

## **McKinley County moves on Deer Springs Road construction**

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 27 January 2017 09:40

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### **Irving: County to use \$170K to leverage more funds**

The McKinley County Board of Commissioners approved a \$170,000 budget resolution Jan. 24 for the planning, design and construction of road improvements for Deer Springs Road. The road is a 10-mile rural stretch between the Mexican Springs and Twin Lakes chapter houses and has been in need of improvement for years, officials have said.

Commissioner Genevieve Jackson did not attend the commission meeting. Commissioners Bill Lee and Carol Bowman-Muskett attended the meeting and voted in approval of the matter.

"This is something that has been a part of the county's to-do list for a long time," McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker said. "It's part of our road improvement platform."

McKinley County Roads Superintendent Jeff Irving said state funds were received for the road improvements to Deer Springs in 2016. He said the county has until 2019 in which to use the funds or they might be clawed back.

Irving said the Deer Springs Road project is one of the many rural county roads that need some improvements. Specifically, Irving said the road improvements along Deer Springs include drainage and chip sealing and paving.

"We know what has to be done," Irving said. "That part is pretty clear. It's a matter of time before this particular project gets done."

Decker noted that the commission vote was for the review and approval of a budget adjustment. He said there is no specific time line in place to start and complete the work.

Irving said one idea that the county is tossing around is the possibility of going to Santa Fe while

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the State Legislature is in session and using the \$170,000 to get more funds. The state legislative session ends in March this year. Irving said when you're talking about rural county roads, \$170,000 is only going to go so far, hence the need for more funds.

"The road needs a lot done to it," Irving said about Deer Springs Road. "But what was approved (today) is not enough – but it's enough to at least start and get the ball rolling."

Irving said when the proposal moves beyond where it is now that it would be county workers who'd do the actual road improvements. He said there would be no bidding or hiring of an outside construction firm for any reason.

Like Decker, Irving did not put a time line on how things would move, but said they would definitely move since people in the Mexican Springs area want the project on the fast track.

Bowman-Muskett, who is from Mexican Springs, said the road has been in need of some improvements for a long time. She said she'll continue to monitor the progress of the situation. Commissioner Bill Lee, elected to the panel last year, said he'd monitor the situation as best possible. Lee is the executive director of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce and he said he would do what he could to push the matter in Santa Fe. Lee is in Santa Fe until the end of this week.

"It's been a priority for a long time," Lee said. Lee served as county manager for a short stint over the past year. "I think everybody is looking to see what comes out of the state legislative session in terms of funding – not only for this particular project but a lot of others as well."

At a McKinley County Board of Commissioners meeting in August 2016, Irving gave out a list of priority road projects (Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan) and the cost for improvements on that list to Deer Springs was \$2.7 million. Deer Springs Road was a priority on the list behind the Manuelito Bridge and County Road 19 improvements.

Irving said the county would probably approach the Navajo Nation in the near future to see if more road improvement funds, generally, could be secured.

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Also at this week's county commission meeting, the Board of Commissioners appointed Rodney Tahe, Ken Esparza, Edwin Begay and Jennifer Saucedo to the McKinley County Board of Registration.

McKinley County Bureau of Elections Director Rick Palochak said the volunteer board involves itself in things like voter registration, mailings and inactivity. The board's first meeting is set for the end of February, he said.

***By Bernie Dotson  
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