



# NAVAJO COUNTY

## Board of Supervisors

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*"We are Navajo County"*

House Subcommittee on Federal Lands

March 7, 2024

Testimony of Daryl Seymore, Navajo County Supervisor District IV

H.R. 3047 Apache County and Navajo County Conveyance

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany and members of the sub-committee, for the opportunity to address you today. I'd also like to thank Representative Eli Crane for sponsoring this bill. My name is Daryl Seymore and I'm the Navajo County Supervisor for District 4 and I'm here to share information about the impacts of House Resolution 3047 Apache County and Navajo County Conveyance Act of 2023 on the unincorporated communities of Alpine and Pinedale Arizona.

Navajo and Apache Counties are in the northeastern part of Arizona and are very rural with each county having a population of less than 150,000 residents. These counties are steeped in tradition and can trace their origins to two very distinct communities: Native Americans and the early Pioneers. Both groups still have thriving communities within Navajo and Apache counties. As part of that history, many current residents can trace their family history back for generations and take great pride in being able to live, work, raise families, and eventually find their resting place in the same community. Unfortunately, the cemeteries in Alpine and Pinedale have reached their current capacity. Families are now seeking burial locations in other communities for their loved ones who have passed. This causes undue stress and hardships on the residents of Alpine and Pinedale. Therefore, I am respectfully asking your help to find an expedient solution to this pressing issue.

The existing Alpine cemetery is 2.56 acres, which is leased from the U.S. Forest Service and abuts the Apache National Forest. It is estimated that the cemetery would need to expand an additional 8.06 acres to accommodate current and future community burial needs bringing the total cemetery size to 10.62 acres.

Apache County's Public Works Department has spent several years working with the Alpine District Rangers to identify possible options for the cemetery's expansion. After many attempts to acquire the expansion through the Townsite Act, it ultimately proved to be expensive, time consuming and burdensome. Alpine residents do not have any more time to find a solution and the only funding available goes entirely toward maintaining the cemetery grounds.

Similarly, the existing Pinedale cemetery in Navajo County is approximately two and a half acres, which is leased from the U.S. Forest Service and borders the Sitgreaves National Forest. It is estimated that the cemetery would need to expand an additional two and a half acres to accommodate current and future community burial needs bringing the total cemetery size to 5 acres.

Like Apache County, Navajo County's Public Works Department has spent just over two years working with Joshua Miller, District Ranger for the Lakeside Ranger District to identify possible options for the cemetery's expansion. After extensive conversations and hours of research, Mr. Miller learned that the only clear path forward for the U.S. Forest Service would be to sell the full 5 acres to Navajo County. Unfortunately, this option is not feasible due to time and cost constraints.

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As we learned from the sale of the Woodland Lake Park in Pinetop-Lakeside, Arizona, the process to purchase land from the U.S. Forest Service can take years, which is time the Pinedale residents simply don't have! As a matter of fact, I spoke with the local cemetery board and learned they are considering closing off road space and using that for burial space. In addition, we heard from the Forest Services the total acreage for this request is so small, this project would not be expedited through the sale process.

This request comes as a partnership between Navajo County, Apache County, the community of Pinedale, the community of Alpine, and the Apache-Sitgreaves Forests. Given the urgency of this issue, all these partners are committed to working together to find solutions. We are asking Congress' help to pass legislation authorizing a Congressional land delineation of 5 acres within the Sitgreaves Forest for the existing and expanded Pinedale cemetery and 10.62 acres within the Apache Forest for the existing and expanded Alpine cemetery. Without your help, families in these communities will be forced to make the heartbreaking decision to bury their family members somewhere other than their hometown.

Thank you for your time today and I'm available for questions.

