



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

CONTACTS:
Jared Touchin, Communications Director
(928) 274-4275

Crystalyne Curley, Sr. Public Information Officer
(928) 274-2758

nnopvp.communications@gmail.com

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Elderly Diné residents say their “prayers have been answered” with the start of N71 road improvements in Birdsprings



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr., Navajo Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith join Birdsprings Chapter officials and residents for the groundbreaking ceremony for N71 in Birdsprings, Ariz. on Aug. 12, 2021.

BIRDSPRINGS, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr., Navajo County Supervisor Alberto Peshlakai, and Birdsprings Chapter officials joined community members and local leaders on Thursday in Birdsprings, Ariz., to mark the start of construction of a nearly seven-mile stretch of N71 that will include pavement of the existing dirt road, which serves as a primary bus route for the 100-plus students who attend Little Singer Community School and for many local residents.

“Recently, the Birdsprings Chapter was one of many communities that experienced flooding and road washouts due to heavy rainfall. Now, thanks to the persistence and hard work of past and

present leaders, N71 will soon be paved for the benefit of Little Singer Community School students and teachers, first responders, and many local residents who rely on the road on a daily basis. This initiative shows that when leaders work together and support one another, we get things done for the people. Yes, it takes time to move projects forward due to environmental clearances, assessments, and many other requirements, but we are here today and we are excited and happy for all of the residents, students, and others,” said President Nez.

The road improvements will include grading, pavement, drainage, fencing, and the installation of cattleguards, which will make commuting much safer for residents and school buses. The project is funded through the Tribal Transportation Program under the Federal Highway Administration.



PHOTO: N71 located in Birdsprings, Ariz. on Aug. 12, 2021.

Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr. and Birdsprings Chapter President Vernice Wagner recalled the pleas long ago from residents to improve the road. Delegate Walker also noted that the Birdsprings

Chapter first passed a resolution supporting the road improvements in 1971. As a child, President Wagner said she remembers local residents talking about the need for improved roads in the community. She also called on the younger generations to learn from their elders and continue advocating for their communities.

“This was a homegrown initiative that many elders have prayed for over the years. The Little Singer Community School board has supported this project for many years through resolutions. We are here because of our past and present leaders,” said Delegate Walker.

Birdsprings resident and longtime member of the Little Singer Community School board, Dennis Yazzie, was also in attendance and provided the opening prayer for Thursday’s event. He also thanked the Nation’s leaders, spoke about his personal experience and support for the road project, and stated that the community’s “prayers have been answered.”

Navajo Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith thanked all of the entities involved in the preliminary planning and design and the upcoming construction work including Dibble Engineering, Logan Simpson, Navajo Area BIA, Navajo Nation Historic Preservation, and CB Emulsion. Construction of N71 is expected to be completed in one year.

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