



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly, Gov. Martinez fly over fire and meet with residents



On June 17, N.M. Gov. Susana Martinez traveled to Window Rock and met with President Shelly and Vice President Jim before a briefing and aerial tour of the fire damaged areas. They also met with residents in Newcomb and Naschitti Chapters to provide an update. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

Emotions are running high.

But in the midst of adversity, there is one major truth about the Asaayii Lake Fire: there has been no loss of human life.

Clouds of smoke have billowed across the horizon since Saturday. Residents are worried about their homes and livestock in the mountainous area.

On June 17, Gov. Susana Martinez flew into Window Rock and met with Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and Vice President Rex Lee Jim.

She came to offer assistance to the Navajo Nation and take a firsthand look at the fire that began in the Asaayii Lake area.

“We have a strong working relationship with Gov. Martinez and we appreciate her taking the time to offer assistance,” President Shelly said. “There have been numerous individuals and organizations that have stepped forward to help.

“We appreciate this outpouring of support. Together, we can make a difference,” he added.

President Shelly and Gov. Martinez walked through the command center shaking hands and commended firefighters for their hard work in extinguishing the blaze.

The fire was described as “spotty” and a “dirty burn” by operations staff. This meant portions of land were still left untouched.

Gov. Martinez had questions about the loss of livestock and structures in the fire. She also asked if the livestock board was being utilized to clear out livestock in the fire area.

Officially, two structures were reported as burned and no reports have come in regarding loss of livestock. Crews couldn’t get anyone into the area to clear out the livestock because of the road closures and potential danger from gusting winds.

The primary concern for the fire crews has been structures and watersheds.

Staff said 13 Type-I hotshot crews are battling the blaze, along with Type-II initial attack crews, 15 engines, four dozers and miscellaneous taskforce

leaders and other resources.

Incident commander Bea Day explained that it was a full suppression fire and that was the reason why they were actively going after the fire with the number of crews they have.

“We also have a number of aircraft, if we can fly them,” Day said. “We are ready to take action and we are looking good on the south side and west side.”

She said they had great coordination with the BIA Navajo Region and the Navajo Nation for the purpose of successfully extinguishing the fire. Chapter houses have been actively participating as well, with spike camps in Crystal and Sheep Springs.

Rose Whitehair, agency

representative for the Navajo Nation, spoke of the need to dispel rumors about the need for cash donations. She noted that the money was not going to the firefighters or to the incident command team.

“The Red Cross is here and they are helping us with the huge amount of donations. They’re giving us technical assistance with donations management,” Whitehair said.

The Navajo United Way has also stepped up to assist with monetary donations. An account has been established under the name “Asaayii Lake Fire Relief Fund.”

She explained that Facebook pages sprung up for acceptance of monetary donations. The governor knew of the propensity for fraud during an emergency from past experiences.

“It’s going to be very difficult. That’s why donate the cash donations go only to the Red Cross,” Gov. Martinez said. “You’ve got to get that word out.

“Also, do not accept calls soliciting from Red Cross. Instead, say if I’m going to donate, I’ll make the call,” she added.

She asked if additional law enforcement assistance was needed for the state police to be on standby or to be onsite. However, Whitehair said they were already working with the necessary resources and that the incident command was already being inundated with traffic.

Day said some residents disregarded the roadblocks and snuck through the blockades during the middle of the night in search of their livestock.

“I understand their concern,” she said. “But they have to understand that it’s still very dangerous in here.”

After the briefing, President Shelly, Vice President Jim and Gov. Martinez boarded a N.M. National Guard helicopter and flew over the site to see the fire damage before landing on a baseball field at Newcomb

School.

They met with Newcomb Chapter residents and shared information about the aerial view of the fire damage. The spot fire patterns were consistent with reports from the crews battling the blaze.

President Shelly and Gov. Martinez assured the residents that the fire wasn’t as enormous as it seemed. The heavy smoke gives the impression that all of the landscape is charred, but that isn’t the case.

They also traveled to Nashcitti Chapter and again met with residents to reassure them that the wheels were in motion to extinguish the blaze.

On June 17, President Shelly and Vice President Jim broadcast news about the fire to listeners of KTNN AM 660.

President Shelly’s address focused on the coordinated efforts, from the June 12 executive order mandating fire restriction to the declaration of emergency and the call for tribal programs to assist with the fire.

Vice President Jim’s address focused on safety and he encouraged residents to stay away from the fire zone until the crews had the blaze under control. He also reminded the Navajo people to pray and remember the traditional values.

The next day, medicine men and women were allowed access to the fire site to provide offerings and prayers for the winds to calm for the fire to be extinguished. Vice President Jim also provided prayers and offerings.

President Shelly said the Division of Natural Resources is already communicating with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to reseed the damaged areas once the fire is extinguished.

The fire is five percent contained right now. Five structures have officially been reported burned. There are no reports of any livestock fatalities or injuries by the incident command. 



President Shelly listens intently as Gov. Martinez offers assistance from the N.M. State Police or National Guard for the fire. However, the Southwest Incident Management Team 3 had all the necessary resources available to them to fight the fire. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Incident Commander Bea Day provides a briefing for President Shelly, Vice President Jim and Gov. Martinez at the command center in Ft. Defiance. Day said true information was important because of misinformation that went out by incredible individuals and spread like wildfire. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Gov. Martinez prepares to board the N.M. National Guard helicopter with Vice President Jim and President Shelly. They took an aerial tour of the Asaayii Lake Fire and provided an update to residents of Newcomb and Nashcitti Chapters. (Photo by Rick Abasta)