

Hemp not welcomed by Navajo Nation

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 02 October 2020 04:32



Growers are persistent

The Navajo Police Department has been addressing hemp farm issues since 2019, when hemp growth was first reported.

Now the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission is being called in to help.

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On Sept 18, the Shiprock District Court approved a Navajo Nation motion for a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction order to stop hemp farm cultivation and an extensive operation to enforce that decision was initiated.

An estimated 36 hemp farms have been identified in the Shiprock, Cudeii, Hogback and Fruitland, N.M. areas. Several officers from each district have been assigned to address complaints related to hemp farm operations.

Despite the court's injunction, the department continues to receive reports that hemp farms are continuing operations and has informed land coordinators who oversee these sites that all activities are to stop and noncompliance will result in arrest.

A hemp cultivation case filed June 12 against Dineh Benally, Native American Agriculture Company and Navajo Gold Company sought to stop the growth, production and sale of hemp within the exterior boundaries of the Navajo Nation.

Shiprock District Court said Sept. 10 that it would consider the Navajo Nation's motion for a temporary restraining order and request for a preliminary injunction to stop Benally's hemp operation pending resolution of the case.

However, as of Sept. 22, the NPD continues to receive daily reports of noncompliance and news of hemp workers continuing to access hemp farms.

NPD said Benally is allegedly informing hemp farm workers to continue operations and is intentionally putting them in a position of violating a Navajo Nation court order.

"This is a unique situation, as a majority of the employees tending to these hemp farms may have been brought to this area to work under false pretenses," NPD Chief Phillip Francisco said.

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“We recognize this situation is expanding to other areas outside of public safety and we are actively working to address those concerns.”

Since many of the workers were living on the farms and have now been told they are no longer permitted to access those farms, Francisco has contacted the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission for assistance on a solution to those who have been dislocated.

The Commission is scheduled to meet with the NPD in the upcoming week to address residual issues in connection with the daily complaints.

Meantime, NPD encourages the public to continue to report any suspicious activities related to hemp farm operations or noncompliance with the court’s order, by contacting a hemp operation hotline set up at (505) 368-1552. Tips, photos and videos can be emailed to npdops@navajo-nsn.gov.