

Real AZ Corridor Offers Real Opportunity, Right Now

Navajo and Apache counties have teamed up to create the **Real AZ Corridor**, an economic development region that offers ‘*Real Opportunity in Northeast Arizona, Right Now*’ to companies looking to build a sustainable future in diversified energy production and other industries.



Resources, Energy, Access and Lifestyle (REAL) are key elements of the **Real AZ Corridor** regional branding strategy that debuted in July.

The strategy is a project of the former **Navajo County Regional Development Council**, which has changed its name to the **Real AZ Development Council (RADC)** to reflect the regional nature of the bi-county effort. Members include the Navajo County communities of Holbrook, Pinetop-Lakeside, Show Low, Snowflake, Taylor and Winslow and the Apache County communities of Eagar, St. Johns and Springerville. Unincorporated areas in both counties are also represented in the project.



RADC contracted with economic development branding expert **Lori Martinek of Presentation Plus** in February to develop a regional strategy that would help attract new industries and jobs to the area. Martinek’s strategy was approved in early July, according to **Navajo County Supervisor** and **Real AZ Development Council Chairman David Tenney**.



“A big part of Arizona’s future is going to play out in this region,” said Tenney.

Martinek conducted six visioning workshops with nearly 100 community stakeholders to assess the region’s offering. “We’re talking about assets to build a future on, with the demonstrated potential to make the **Real AZ Corridor** one of the premiere energy-producing and business-sustaining regions in the country,” she noted.

Emerging opportunities can already be seen throughout the region. Navajo County has approved Phase II of Dry Lakes Wind Farm, which is Arizona’s first turbine-powered, commercial-scale energy project. The USDA awarded biomass utilization grants totaling nearly \$1 million to companies that will develop innovative ways to utilize forest byproducts in both counties.

Senior USDA officials visited the **Real AZ Corridor** in June to discuss the success of the White Mountains Stewardship Contract and the potential for a Four Forests Restoration Initiative, which would create similar economic development opportunities — and as many as 600 new jobs — in the region.

The Real AZ Corridor is also home to Arizona’s only recycled paper mill; a plant that utilizes small diameter trees to produce fuel pellets; and a company that uses saline water to grow marine algae for pharmaceuticals.

“We’re going after future-focused companies that are looking for sustainable energy access and early-stage development opportunities,” said Tenney. “There is a lot of ground-floor investment opportunity here.”

The branding strategy includes a sub-brand (**Make It REAL In ...**) that will be used by the communities in their local economic development efforts. A regional website will debut in September. The **Real AZ Corridor** branding strategy will also be presented at the **Governor’s Regional Development Conference** in October.

The **Real AZ Development Council** is a ‘truly collaborative economic development group’, according to Martinek, who has worked on similar projects across the country. “The communities in Navajo and Apache counties recognize the value of working together to build a future that will benefit the entire region.”

Presentation Plus specializes in branding and economic development and community marketing.

*Website: www.pplusonline.com. Contact **Lori Martinek** at (623) 537-0888 or at ljm@pplusonline.com.*