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Tribes' long battle over Bennett Freeze Area

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TRIBES' LONG BATTLE OVER BENNETT FREEZE AREA

The issue stems from a 1934 federal law that extended the borders of the Navajo Reservation and said the area was for use by the Navajos "and other Indian tribes." The Hopis sued the Navajos for access to the land in 1974, hoping to keep people from becoming entrenched amid various ongoing legal matters.

The freeze, instituted in 1966 by former Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner Robert Bennett, banned Navajos living on contested land from making repairs to their homes or building new ones on about 1.5 million acres on the western edge of the Navajo Reservation. It also applied to water and power lines, indoor plumbing and roads.

In 1997, U.S. District Judge Earl Carroll lifted the ban on about half of the disputed area, allowing building.

The construction ban remained on 700,000 acres to which the Hopis still laid claim because of a long-standing historical and religious presence.

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