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**Taos Pueblo and Town of Taos sign
Memorandum of Agreement Regarding the Taos Regional Airport
December 29, 2011**

A historic Memorandum of Agreement was signed by Governor Nelson J. Cordova and War Chief Edwin Concha on December 28, 2011 on behalf of Taos Pueblo, and on December 29 by Mayor Darren Cordova on behalf of the Town of Taos. The Memorandum of Agreement memorializes the agreement reached to address the adverse effects on Taos Pueblo traditional cultural properties and historic properties of the FAA's approval and funding of the new crosswind runway at the Taos Regional Airport and associated airport infrastructure modifications (the Undertaking) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The parties to the MOA are Taos Pueblo, Town of Taos, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), National Park Service (NPS), New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and New Mexico Department of Transportation, Aviation Division. With the signing of the Agreement by the two major parties, Taos Pueblo and the Town of Taos, FAA and the other parties are expected to also sign the Agreement that was negotiated over a course of several years.

The issue over expansion of the Airport goes back over 25 years due to Taos Pueblo's concerns about further increase of effects from airplane intrusions that the people of the Pueblo was already experiencing at that time. In 1990 the Taos Pueblo Tribal Council took a formal position of opposition against the proposed expansion of the Taos Airport. In 2006, the Taos Pueblo Tribal Council suspended its 1990 position of opposition in order to provide an opportunity to negotiate a settlement to the issue that would protect the Pueblo's interests of protection of its traditional way of life, its culturally-important

lands, including the Blue Lake Wilderness Area, and of its sacred village with its multi-storied adobe structures, which in 1990, was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations.

In 1991 the New Mexico U.S. District Court ruled that the FAA was required to complete an Environment Impact Statement to assess any and all impacts resulting from expansion of the Airport. In 1995 Taos Pueblo elected to be a Cooperating Agency in the Environmental Impact Statement process that gave it a more prominent position and voice with which to present the Pueblo's interests and concerns in the EIS process.

After numerous meetings over the years agreement was finally reached in December 2011 that will provide voluntary minimum flight altitudes over the Taos Pueblo World Heritage Site and over the Blue Lake Wilderness Area and adjoining Pueblo Lands. A key feature in the agreement is pilot education to avoid over-flights, except for emergencies due to weather or emergency conditions, law enforcement or aero-medical flight operations for operational or safety purposes or for purposes of fighting a forest fire or for fire surveillance.

Other MOA provisions include:

- Measures to address aircraft accidents to improve coordination of aircraft crash responses with Taos Pueblo and for agencies to assist in removal of old aircraft crash debris from Taos Pueblo lands.
- A Passive Monitoring System with use of transponders on aircraft and ground receivers to track aircraft flights over the Taos Pueblo World Heritage Site and the Blue Lake Wilderness Area, and reporting of periodic radar data of over-flights over the Rio Grande Gorge in the Pueblo's Tract A area.
- A Taos Pueblo position to be created on the Town's Airport Advisory Board.

An important provision for permanent long-term protection is for the Pueblo, the Town, the SHPO and the ACHP to work together to develop legislation to protect the living culture values of the World Heritage Site, the Blue Lake Wilderness Area, the Taos Pueblo Grant, and adjoining Taos Pueblo lands from the noise and visual effects of aircraft through enforceable flight restrictions and prohibitions. The MOA provides for periodic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Stipulations in the MOA.

Governor Nelson Cordova stated: "I am extremely pleased that we were able to craft an agreement that protects the Pueblo's interests and allows the Town to proceed with its plans for airport improvements. Just like all agreements reached with good intentions the next big step will be implementation of the terms. For the Pueblo the key provision is the agreement for the parties to work with the Pueblo on legislation that will elevate the interim voluntary protection measures to permanent measures with enforceability. I thank Mayor Cordova, and officials and representatives from the Federal Aviation Administration National Park Service, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office for their cooperation and guidance through the difficult process to finally reach agreement."

War Chief Edwin Concha said: “As the War Chief charged with protection of our tribal lands that are important to us for traditional purposes I appreciate the agreement that provides for flight altitude advisories over these lands. We will continue to work toward the permanent protection that we desire through congressional action. I am especially grateful that the MOA provisions include coordination with the Pueblo for any air craft crashes on Pueblo lands and for removal of debris from past aircraft crashes that is still there.”

Mayor Darren Cordova stated: “After approximately 20 years of ongoing consultations it is with great honor that we announce that the Town of Taos and Taos Pueblo have reached consensus on a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) regarding the expansion of an existing runway at the Taos Regional Airport while protecting the Taos Pueblo, which is the only living World Heritage Site (WHS) and a National Historic Landmark. The MOA developed also addresses the protection of Blue Lake Wilderness Area (BLWA), an area culturally linked to the WHS. “It has always been my position as Mayor to fully support Taos Pueblo in their efforts to protect the World Heritage Site and Blue Lake Wilderness Areas. I strongly believe this position and commitment was key in reaching consensus.”

Tribal Councilman and Airport Study team member Gilbert Suazo Sr. said: “Finding resolution to the issue about the Airport expansion and the Pueblo’s concerns about impacts on its way of life and lands took many years but I feel it was worth it because we were eventually able to find ways to resolve the issues and barriers we confronted. Even the technology that we will be able to utilize in implementation of the agreement improved over the years. I also believe that we were able to learn more about each other’s interests and responsibilities, and gained appreciation for what we have in the Taos Valley that needs to be protected.”