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PRESIDENT BEGAYE ALLOCATES FUNDS FOR HOUSING IN FORMER BENNETT FREEZE AREA

TONALEA, ARIZ-Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye visited four chapters on Tuesday, May 17 to sign-off on budgets releasing funds to build and/or renovate houses in the Former Bennett Freeze Area (FBFA).

“We need these chapters to assess the housing needs that exist in their communities, addressing the needs in the FBFA first and foremost,” President Begaye said. “The FBFA has gone far too long without development and in turn, it has affected our people. Bringing housing to the FBFA is a top priority of the Begaye-Nez Administration.”

The funds budgeted for housing come from the FBFA Escrow Account.

In a memorandum dated December 28, 1970, Acting Commissioner Ernest Stevens stated “All income collected on lands in the 1934 disputed area inside the original Bennett line (or western extension of the 1882 Executive Order Reservation) will be placed in escrow in a special deposit account”.

As the Bennett Freeze was lifted on Nov. 3, 2006, and pursuant to Article 7.2 of the Navajo-Hopi Intergovernmental Compact, the Navajo and Hopi nations agreed to divide the funds from the escrow equally.

The Navajo-Hopi Land Commission requested the Bureau of Indian Affairs to authorize the Office of the Special Trustee to transfer the ownership of Securities to the Navajo Nation from the Navajo-Hopi Escrow Account. The funds were deposited with the Navajo Nation.



President Begaye signed off on approximately \$216,000 for FBFA housing needs in the Coppermine Canyon Chapter area.

On July 25, 2013, the NHLC approved distribution of approximately \$3.6 million for housing in the FBFA to the nine FBFA Chapters according to a distribution formula that takes into account the percentage of each chapter’s FBFA population.

The president visited the chapters of Cameron, Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine Canyon and Tonalea and is expected to sign two more budgets in the coming week.

Cameron was the only chapter not to have their budget signed-off on. The chapter was to receive approximately \$649K to be applied to developing and renovating 15 houses in total.

“In Cameron, we needed for the chapter to have identified families, houses and projects to which this money would go,” President Begaye said. “I need a listing before I’ll sign off. I don’t want this money to sit there for years. I let them know I’d be back in one month to see the housing list and to sign the budget.”

Cameron Chapter Vice President, Emmett Kerley said a list had been formulated previous to his time in office.

“Currently the chapter doesn’t have a solid listing of 15 homes but we have a general idea of the need. The chapter does have an existing list but it needs to be assessed



Officials from the Bodaway/Gap Chapter stand beside President Begaye and Executive Director of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office, Wenona Benally. President Begaye signed a budget releasing funds in the approximate amount of \$865,000 for FBFA housing needs within the chapter's vicinity.

to see if people have moved out or if people are deceased," said chapter Vice President Kerley. "We then need to add and remove people accordingly."

Bodaway/Gap Chapter received approximately \$865K; Cop-permine Canyon Chapter received approximately \$216K; and To-nalea Chapter received \$288K. All money budgeted is to be used for housing.

At each chapter, President Begaye stressed that he didn't want to lose money by waiting five or ten years for housing projects to be formulated. He told the chapter officials to help the people of their

communities in building houses and putting roofs over their heads.

The president has previously signed off on the Escrow Fund budgets for To'nanees'Dizi, K'ai'Bii'To, and Tolani Lake chapters. In total, President Begaye has signed off on over \$2.3 million dollars in funding for housing.

"This is our commitment to help the folks in the Former Bennett Freeze Area," he said. "This is just the beginning."

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