



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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MEDIA CONTACTS

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

Naabik'iyátí' Committee establishes the Subcommittee for the negotiation of the Little Colorado River water rights

LEUPP, Ariz. – The Naabik'iyátí' Committee on Thursday unanimously approved Legislation No. 0376-16, which officially establishes a subcommittee to negotiate the Little Colorado River water rights settlement agreement with the Hopi Tribe and other officials.

The subcommittee will consist of five members of the Naabik'iyátí' Committee, three members from the Office of the President and Vice President, one member from the Department of Justice, one member from the Division of Natural Resources' Water Management Program, and one member from a community along the LCR.

Legislation sponsor Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said that obtaining water rights to the LCR remains a top priority for the Council and in order to move the process forward a negotiating team is necessary. In previous discussions with the Hopi Tribe, their Council members indicated that they reached an impasse with the individuals that President Russell Begaye had assigned and that they preferred to negotiate with the Navajo Nation's decision makers.

The legislation states that the subcommittee shall participate in leadership-to-leadership discussions and negotiations with the Hopi Tribe concerning those water resources shared by the tribes in the Little Colorado River Basin. It further states that the subcommittee shall recommend to the Naabik'iyátí' Committee and the Navajo Nation Council the proposed action for the agreement between the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe.

Officials from both tribes have met on several occasions to begin developing the framework to guide the negotiations and on Sept. 20, members of both tribal councils met and stated that they would remain committed to engaging in further discussions in order to reach an agreement that benefits both tribes and allows the tribes to present a unified voice when negotiating with non-Indian stakeholders when discussions reach the state level.

During Thursday's discussion, committee members also nominated and confirmed five Naabik'iyátí' Committee members to serve on the subcommittee including Council Delegates Walter Phelps, Otto Tso, Lee Jack, Sr., Dwight Witherspoon, and Alton Joe Shepherd – each of which represents communities along or near the LCR.

On Sept. 22, Speaker Bates issued a memorandum to President Begaye providing an overview of the circumstances and requested his input regarding the establishment of a negotiating team, however, Speaker Bates said he has yet to receive a response.

At the conclusion of Thursday's discussion, Naabik'iyátí' Committee members voted 14-0 to approve Legislation No. 0376-16. The committee serves as the final authority for the bill.

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