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President Shelly attends Zoo Fest, announces funding for new aviary



President Shelly said the new aviary will be an opportunity to teach golden eagle conservation to Navajo people. He began planning for the aviary upon taking office in 2011. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— Parents and children came out in droves.

On May 2, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly attended the 8th annual Navajo Nation Zoo Fest. Guest speakers, entertainment, a play area for kids and animals were featured at the free event.

The tribal zoo features more than 50 different species of animals indigenous to the Navajo Nation. It is also the only zoo in the country owned and operated by a Native American tribe.

“A small but dedicated staff takes care of the animals in our zoo. If you see them, please take a moment to thank them for their service,” President Shelly said. “From the black bears to the golden eagles, these animals can be found across the Navajo Nation.”

He noted that the zoo operates

on donations from the general public and tribal departments and entities that adopt animals. Entities adopting an animal provide funding for food, repairs for their enclosures and other needs.

Upon taking office in 2011, President Shelly and First Lady Martha Shelly adopted a golden eagle that could not fly because it was missing a wing. Shellie the golden eagle is one of the many animals on display at the zoo.

In 2011, President Shelly also made the commitment to fund an eagle aviary exhibit at the zoo. The project will give the birds more room to fly and provide the public with an exhibit dedicated to conservation of the birds of prey.

“This week, I will sign off and approve legislation to fund more than \$400,000 for the construction of the eagle aviary.

I have been very passionate about this project,” President Shelly said.

President Shelly will approve \$401,514 in supplemental funding to cover the remaining construction costs for the project.

In 2011, the Navajo Nation became the fourth Native American tribe in the U.S. to be permitted for an eagle aviary. The aviary measures 4,133 square feet and will be located in the center of the zoo.

Drinking ponds, storage, examination rooms, office space, an observation area and gallery are included in the conceptual design of the aviary. The eagle aviary area will have 2,533 square feet and will house up to 30 injured, non-releasable golden eagles.

President Shelly said, “The new aviary will provide live eagle feathers to the Navajo people through a program

established by the Navajo Nation Zoo and Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department.”

David Mikesic, curator of the Navajo Nation Zoo, said naturally shed feathers from the golden eagles are going to be distributed in a legal manner pursuant to federal regulations for traditional purposes.

Not only will this expedite the process for eagle feathers, but it will also reduce illegal actions on eagles in the wild, he said.

The aviary will also have a security system to monitor the eagles.

A federal grant from the U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service provided \$200,000 for initial design and engineering of the aviary in 2014. The total project cost is estimated at \$757,935.

President Shelly said the new aviary is a chance to teach Navajo people about eagle conservation, especially young children.

“The Navajo Nation will become known as an aviary tribe and we will continue to push for the protection of these magnificent birds. It is our hope that the new aviary will attract more visitors and hopefully, more funding.

“This is your zoo, take pride in it. We need your donations and support,” he added.

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