



## Navajo Nation awarded significant \$434k US Department of the Interior contract to conduct Chaco Canyon cultural study

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** September 24, 2020

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — The Navajo Nation was awarded a \$434,356 contract from the U.S. Department of the Interior to conduct a cultural resources investigation to identify, inventory and assess culturally and historically significant areas within the greater Chaco Canyon region. The Navajo Nation Council acted in coordination with the Navajo Nation Heritage and Historical Preservation Department (HHPD) to authorize the contract proposal on Sept. 4 before the deadline on Sept. 8.

Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Lake Valley, Náhodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint) sponsored Resolution No. CS-72-20 (Legislation No. 0218-20) approving the HHPD's proposal, titled Chaco Canyon Cultural Resources Investigations, submission to the USDOI.

“My colleagues and myself thank the Department of the Interior, the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Senator Tom Udall, U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich and Congressman Ben Ray Lujan for creating this opportunity for the Navajo Nation to conduct the investigative study within the Chaco Canyon region. As Navajo and Indigenous peoples, we have many cultural and traditional ties to this region that are told through our oral history. We thank and congratulate our Navajo Nation Historical Preservation team and we look forward to a thorough and complete investigation,” said Delegate Freeland.

Legislation co-sponsor Council Delegate Carl Roessel Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tséché'izí, Lukachugai, Tsaille-Wheatfields) also expressed appreciation for Navajo people to be involved in the study from its inception.

“Our people have the right to lead policy-making affecting Diné Bikéyah. Dinétah and the Chaco Canyon region is a sacred and powerful place of clanship emergence, countless ceremonial histories, and truths about our people. This grant will affirm the truths we know,” stated Delegate Slater.

The study will be conducted by HHPD Director and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Richard Begay, who described the study to the Council at the special session. In addition to establishing a community-level approach to collecting important cultural information in, and around, the Chaco Canyon region, emphasis will be placed on studying areas of high development potential, as identified by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Mancos-Gallup Resources Management Plan Amendment.

“I am pleased that the Department of the Interior has finally recognized the long cultural history of the Navajo people in the Chaco Canyon and the Chacoan people. We fully intend to work with the local Navajo elders and communities to document our history, our language, our teachings and our lifeways that came from Chaco Canyon,” said Begay.

In a letter to Navajo Nation leadership, USDOI Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney indicated that two awards were made from a \$1 million Congressional appropriation for the study. The second applicant was the unincorporated Chaco Heritage Tribal Association (CHTA).

The grant agreement must be executed by the president and submitted alongside detailed project information before the contract is finalized. Begay noted that the study and associated work may begin as soon as December if all documentation is processed in a timely manner.

“We applaud the Department of the Interior’s approach in awarding these funds,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “In this instance, they heard the Navajo Nation and other tribal nations and ultimately awarded this contract to a tribal organization. This approach is significant because it allows us to establish a more accurate and comprehensive record of parts of our cultural history.”

The resolution by the Council, which includes the approved study proposal, is available through the Navajo Nation Council’s online legislative tracking system, called Diné Bibeehaz’áanii Binaaltsoos (DiBB), at the URL: <http://dibb.nnols.org/>.

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