

NAVAJO TIMES

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RDC OK's access to trust, fee land for enterprises

The Resources and Development Committee approved rules for Navajo Nation enterprises' access to trust and fee lands for development that no longer require Bureau of Indian Affairs rights-of-way approval, according to a press release from the speaker's office.

Pursuant to federal law concerning rights-of-way over Native land, the RDC OK'd access without BIA approval on June 3 for independent legal entities wholly owned by the Navajo Nation.

With the need to speed up the process for the high number of infrastructure and water projects currently being discussed by the Navajo Nation Council, RDC, which holds final authority over the issue, voted to approve the new rules.

RDC Chairman and sponsor Rickie Nez (T'iistoh Sikaad/Nenahnezad/Upper Fruitland/Tse' Daa' Kaan/Newcomb/San Juan) explained that the bill is the result of an effort to streamline

the project development process for all Navajo Nation enterprises that are working on land controlled by the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Land Department can now grant tribal authorization access for overhead and underground electric, water, sewer, natural gas distribution lines, transmission lines, utility fiber optic, temporary construction easements and roads consistent with federal and Navajo Nation laws.

In passing the bill, the committee approved a delegation of authority from the RDC to the Navajo Land Department manager at the Division of Natural Resources to grant TAA for development projects, subject to the terms and conditions included in the legislation.

Delegates acknowledged the tribal access authorization was a critical step in the ongoing process of getting projects completed on Navajo Nation trust and fee lands.

Delegate Herman M. Daniels Jr. (Tсах Bii Kin/Navajo Mountain/Shonto/Oljato) said, "A lot of our Navajo people out there don't have electricity. They're on a waiting list."

Delegate Wilson Stewart Jr. (Crystal/Fort Defiance/Red Lake/Sawmill) said the tribal access authorization and the delegation of authority would be the first of its kind in Indian Country.

The new policies will help tribal nations more quickly undertake infrastructure projects for the benefit of their people, he said.