



# THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUNE 19, 2009

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

OFFICE – 928-871-7917

CELL – 928-309-8532

pressoffice@opvp.org

## Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., Navajo EPA Director Stephen B. Etsitty honored by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 for leadership

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency was recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 for its 30-year partnership in protecting the Navajo environment and for its regional and national leadership in the development of tribal environmental programs.

On Tuesday, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Navajo EPA Executive Director Stephen B. Etsitty expressed their appreciation to acting U.S. EPA Region 9 Administrator Laura Yoshii and her staff during their two-day visit to Navajoland for a senior management team meeting with the Navajo Nation EPA to plan out priorities for next two years.

Ms. Yoshii took the opportunity of her visit to present a plaque to Mr. Etsitty and the Navajo Nation EPA in recognition of its three decades of accomplishments and for building its program into one of the premiere tribal environmental offices in the country.



**Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Navajo EPA Executive Director Stephen B. Etsitty expressed their appreciation to acting U.S. EPA Region 9 Administrator Laura Yoshii who presented the Navajo EPA with a plaque in recognition of its 30 years of protecting the Navajo environment and creating a premiere tribal environment program.**

“I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for the partnership but, most importantly, to congratulate you for the tremendous accomplishments, urge you to share our commitment to continue working with you in full partnership,” Ms. Yoshii said.

Among Navajo EPA’s accomplishments are:

- The ongoing clean up of the Northeast Churchrock Mine site.

- The on-going five-year, five federal agency plan to address uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation.

- Having two staff receive inspector credentials through the U.S. EPA Underground Storage Tank program, giving them authority to inspect tanks on behalf the EPA and cite for violations of federal regulations.

- The March 2008 passage of the Navajo Nation Superfund law.

- Receiving primacy for the Underground Injection Control program in December 2008.

- Having the Navajo EPA delegated to administer the Title V Air Permitting Program.

Mr. Etsitty gave credit to his long-time staff for its dedication and perseverance to achieve what the program has.

"I can't do enough to take care of my staff," he said. "They are so tireless in what they do. They are so attentive to our mission which is to protect the public health and the environment on the Navajo Nation."

President Shirley told Ms. Yoshii that families in the Churchrock area whose homes and lands are being cleaned up through the U.S. EPA's efforts are also grateful for the clean-up program after waiting years and hearing unfulfilled promises from others. Unlike in the past, he said, after visiting their homes the U.S. EPA returned with money and equipment to really clean up the sites.

" 'Now we believe,' is what they said," the President told Ms. Yoshii. "Certainly we look forward to fulfilling those plans. I look forward to working together."

Ms. Yoshii said she was fortunate through her career at EPA to work with tribal programs over many years.

"I do recall when engagement with the Navajo EPA was a handful of people," she said. "Now it's 66 people on staff."

"We need strong partners and allies in the fight for environmental protection," SHE SAID. "The agency really has moved to recognize the importance of tribal programs."

She said in the mid-90s, only 10 percent of tribes were supported with funding by the U.S. EPA to develop their environmental programs. Today, she said, 90 percent of the nation's 563 tribes enjoy at least basic environmental resources from the federal government.

"We know that in certain areas, in particular access to safe drinking water, there are huge disparities on tribal lands (compared to) what the rest of the country enjoys," Ms. Yoshii said. "We know that on the Navajo Nation, 30 percent of the families still lack access to drinking water so we're committed to getting those resources. We've seen incredible progress."

She said President Obama has set aside resources for clean-up and waste water infrastructure in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"The Navajo Nation is going to greatly benefit from that," she said.

Among other programs the Navajo EPA is working on with federal funding is:

- Drinking Water – \$3 million for phase 1 for Sweetwater-to-Shiprock drinking water.

This will serve 93 homes without piped water near three unregulated water sources that have been contaminated with uranium, 845 homes served by public water systems that exceed the arsenic drinking water standard, and 982 homes with inadequate water supply.

- Waste Water – \$9.7 million through the global Interagency Agreement through HIS.

- Tribal Drinking Water Set Aside Funding Projects:

Dennehotso New Water System – \$2 million from U.S. EPA and \$2 million from HUD to construct a new 50-mile water system to serve 102 homes without piped water, near 2 unregulated water sources contaminated with Uranium.

- Water Hauling Feasibility Study/Pilot Project to serve 4,000 homes without piped water.

USEPA is expected to soon provide funding to the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources to develop a water hauling feasibility study and pilot project to serve residents in uranium-impacted areas, and to develop safe water hauling guidelines and conduct outreach.

- Black Falls Water Line Extension – U.S. EPA provided \$830,000 to construct a water line and safe water hauling point to serves 40 homes without piped water near four unregulated water sources contaminated with uranium.

- Clean Water Act/Wastewater Tribal Set Aside Projects:

\$1.75 million award – \$1 million will be in a direct grant to NTUA's Stimulus proposal submitted for Window Rock Wastewater Treatment plant upgrades; \$752,867 into inter-agency agreement with IHS to fund other wastewater treatment facility projects.

###