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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Navajo Nation Council applauds the successful delivery of pipe to repair breach at Navajo Agricultural Products Industry

WINDOW ROCK – Speaker LoRenzo Bates and Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd express their appreciation to officials from Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, state of Arizona, and others for successfully coordinating the delivery of a 17-foot-wide siphon to Navajo Agricultural Products Industry on Sunday afternoon.



Photo: The first section of pipe being lowered into place at the breach site on May 29, 2016 (Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Reclamation).

The siphon is being used to repair a 40-foot portion of NAPI's water delivery system following a breach that occurred on May 13. The breach caused a water shortage at the 80,000-acre farm located south of Farmington, which produces a variety of products including corn, potatoes, alfalfa, beans, wheat, and others.

"I extend my sincere appreciation to all of the officials involved in the safe and successful coordination of the delivery and we look forward to seeing the breach repaired so that regular operations at NAPI may resume," said Speaker Bates.

The siphon parts were manufactured by a company in the city of Yuma, located in the far southwest portion of Arizona and transported approximately 600-miles to the site at NAPI. Due to heavy traffic during the Memorial Day weekend, the Arizona Department of Transportation had to issue permits to allow the transportation of two oversized loads carried by two diesels to travel through the state of Arizona to reach the breach site in New Mexico.

"While ADOT doesn't normally allow oversize loads during busy holiday travel weekends, the emergency prompted the agency to issue permits for these loads," ADOT stated in a news release.

Council members thanked Arizona Sen. Carlyle Begay (Dist. 7 – R) and U.S. Sen. John McCain (R – AZ) for assisting the Navajo Nation and NAPI in expediting the issuance of the permits.

“Our state and federal leadership were able to successfully communicate the need for the immediate transportation of the siphon,” said Delegate Shepherd, who serves as the chair of the Resources and Development Committee, which has oversight authority over NAPI.

Speaker Bates and Delegate Shepherd were on site a few hours following the breach and have assisted in coordinating communication and repair efforts since.

On March 26, the Council’s Naabik’iyáti’ Committee received a report from officials with NAPI, the BIA, and the BOR, regarding the effort to repair the breach.



PHOTO: Contractors continue to make progress on the replacement of the 40-foot portion of the pipe on May 30, 2016 (Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Reclamation).

NAPI CEO Wilton Charley said the estimated completion date for the repair is June 11. He also reported that NAPI could lose approximately \$17.5 million in revenue if the repair is not completed by that date.

The report also indicated that of 272 full-time and seasonal employees, NAPI has furloughed 49 employees and reduced the working hours of 117 employees since the break.

Charley also said NAPI has insurance for its crops and other products, however, the insurance agents are awaiting the cause of the breach to be determined before issuing coverage. Meanwhile, NAPI is using funds from an established trust fund to pay for the estimated \$1.6 million cost to repair.

Several Naabik’iyáti’ Committee members emphasized the need to look beyond the immediate siphon repair and to assess the overall condition of the infrastructure at NAPI.

“We need to look at the entire structural integrity and begin to share that information with officials in Washington D.C.” stated Delegate Shepherd, referring to a 1962 Congressional bill, P.L. 87-483, that obligated the federal government to provide funding for the planning, designing, and construction of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project at NAPI.

Since the creation of NAPI, annual funding for NIIP construction has declined from \$25 million, to \$12.5 million, to a current low of \$3.3 million. To date, NIIP construction remains only 75-percent complete and estimates show that it will cost over \$700 million to complete the project.

BIA Navajo Region director Sharon Pinto said that BIA and BOR engineers were onsite immediately following the break and have since been providing technical assistance and would continue to do so.

On Monday, NAPI officials reported that the first portion of the siphon had been installed at the breach site on Sunday night, and that construction would continue until the break is completely repaired.

Speaker Bates toured the site on Monday afternoon during which officials reported that once each portion of the pipe is fitted in place, it will take several more days to weld each portion together. Once welded together, the contractors will then pour footing layer by layer to support the siphon. Officials also stated that the repairs remain on schedule to meet the June 11 completion date.

The officials also thanked the construction company for contributing lighting services free-of-charge to enable the workers to continue working 24-hours, seven days a week until the repair is complete.

“The Council will continue to support the repair efforts and we look forward to seeing NAPI in full operation with a full work force once again,” added Speaker Bates.

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