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Land dispute history

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Land dispute history

1882: An order by President Arthur sets aside about 2.5 million acres in northeastern Arizona for the Hopis and "other Indians" who might be settled there by the Interior secretary. The land centers on the mesas of the village-dwelling Hopis but includes areas occupied by scattered Navajo shepherders.

1900: An Indian agent to the Hopis reports that Navajos "have been allowed to encroach upon the Hopi Reservation for years, taking possession of the best watering places, best farming and best pasture land."

1925: An Indian agent writes that the Hopi tradition of clinging to the mesas "explains why they have not prospered parallel to their neighbors, the Navajos." The same agent later reports that new Hopi interest in lands beyond the mesas has brought them into conflict with Navajos.

1934: More land in northeastern Arizona is given to the Navajos "and such other Indians as may already be located thereon."

1930s-40s: Federal officials act to reduce overgrazing by Navajos and Hopis. Within the 1882 reservation boundary, they establish the 650,000-acre Grazing District 6 for exclusive Hopi use. Some Navajo families are forced to relocate. Others continue living on the remaining 1.8 million acres of the 1882 reservation.

1962: A court rules that Navajos and Hopis are equal owners of the 1.8 million acres, which becomes known as the Joint Use Area.

1966: Hopis claim ancestral sites on the western portion of the Navajo Reservation. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert Bennett bans all construction on the land until the tribes can resolve the claims. This became known as the "Bennett Freeze."

1974: Congress passes legislation to partition the Joint Use Area into Hopi partitioned land and Navajo partitioned land and relocate those living on the "wrong side" of the line.

1991: In an effort to reduce relocation, a federal Appeals Court initiates intertribal negotiations after a lawsuit claims relocation violates Navajos' freedom of religion.

1992: The ban on development in the Bennett Freeze Area is lifted, but Hopis appeal, saying there are religious sites in the area.

1995: Appeals court reinstates the freeze, saying the Hopis could lay claim to lands if they can identify religious sites.

1996: The tribes reach an "accommodation agreement" to allow Navajos to stay on Hopi partitioned land if they sign a lease acknowledging Hopi jurisdiction. Many Navajos do so. Others refuse.

2000: Relocation deadline for Navajos on Hopi partitioned land who have not signed the agreement.

2006: After mediation, both tribes agree to mutual access to the Bennett Freeze Area for religious rites, allowing the development ban to be lifted.

Today: Signing ceremony for the agreement.

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