

Begaye, DNR, NNEPA meet with BLM, BIA officials; Environmental Impact Study on the table

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – President Russell Begaye, the Division of Natural Resources and the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency met with the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for a government-to-government consultation regarding the Draft Resource Management Plan and the Environmental Impact Statement for the San Juan Basin Nov. 30.

The discussion focused on gathering input prior to presenting an EIS after the comment period closes. The chapters of Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon and Counselor could be affected by mineral extraction pending the EIS.

Discussion also focused on the rights, authority and responsibility of each agency and government in addressing surface lease agreements and master plans regarding mineral development and extraction.

Victoria Barr, Farmington District Manager with the BLM, said her purpose in attending the consultation was to listen to the President Begaye's concerns and to provide information about the BLM's plan and planning process.

"We will take back the concerns presented and analyze them in the EIS process," Barr said. "We also look forward to receiving formal comments from the Navajo Nation government on the EIS process that we will take into consideration."

Barr noted that the original Notice of Intent stated that the public comment period would end on

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Dec. 20, but the BLM has extended the deadline 60 days to end on Feb. 20.

Because the Draft Resource Management Plan and EIS could potentially concern mineral extraction on Navajo communities in and around the San Juan Basin, President Begaye is asking all concerned tribal members to participate in public outreaching meetings regarding this issue. He is also asking for tribal members to submit public comments.

“This isn’t the first EIS that we’ve participated in that will address scoping and I think it behooves the federal government to make sure we proceed in a non-reckless manner,” President Begaye said. “We want our people’s concerns to be voiced and taken into consideration as this EIS process moves forward.”

The BLM will host a public outreaching meeting regarding the Draft Resource Management Plan and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the San Juan Basin on Dec. 2 at 10 am at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Ariz.