

# Pathways to Restore Power over Energy, Environment, and the Economy on the Navajo Nation

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## Research Question

What hurdles need to be removed to enable the Diné to create their own land use plans that meaningfully represent their culture and traditions?

## Project Background

The Navajo Nation's borders extend over Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado with a land area roughly equivalent to the size of Portugal and a Tribal enrollment of almost 400,000 people. Land use planning on the Navajo Nation has historically been guided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) using external contractors that follow western formats. This has resulted in plans that fail to represent the people impacted by them as they are devoid of cultural and traditional elements. The impact has been widespread unemployment and poverty, a lack of access to basic utilities, and overall environmental degradation.

Partnering with Indian Country Grassroots Support, a non-profit organization with retired Diné judges, lawyers, land use planners, traditional mentors, and advocates, this project looks at how the Diné can develop their own pathway forward using land use planning to implement meaningful change. This is a small part of the larger Diné Nihi Kéyah project.

## Sustainable Development Goals

**7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY**  
  
 ≈ 14,000 homes without power  
 32% without electricity

**10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES**  
  
 48% Unemployment rate  
 36.5% living in poverty

**15 LIFE ON LAND**  
  
 Overgrazing  
 Legacy of contamination

Image Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

## Project Overview

### Data Analysis



Current CLUPs and IRMPs on Navajo Nation

### Literature Review



Land use studies  
 International Indigenous land use plans

### Community Engagement



Partnership with Indian Country Grassroots Support

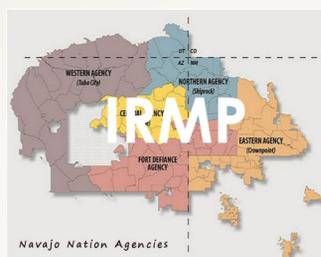
### Regulatory Review



Federal and Tribal regulatory framework assessment

## Land Use Planning Basics

### Integrated Resource Management Plan



### Community Land Use Plan

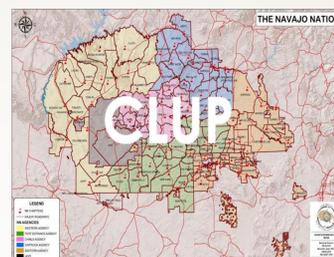


Image Source: <https://dinelanduse.org/boundaries/>

## Planning on the Navajo Nation

### Missing Elements

- Community Visions
- Community Engagement
- Culture and Tradition
- Limited Land Consideration

### Hurdles to Overcome

- Access to Funding
- Bridging the Gap in Local Expertise
- Competing Land Interests
- Creation of a Tribal Vision
- Regulatory Limitations

## Outside the Nation's Borders

### United States:

Bears Ear Inter-Tribal Coalition Land Management Plan

- Intertribal Land Use Planning
- Utilized Ethnographers and Ethnobotanists
- Recommends Full-Time Tribal Management Staff

### Amazon Rainforest:

Oiapoque Programa de Gestão Territorial e Ambiental

- Ethnomapping
- Environmental Agent Accreditation
- Institutional Arrangements

### New Zealand:

Ngā Pōtiki, Hapu, & Hauraki Iwi Environmental Management Plans

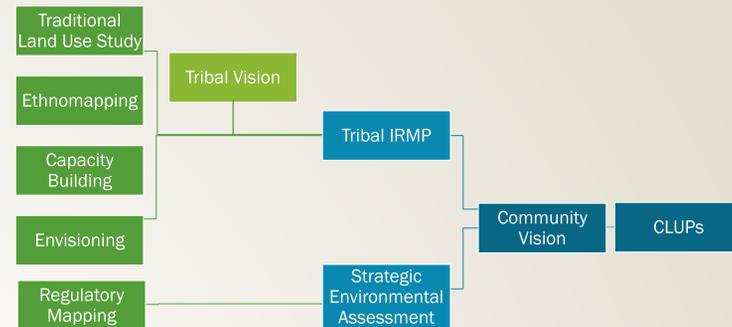
- Regulatory Advocacy & Sustainable Development
- Cultural & Traditional Connections
- 50 Year Tribal Vision

### Canada:

Leq'á:mel & Paungassi First Nations Land Use Plans

- Land Use Plan → Environmental Management Plan → Land Code
- Decentralized Energy & Collaborative planning
- TLUs, Traditional Use Interviews, Memory Maps & Community Map Atlas

## Recommendations



### Preplanning:

- Creation of cultural resources for intergenerational learning, land use planning, and political advocacy
- Capacity building within communities for land use planning including both Indigenous and Western epistemologies
- Formation of a united Tribal Vision through an envisioning process which includes as many voices as possible to increase the power behind it
- Federal and Tribal regulatory mapping related to land use has already been completed by Indian Country Grassroots Support

### Planning:

- Utilize the pre-planning efforts and Tribal Vision to create a Tribal IRMP to illuminate the pathway forward
- Perform a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) concurrently to ensure the developed regulatory framework supports the IRMP

### Moving Forward:

- Community visions guided by the Tribal Vision while incorporating local attributes
- Utilize the new IRMP and SEA to create CLUPs that allow for meaningful change at the community level

## Conclusion

A complex regulatory framework perpetuates the poverty, lack of access to utilities, and environmental degradation experienced on the Navajo Nation. The BIA recognizes that the creation of Tribal Vision & Tribal IRMP can be used to revise or waive regulations to create meaningful change. However, access to funding, gaps in expertise, competing land interests, and regulatory limitations must be addressed. Through careful pre-planning and the creation of a Tribal IRMP that is supported by a thorough SEA, the Diné can start to determine their own pathway forward.

## Acknowledgements

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For additional information about the Diné Nihi Kéyah Project and Indian Country Grassroots Support visit <https://dinelanduse.org/>



References