

## Navajo Nation Trails Initiative an opportunity to learn more about creating trails

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent  
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**WINDOW ROCK**—An intricate network of trails across the Navajo Nation are leading to healthy pathways for tribal members and others mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

In 2016, the Navajo Nation Trails Initiative was created and was spearheaded by Vice President Jonathan Nez and Navajo Youth Empowerment Services.

“(We have) been honored to provide oversight, technical assistance and hands-on support for the effort,” said Tom Riggensbach, executive director of Navajo YES.

Office of the President and Vice President, Division of Natural Resources, Engineers Without Borders, Indian Health Services, Southwest Trail Solutions, local communities and various tribal entities have also provided support.

A task force was created and began work on community trails, trails in the parks, long-distance routes, and pump tracks/skills parks.

Riggensbach said the trails initiative began in response to interest from various tribal communities to develop trails and restore historic routes in their respective areas.

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The task force tackled issues such as permitting, funding and educating communities on the benefits of trails across the Navajo Nation.

The result was new projects in Beclabito, Chuska Mountains, Cove, Dilcon, Four Corners Monument, Kayenta, Pinon, Rainbow Bridge, Tsaile, and Window Rock to name a few.

There is an opportunity for the public to learn more.

Riggenbach invites the general public to attend the Navajo Nation Trails Conference on Feb. 20 in Window Rock to learn more about how they can participate in the trails revolution.

The all-day event will be held at the Navajo Nation Museum and begins at 8 a.m.

“The conference will feature some inspiring trail success stories from across Dine’ Bikeyah and will also introduce participants to some great resources that can assist in making trails a reality in their communities,” Riggenbach said.

He said various tribal leadership, department heads and other entities will be on hand to share their role in the trails initiative.

“The conference will feature some inspiring trail success stories from across Dine’ Bikeyah and will also introduce participants to some great resources that can assist in making trails a reality in their communities,” he added.

While Navajo YES has been honored to provide oversight, technical assistance and hands-on support for the effort, the non-profit organization is simultaneously gearing up for another initiative that’s been changing lives for the better.

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The 2018 Navajo Parks Race Series will once again highlight the beauty of tribal parks across Navajo land while challenging runners to a multitude of courses to test the meddle of everyday joggers and ultra runners alike.

The series will kickoff with the Little Colorado River Gorge Half Marathon and 10K run on Feb. 10. Other events on the series include the Monument Valley Ultra, Shiprock Marathon, Asaayi Mountain Runs and King of the Mountain Challenge, 12 Hours of Asaayi, Code Talker 29K and 10K, Natsisaan Trail Ultra, Monument Valley Marathon, and Four Corners Quad Keyah Marathon Series.

Riggenbach said two new races have been added to the series this year – 12 Hours of Asaayi and Monument Valley Ultra – and continue the legacy of healthy, active lifestyles.

The 12, 6, or 3-hour timed event on a 2.5 mile trail at Camp Asaayi promises to be a challenge while elite runners can now challenge themselves on the 50-mile, 50K and half marathon distances for the Monument Valley Ultra.

“The Navajo Parks Race Series has been an awesome project and a beautiful collaboration of so many folks,” Riggenbach said.

Lace up those running shoes this year and hit the trails on the Navajo Nation.

**Information:** [www.navajoyes.org](http://www.navajoyes.org)

***By Rick Abasta***

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