



Eastern Navajo Land Commission Seeks to Increase Navajo Trust Land and Address Right-Of-Way Renewals

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Last Friday, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council (NNC) and the Eastern Navajo Land Commission (ENLC) met to receive updates and reports from the Navajo Exchange Legislative Initiative (NELI) and the Gas Company of New Mexico.

According to ENLC, a recent request was made to add acreage to regain original Navajo territories that were designated as private or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. The initiative to add acreage began over 10 years ago and the goal with the recent request will turn most of private and BLM lands near Eastern Agency into Navajo Trust Land.

“Due to the COVID-19 impacts to the nation, the efforts to move these initiatives forward were put on hold,” said Chair Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau). “Now we need to make sure that we can provide as much energy to the deliverance of carrying out these projects stated.”

ENLC met with U.S. Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) and U.S. Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM) in mid-August to propose the new NELI revisions. The New Mexico leaders were informed and updated of the proposed changes. The proposed legislation currently awaits congressional action to move forward.

Paul Moorehead, attorney and advocate for ENLC stated it is up to the commission to make sure these efforts are being addressed and move forward. Moorehead added that Congress has 180 days to act on the initiatives and the commission needs to be prepared and processed for due diligence.

Thereafter, ENLC heard a second report from the Gas Company of New Mexico regarding the right-of-way (ROW) renewal status. Jerry DeGroat from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) reported on the main line for the Albuquerque ROW application renewal needs a majority consent. The gas company is currently awaiting seven allotments near Tohajiilee for consent for the pipeline.

In addition, the Lybrook main line renewals application for natural gas pipeline and roads has expired on July 12, 2021. DeGroat emphasized that there should be no deviation from the prior plans or realignments because changes made hold up the approval process.

Council Delegate Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor) stressed his concerns on the completion of the 100-million-dollar Pueblo Pintado Health Center scheduled for 2023.

“The access to the health center through N-46 and N-47 need improvements by adhering to the Federal Gold Standard rules for roads,” stated Delegate Tso. “Drainage and gravel need to be implemented in order to improve access to the upcoming health center. If this is not addressed, folks will have to travel forty to sixty miles one way to receive service.”

Roads built within oil and gas ROW belong to the companies. The roads are utilized for maintenance and inspection vehicles to travel between oil fields and should not be labeled for public use. As a result, DeGroat insisted a road should be built adjacent to the companies’ ROW. A collaborative effort between BIA, ENLC, and the Gas Company of New Mexico would need to be established to move forward on the construction of new roads.

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