



Contact: Erny Zah
Director of Communications
Cell: (928) 380-0771
navajonationpress@navajo-nsn.gov

For Immediate Release
Nov. 1, 2013

Navajo President Shelly Praises Courts Decision Regarding Navajo Water Rights

WINDOW ROCK, A.Z. – Navajo President Ben Shelly praised a New Mexico appeals court decision that determines water rights for the Navajo Nation in the San Juan River Basin.

On Friday, Nov. 1, 2013, Judge James Wechsler, presiding over the general stream adjudication for the San Juan River in New Mexico, entered the final judgment and decrees that quantify the water rights of the Navajo Nation in the San Juan River Basin. Those rights were the product of a negotiated settlement the court previously determined to be "fair, reasonable and consistent with law and public policy."

President Shelly hailed the decision as a major triumph for the Navajo Nation. The President observed that, "Water is a sacred element that is needed for life. This decision recognizes the Navajo rights to water from the San Juan River. We can now focus on the future of water needs for our residents in New Mexico."

In 2009, Congress approved a settlement agreement between the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico recognizing the water rights of the Navajo Nation in the San Juan River Basin that includes agricultural water for the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project and the Hogback and Fruitland projects, drinking water to be delivered to eastern Navajo communities through the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, as well as water for livestock and other historic uses. The Northwest New Mexico Rural Water Projects Act established a number of milestones that must be met for the settlement agreement to be finally effective. Under the Act, entry of the final decrees of Navajo Nation water rights in the San Juan River Basin adjudication is required by the end of 2013. The Act also requires that Congress appropriate the funding necessary to build the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project and that construction be completed by the end of 2024. The final decrees conclude the litigation of the rights of the Navajo Nation that began in 1975, although it is possible that other water users who have opposed the settlement and entry of the decrees will file an appeal.

Benjamin Cowboy, Chair of the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission, noted that "this historic milestone could not have been achieved without the courage and foresight demonstrated by the Navajo Nation Council in approving the settlement, and the persistence and tenacity of our entire water rights team as they work to ensure that the rights agreed to in the settlement become legally enforceable."

###