



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 12, 2014

President Shelly tours Cutter Lateral pipeline, meets with officials



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and tribal, federal and state officials met at Nageezi Chapter on May 9 before embarking on a tour of the Cutter Lateral pipeline. The officials met at Cutter Dam and were briefed on progress with the \$43 million Cutter Lateral project, which is slated for completion in 2016. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

NAGEEZI, N.M.—Drive through the Navajo chapters of Nageezi, Huerfano and Dzil Na'oodilii, one thing becomes abundantly clear: the communities are in the midst of drought.

A recent tour with tribal, federal and state officials provided a firsthand view of the conditions in the northwestern N.M. communities located on the eastern portion of the Navajo Nation.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly joined chapter officials and representatives from the Navajo Nation Council, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services for a tour of Cutter Dam and Reach 22 on May 9.

The Cutter Lateral is one of two main laterals of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project (NGWSP).

Authorized for construction in 2009 through the BOR, the NGWSP is a basis of the New Mexico Water Rights Settlement between the Navajo Nation, U.S. and State of New Mexico.

Estimates from the bureau indicate that by 2040, a population

of 250,000 will be served by the project.

It will provide a long-term, sustainable water supply from the San Juan River Basin to 43 chapters on the Navajo Nation, the southwest portion of the Jicarilla Apache Reservation and the city of Gallup, N.M.

In Sept. 2012, President Shelly and former U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced an agreement for \$43 million for the Navajo Nation to design and construct a portion of the NGWSP.

The portion will provide clean water to thousands of Navajos and create up to 600 new jobs in the area.

“This project has been in development for a long time, back to my days as a county commissioner and council delegate,” President Shelly said. “These chapters are in desperate need of water and this project will address that.”

The NGWSP is separated into 27 reaches for construction.



The BOR states that the beginning of a reach is typically the location of a turnout that will deliver water to communities. The two main laterals of the project features 270 miles of pipeline.

Cutter Lateral will provide water to the eastern side of the Navajo Nation and a portion of the Jicarilla Apache Reservation. Reaches 21 through 26 are in the Cutter Lateral segment of the project.

The San Juan Lateral will begin at the San Juan River near Kirtland and stretch south along U.S. Route 491 through Gallup. Reaches 1 through 20 and 27 are in the San Juan Lateral of the project, with extensions to Crownpoint, N.M. and Window Rock, Ariz.

BOR construction engineer Barry Longwell facilitated the tour of Cutter Dam and provided information on the project.

Constructed in the early 1970s, the Cutter Reservoir was completed in 1974 and has provided water to the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project since. About 80,000 acres is under irrigation presently.

He explained that when the dam was built, a pipe was constructed through the bottom portion of the reservoir to release water when the dam was low.

“That’s where we’re going to tie into to get water for the Cutter Lateral,” Longwell said. “That will be our pipeline that will be taking water out to all of your communities around Highway 550.”

The 27-inch conduit that extends into the reservoir is where the Cutter Lateral begins. The BOR will be doing modifications to the concrete down at the bottom of the vault, including the pipe gaskets and joints.

We want to ensure the pipe doesn’t leak, so we’re going to put steel bands inside that pipe where and gaskets and joints and seal those, he explained.

“They’re 40 years old now. We don’t know what condition they’re in, so we’re going to seal them and make them water tight,” Longwell said.

A new vault and a T will be constructed for the Cutter Lateral pipeline to hook into for water delivery. The pressure from the reservoir will be used to push the water down to the other side of Blanco Canyon, the site of the first pumping plant.

Longwell said the purpose was to reduce the amount of infrastructure in the remote location to keep costs low.

President Shelly expressed appreciation for the tour of the dam and explanation of its proposed Cutter Lateral use for Navajo chapters.

“For our chapters and communities in the Eastern Navajo Agency, the water is coming. All of you leaders from the eastern agency and agency council have a lot of planning to do,” he said.

“It’s great to see the progress that is being made on this project after so many years of development and discussions,” President Shelly said. “We will continue working together to serve the needs of the Navajo people.”



Top, a panorama of the Cutter Reservoir, which saw final construction in 1974. Since then, it has provided water to the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project. Above, the Bureau of Reclamation modifications for the Cutter Lateral project. (Photos by Rick Abasta)



President Shelly met with federal, state and tribal officials during the tour and briefing of the Cutter Lateral project. (Photo by Rick Abasta)