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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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President Begaye opens irrigation to Upper Fruitland, San Juan and Nenahnezad Chapters

NENAHNEZAD - Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye has lifted restrictions on the San Juan River for irrigation purposes for the Chapters of Upper Fruitland, San Juan and Nenahnezad.

President Begaye informed farmers during a meeting at the Nenahnezad Chapter House on Thursday, Aug. 27. His announcement was met with applause from local farmers who have been under significant duress as a result of the Gold King Mine disaster.

"I wanted to hear directly from the farmers that they are comfortable using the water from the San Juan River for irrigation purposes," President Begaye said.

District 13 Council leaders put forth a resolution asking that the declaration of emergency be lifted for irrigation purposes in an effort to address, in part, the devastating economic impacts of the contamination of the San Juan River.

Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (NNEPA) Director Dr. Donald Benn has determined that water from the San Juan River meets the Nation's water quality standards for the limited use of irrigation. This conclusion is based in part on NNEPA's test results, which are consistent with those of other agencies testing the river. The NNEPA intends to continue testing and monitoring the water quality.

After receiving the Resolution from District 13 Council, President Begaye signed a directive to the Division of Natural Resources (DNR), ordering DNR to immediately flush the irrigation canals. After hearing from the farmers, President Begaye opened the canals for irrigation purposes for Upper Fruitland, San Juan and Nenahnezad Chapters. Restrictions are not lifted for

livestock. Vice-President Jonathan Nez said that these steps must be taken to protect the farmer's livelihood but it is unjust that the Nation has been put in this situation.

According to Marlin Saggboy, Irrigation Supervisor for the Department of Water Resources, the canal system is flushed it should reach San Juan by sundown.

At Thursday's meeting Upper Fruitland Chapter President, Hubert Harwood, talked about the urgency of lifting the restrictions.

"The drier things get, the harder it is to bring things back," he said. "What we need to do is turn the water on and save what we have left. Everybody is shooting for time here."

Moving forward, President Begaye said the NNEPA will continue to monitor the water from the San Juan River and test soil along the canal banks and river beds.

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