

## NDOT road construction continues in Pinon, N4 road work still halted



Pictured above is the desolate roadside of Navajo Route 4 near Pinon. In late October, Navajo Division of Transportation road maintenance crews encountered two vehicles passing by the worksite with rifles pointed out of their window. Because of safety concerns, construction on Navajo Route 4 was stopped. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

The Navajo Division of Transportation continues to work on roads near the community of Pinon, but the stoppage of construction on Navajo Route 4 remains in effect.

NDOT closed the project on Oct. 22, after road construction crew members were faced with community members driving by the worksite with rifles pointed out the window of their vehicle.

Sergeant Antonio Cook, acting commander for the Window Rock Police District, said for assault charges to be filed, evidence of premeditation must be provided.

“Otherwise, it’s considered criminal nuisance, or endangering other people’s safety,” Cook said.

The 28-year veteran of the Navajo Police said even if the people in the vehicle were hunting, it is illegal to do so from a moving vehicle.

“They aren’t supposed to be shooting from a vehicle to begin with,” Cook said.

Driving with a weapon pointed out the window is a serious offense, he said, regardless if the weapon is loaded or not.

“All weapons are loaded, so to speak. It’s at the discretion of the prosecutor’s office to press charges,” he said.

Law enforcement manager Kevin Gleason has worked for the Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department for over 20 years.

“Hunting from a vehicle is not allowed, you need a special permit,” Gleason said.

Such a permit would require proof of physical disability, he explained.

Violation of the law would result in confiscation of the rifle.

“We would essentially take the weapons. And if they didn’t have a small game permit, they would also be in violation of tribal law there,” Gleason said.

Violators of the law would be ineligible to hunt and would have to attend a hunter’s training course.

The decision to report the community members driving near the worksite with rifles pointed out the window was a serious matter for NDOT officials.

The safety of employees is the primary priority and will not be compromised, said Paulson Chaco, director of NDOT.

“We are currently continuing road construction in the Pinon area on Navajo Route 8027 this week, which will be re-graded,” Chaco said. “We will also be mobilizing to N8068, which will receive spot graveling.”

The spot graveling activities on N8068 may also include the replacement of damaged culverts. Work in Pinon does continue, despite safety and security concerns in the area.

A report on Pinon road construction activities from NDOT to the Resources and Development Committee last Tuesday was postponed due to a lack of quorum.

There was new information to report to the committee.

On Oct. 29, NDOT staff reported that unknown vandals had cut through the perimeter fence and damaged a one-ton, four-door Chevrolet in the yard.

The gas line on the truck was cut and fuel was drained, resulting in a large fuel spill in the process.

Acting safety officer Julius Tulley said the NDOT vehicle was towed to fleet management for repairs and that the investigation is ongoing.

Tulley said, “They cut through the chain link fence on the north side of the building to enter the yard. Then they crawled under the truck and cut the fuel line to drain the diesel fuel into a bucket.”

The large puddle of diesel fuel had to be covered and absorbed to prevent damage to the parking lot asphalt.

Aversion to road construction in the Pinon area has many NDOT officials curious.

Tulley recalled an incident two-years ago, when somebody from the community killed a coyote and hung the dead animal near the construction worksite.

“This (firearm incident) instantly created a hostile work environment for all that were in the vicinity,” Tulley said. “A weapon of any type is considered a threat to human life.”

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Navajo Route 4 in Pinon is a heavily traveled road and a bus route for students in the area. The Red Dog graveling project has made improvements to the roads in the Pinon area by NDOT staff. Road crews are currently re-grading Navajo Route 8027 and mobilizing for Navajo Route 8068, which will begin receiving spot graveling next week. (Photo by Rick Abasta)