rule.

The USDA Forest Service Sacred Sites Listening Session will begin at 9 a.m. on:

- Monday, March 14, 2011 at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Navajo Nation (AZ)
- Tuesday, March 15, 2011 at the Coalmine Canyon Chapter House near Tuba City, Navajo Nation (AZ)
- Wednesday, March 16, 2011 at the Shiprock Chapter House in Shiprock, Navajo Nation (NM)

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According to a press releases from the USDA Forest Service, “[Vilsack] has asked the Forest Service and USDA OTR to provide a final report and recommendations for sacred site policy changes and proposed policy language by November 2011, following the conclusion of Tribal consultation.”

The USDA OTR, in addition to the sacred site listening session, “is continuing to solicit comments on a draft department-wide policy that will guide future consultations and collaboration efforts,” according to a press release from OTR about tribal consultations. “The policy will guide all USDA agencies as they work with the Tribes.”

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According to USFS OTR website, “Listening sessions around the country have taken place or will occur at the following dates and venues:”

- *February 7, 2011: United South and Eastern Tribes' Impact Week, Arlington, VA*
- *February 9, 2011: Alaska Forum on the Environment, Anchorage, AK*
- *February 14, 2011: National Telephonic Listening Session*
- *February 22, 2011: Southwest Corner of Colorado Listening Session, Ute Mountain Ute Hotel, Towaoc, CO*
- *February 25, 2011: Sheraton Hotel at the Portland Airport, Portland, OR*
- *March 1, 2011: McClellan Garden Pavilion, Sacramento, CA*
- *March 4, 2011: USDA National Resource Conservation Service Office, Eureka, CA*
- *March 8, 2011: San Bernardino National Forest, Supervisor's Office, San Bernardino, CA*
- *March 8, 2011: Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, Ashland, WI*
- *March 10, 2011: South Dakota Listening Session, Wakpa Sica Reconciliation Center , Ft. Pierre, SD*
- *March 14, 2011: Listening Session, Window Rock, Navajo Nation - Navajo Nation Museum, 9:00 a.m.*
- *March 15, 2011: Listening Session, Tuba City, Navajo Nation – Coalmine Canyon Chapter House, 9:00 a.m.*
- *March 16, 2011: Listening Session, Shiprock, Navajo Nation - Shiprock Chapter House, 9:00 a.m.*
- *April 5, 2011: To Bridge a Gap Executive Breakout Session, Norman, OK*