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Navajo President Shelly Signs MOA with San Juan County Utah Commissioners

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.- Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed a groundbreaking agreement San Juan County Commissioners Tuesday morning. President Shelly and the commissioners entered into a memorandum of agreement focused on planning collaboration to develop land use recommendations for state and federal lands within San Juan County of Utah.

“Our Navajo people carry a deep history with these lands in Utah. With that history, use and management of the lands is critical for carrying on the Navajo traditional practices such as hunting, ceremonial practice and protecting our sacred sites. The Navajo people have valuable contributions for these important places and our collective communities,” President Shelly stated.

The memorandum of agreement -- the first of its kind between the Navajo Nation and the county-- is an effort to move beyond debate and uncertainty over the use and conservation of public lands, to better recognize the interests and concerns of land users, and to work together to find greater opportunities for economic development and cultural protection.

“The San Juan County Commission is excited to enter into this unprecedented agreement,” said San Juan Commission Chair Bruce Adams. “Working together in a formal collaboration, we believe we can better understand each other and will be more likely to achieve our goals. We expect that a good process will lead to good outcomes.”

San Juan County, Utah, is largely comprised of federal lands and members of the Navajo Nation comprising more than half of its population. The county is abundant with natural, cultural, scenic and recreational resources with red rock canyons, towering plateaus, 12,000-foot peaks, four national parks and monuments, as well as the San Juan and Colorado Rivers.

The rich character of these lands sits in stark contrast to economic challenges faced by San Juan County residents. San Juan County has the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the state of Utah.

“The best decisions about land use are those made from the ground up, with local people working with diverse interest groups to find common ground. That’s how support for land use recommendations grow – with people listening to each other with respect and open minds. I expect this new agreement could be a model for other counties,” said Commissioner Kenneth Maryboy, who also serves as a Navajo Nation Council Delegate.

Over the next 18 months both parties will meet to discuss and make recommendations on federal land designations, management and conservation, state land exchanges, and County economic development.

“This is a good agreement so we can make progress for better quality of life Navajo and non- Navajo people living in San Juan County in Utah,” President Shelly said.

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