

Apache County District II, Navajo Nation Zoo partner to fix road

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Thousands of school children who visit the Navajo Nation Zoo annually will finally have a much smoother ride to the zoo, thanks to a partnership between Apache County District II and The Navajo Nation Zoo to improve its road.

Visitation to the zoo is increasing each year, and zoo officials have calculated more than 42,000 visitors annually. Of those numbers, 4,000 local Navajo school children visit annually. The zoo has been gaining more interest from national and international travelers.

The zoo was established in the 1970s to provide quality exhibition of local native plants and animals, and to foster an understanding of the local environment on the Navajo Nation. The zoo only houses injured and orphaned animals of local species, and it offers free admission to all its visitors.

Tom M. White, Jr., Apache County District II supervisor, explained he and his crew stepped in to offer their help mainly because of the high-volume of school children visiting the zoo, which is located within his county district on the Navajo Nation.

White serves as county supervisor for Apache County District II in northeastern Arizona. He is currently serving his fifth four-year term and is the vice chairman of the board. He was first elected in 1997. The board of supervisors is the governing body of the county, and they are represented by three supervisors for three districts.

"We want to be sure that school field trips arrive safely and have an awesome educational experience at the Zoo," White said. "This type of project is a perfect fit [for us]. We recently

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celebrated a major milestone by upgrading 200 miles of unimproved dirt roads in the public works project.”

David Mikesic, a zoologist at the Navajo Zoo, appreciates the county helping to improve their entryway.

“This project will provide visitors of the Navajo Nation Zoo, and especially large school buses, with a safe road to visit the zoo in Window Rock,” Mikesic said. “Many of our recent visitors have observed a difficult road to navigate when it rains or snows, and we’ve even had potential visitors turn around because of the awful road conditions.”

Mikesic explained the zoo has struggled for many years to maintain its road and parking lot. He said the Navajo Division of Transportation provided the materials and labor nearly a decade ago, but the roads have since deteriorated from everyday use and from weather conditions.