



Aubrey Dunn, State Land Commissioner  
State of New Mexico

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 16, 2018

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## State Land Office and Navajo Nation Exchange Lands

**SANTA FE, NM** – State Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn and Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye today signed into effect a long-anticipated land exchange between the State Land Office (SLO) and the Navajo Nation.

The exchange – nearly three decades in the making – sees the SLO convey 45,562 ± acres of Trust Lands in Cibola, McKinley and San Juan counties (with an appraised value of \$15,020,597) in exchange for the Navajo Nation conveying 41,083 ± acres of land in Cibola and Socorro counties (with an appraised value of \$15,010,000). The Navajo Nation will pay the difference in value to the SLO at closing.

Commissioner Dunn said he is proud to celebrate this important milestone.

“This is an historic occasion and something that I am very grateful to complete before the end of my term” Commissioner Dunn said. “For more than 27 years the Land Office has attempted to exchange these lands, which are interspersed with Navajo Nation lands. While previous administrations’ efforts came to naught, the diligence of current SLO staff has seen this finally come to fruition. I am hopeful that this will be the first of many exchanges between us.”

Among many other things, the exchange will remedy the inadvertent placement on Navajo dwellings and two Navajo cemeteries on State Trust Lands.

The exchange was also lauded by Navajo Nation President Begaye.

“Along our eastern border, the Navajo Nation is fractionated with private, county, state and allotted land. This makes it difficult to work on roads, power lines and water lines,” President

Begaye said. “This land exchange is historic. For all these years, our people have wanted to make their lands whole. Thank you to the New Mexico State Land Office for working with the Navajo Nation on this land exchange.”

The exchange provides multiple benefits for both parties and the State Trust Land Beneficiaries:

- The lands being conveyed to the Navajo Nation are of both cultural and historical significance to the Navajo Nation;
- The exchange will consolidate checkerboard lands thereby facilitating land management for both the State Land Office and the Navajo Nation;
- The Navajo people who have placed structures on state trust lands will be able to finally obtain much needed rights-of-ways for basic life-sustaining services, such as water, electricity & gas;
- The lands acquired by the State will generate significantly more in revenues for the Beneficiaries of the State Trust Lands, with New Mexico’s public schools earning the lion’s share of revenues.

Commissioner Dunn and President Begaye also executed a Memorandum of Understanding wherein the Land Office and the Navajo Nation agreed to continue to work to exchange lands, and to assure that a mechanism exists by which the Navajo Nation is able to acquire lands of cultural and historical significance while the SLO is able to acquire land it can use more productively to generate revenues for its designated beneficiaries.





*Photos: Commissioner Aubrey Dunn and Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye sign final closing document.*

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***Oil, gas, and mineral production, ranching and farming, and commercial development on State Trust Lands support public schools, seven universities, New Mexico Military Institute, New Mexico School for the Deaf, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, water conservation projects, and public building construction and repair. In fiscal year 2017, the State Land Office collected \$664 million from lease payments, oil and gas lease sale earnings, rights-of-way, permits, interest, fees, and oil, gas, and mineral royalties.***