

Brewer signs SB 1317, allows tribes stake in Aviation Fund



Arlando Teller, program manager for Department of Airport Management, said the seed for Senate Bill 1317 was originally planted in 2011. Governor Jan Brewer recently signed the legislation into law on June 20, allowing tribally-owned airports a chance to compete for Arizona Aviation Fund grants. Sponsored by Senator Jack Jackson, Jr., the bill gives tribes a chance to submit proposals for infrastructure improvements at tribal airports in Arizona. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK-After a lengthy six-month process winding its way through the Arizona Legislature, Senate Bill 1317 was signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer on June 20, 2013.

Sponsored by Senator Jack Jackson, Jr., SB 1317 allows tribally-owned airports to participate in the Arizona Department of Transportation's Aviation Fund program.

The purpose of the fund is to allow competitive grants for infrastructure and improvements to public airports in Arizona. The fund is financed by aviation fuel and aircraft

registration fees imposed upon pilots in Arizona.

There is no taxpayer dollars included in the Arizona Aviation Fund.

"This bill is a great opportunity for the 14 tribally-owned airports of Arizona to compete with other public airports to improve their runways and other needs," said Paulson Chaco, director of the Navajo Division of Transportation.

He said pilots from these tribally-owned airports have contributed to the aviation fund since its inception and that it is only fair they are allowed to compete for approved infra-

structure projects through the fund.

"The Navajo Nation has five airports in Arizona that can benefit from this legislation. We look forward to improving mobility for the northern part of the state," Chaco said.

The Navajo Nation owns airports in the Arizona communities of Chinle, Ganado, Kayenta, Tuba City and Window Rock.

The responsibility of guiding the Navajo Nation's airports is shouldered by Arlando Teller, program manager for the Department of Airport Management.

He explained that the seed for SB 1317 was planted in 2011. The Arizona Airports Association initially supported the bill but cited concerns that tabled the legislation.

"They were supportive of allowing tribal airports to become eligible to utilize state aviation grants but they questioned the differing regulatory environment such as taxation and how tribes would pay into the program," Teller explained.

Eventually in Dec. 2012, AAA's new president, Corinne Nystrom, supported amending the Arizona Revised Statutes 28-8202, to include tribal

governments to participate in the program.

Subsequently, Sen. Jackson reintroduced SB 1317 in Jan. 2013 for consideration by the Arizona Legislature.

Teller said the disparity allowing for recognition of tribal governments to compete for the aviation funding was finally addressed after years of inequity.

He noted that a white paper report from Mike Klein, aeronautics manager for ADOT, was instrumental in the approval process for the legislation.

Klein's report explained that airport users are the funding source for the fund, through their purchase of aviation fuel and compliance with aircraft registration fees.

Teller said the operations

airport on an annual basis.

The grants from the Aviation Fund can be utilized to improve airport infrastructure that directly relate to safety, such as runway and taxiway pavement rehabilitation.

Teller prioritized the top three needs of Navajo-owned airports in Arizona in the following order: Chinle, Window Rock and Tuba City.

He said all of the airports require a total rehabilitation of the runways, taxiways, aprons and ramps. They also require electrical upgrades for lighting, perimeter fencing and drainage improvements.

All of the Navajo Nation runways are at a dimension of 7,500-feet long by 75-feet wide.

The Navajo Nation owns three aircraft, which are main-



The Department of Airport Management is responsible for the seven Navajo Nation airports in Arizona and New Mexico. Five of the airports are located in the Arizona communities of Chinle, Ganado, Kayenta, Tuba City and Window Rock. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

“Partnership is the key. Working with our state and tribal leaders is the key in communicating.”

for each of the reservation airports have increased through the years. Air transportation for medical purposes comprises the primary bulk of the flight operations.

Also on the increase are tribal government use and visitors traveling to the Navajo Nation as a destination spot.

“Last month, visitors from Israel rented an aircraft in Sedona and flew to Chinle to visit Canyon de Chelly,” Teller said.

Available to eligible public airports for more than 15 years, the Arizona Aviation Fund is distributed by the State Transportation Board.

There are currently 196 active and pending grants, amounting to \$37 million in obligations. The fund stands at \$24 million presently.

Only 10 percent of the fund can be used as the maximum grant award for any individual

tained by the Air Transport Department under the Division of General Services.

The signing of SB 1317 by Gov. Brewer was a collaborative effort.

“Partnership is the key. Working with our state and tribal leaders is the key in communicating,” Teller said. “A decade from now, I envision well-maintained and equipped airports that encourage economic opportunities and self-sustainment that enhance safe and secure airport operations.”

The Navajo Nation owns a total of seven airports located in Arizona and New Mexico.

Information:
www.navajodot.org

-30-



The Window Rock Airport is at an elevation of 6,750 feet and covers an area of 88 acres. The airport is located one nautical mile south of the central business district of Window Rock, Ariz. The airport has one runway measuring 7,000-feet by 75-feet and averages about 5,000 general aviation aircraft operations per year, or 13 flights per day. (Photo by Rick Abasta)