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Delegate Walter Phelps commends water advocates for securing $4.8 million from the USDA for watershed projects

WINDOW ROCK – On Thursday, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) commended the Little Colorado River Watershed Chapters Association and the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources for their successful efforts in securing $4.8 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to conduct water conservation and watershed planning for the Navajo Nation.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, officially issued notice of the award on Wednesday, following the Navajo Nation's third submission of an application to be accepted as part of the USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

The Little Colorado River Watershed Chapters Association is a community-led watershed planning group comprised of local stakeholders and community partners that was formed three years ago to develop a watershed planning framework that addresses issues impacting water quality and water quantity on the Navajo Nation.

According to LRCWCA members, they work to build local capacity in land restoration for climate change resiliency in the Little Colorado River watershed, while partnering with other grassroots groups, colleges and universities, and federal programs to support water security and food security projects across the Navajo Nation.

"This award signifies the diligence and persistence of the LCRWCA group to help with water systems," said Delegate Phelps. "Water advocates and Navajo programs are to be commended."

Delegate Phelps added that the selection process is very competitive due to the number of applications submitted each year by state agencies, tribes, conservation groups, and others.

LCRWCA senior planner Janene Yazzie, said that watershed planning is a primary way of helping to protect water resources, to assist in water quantification, and to identify factors that impact the availability and quality of water that may create challenges for local development and land use planning.

"Thanks to the hard work of our community members and our partners, more people are learning about watershed management and its importance for creating water security for our people," stated Yazzie.

In 2012, the Navajo Nation Council approved $1.4 million for the LCRWCA to develop a model of watershed planning that builds local capacity, develops partnerships, trains and empowers youth, and creates shovel-ready projects.

Delegate Phelps also noted that the $1.4 million was very beneficial for securing additional funds from other sources. He added that the $4.8 million award will continue to be used to leverage funds and to formalize additional partnerships with entities that will continue to help watershed planning efforts on the Navajo Nation.

"This award is a tremendous opportunity for the Navajo Nation to smartly plan for the conservation and use of our natural resources. I am so proud of leadership of the Division of Natural Resources and the many DNR departments that worked on the RCPP application," stated Division of Natural Resources director Bidtah Becker.

Becker also thanked the LCRWCA, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Delegate Phelps for the successful outcome of the application.

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