

President Begaye signs agreement putting fee land into trust for NDOT Facility

Written by gallupsun

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Staff Reports



On Sep. 23, President Russell Begaye and Sharon Pinto, Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo regional director, signed an agreement that placed 86.68 acres of fee land into trust land status according to the 1974 Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act.

“Converting the land that the Navajo Department of Transportation (NDOT) is built upon has been a long time coming,” Begaye said. “The Office of the President and Vice President greatly appreciate the coordination of this effort between the Navajo Nation, the BIA and the Navajo Hopi Land Commission.”

Principal Civil Engineer for NDOT, Darryl Bradley said NDOT has been looking forward to this signing.

“I’d like to acknowledge the efforts of Senator John Pinto and his collaboration with the New Mexico State Land Commission for purchasing this land with the intention of initiating a land exchange between the Nation and the State of New Mexico,” Bradley said.

After purchase, the acreage was positioned to become fee land and eventually converted to trust land through the Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974.

Executive Director for the Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office Wenona Benally said the Commission was honored to have had the opportunity to facilitate this process through the Settlement Act.

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The Navajo Hopi Land Commission is authorized to acquire land under the Land Settlement Act for the benefit of people adversely impacted by relocation. Rental payments generated from leases on such lands go back into the Navajo Rehabilitation Trust Fund and use of such funds requires the concurrence of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation in Flagstaff.

“The Commission appreciates the collaborative efforts of all agencies involved in making this happen,” stated Chairman of the Navajo Hopi Land Commission Delegate Walter Phelps.

The Obama Administration had set a target goal of putting 500,000 acres of land into trust. The land put into trust through this signing contributes to this goal.

“I want to congratulate the Navajo Nation and the Begaye-Nez Administration for pursuing this process,” Pinto said. “On behalf of President Obama, I’d want to congratulate you.”

Pinto also noted that the BIA is working with the Nation on pursuing this process with the Rolling Hills property outside of Farmington.

“There are other acreages available to the Nation to work with. This process remains open to work through the commission as well,” she said.

Begaye said the day’s signing was a great accomplishment for all governmental agencies and departments involved.

“This is a beautiful facility that NDOT has planned for years and it’s great to see this day come forward,” he said.

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