



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren calls upon Navajo Council to approve historic water rights settlements to Rio San José, Colorado River

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren has called upon the Navajo Nation Council to swiftly and unanimously approve two historic water rights settlements.

“I have received calls of congratulations since last night,” President Nygren said today. “The current round of negotiations to settle our claims to the Colorado River in Arizona began in the early 1990s but reach back to the 1960s. This is a long time coming so I look for a unanimous vote from council.”

Sponsored by Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley, legislation to address the Navajo Nation’s water rights claims in the Rio San José Stream System and the Rio Puerco Basin in New Mexico was introduced to council on Friday.

Legislation to approve the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Agreement was introduced late Monday.

“This is a monumental step to ensure the Navajo Nation can provide water to our people,” President Nygren said. “This week I am in Washington to urge Congress to act on these settlements once our council passes them. It’s more than just water. This is about the health, sustainability and future of our people.”

The San José Stream System Agreement is expected to be considered by Congress as part of a

broader settlement with the Pueblo of Acoma, the Pueblo of Laguna and other parties.

“It’s more than just water. This is about the health, sustainability and future of our people.”

– Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren

The settlement would fund infrastructure for water delivery to the New Mexico Navajo communities of Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Crownpoint, Littlewater, Mariano Lake, Ramah, Smith Lake, Thoreau, Tóhajiilee, Torreon, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Whitehorse Lake, Counselor and Littlewater.

The Navajo Nation’s water claims quantified in the settlement include:

- 2,444 AFY of groundwater for the two basins.
- 417 AFY for livestock use.
- 493 AFY additional storage rights for stock ponds in the Rio San José Basin.
- Livestock water rights for the Rio Puerco Basin to be determined later.
- The settlement agreement does not address allottees’ water rights.

The cost of water delivery infrastructure in the New Mexico settlement is estimated to cost \$243 million. It would be used for wastewater development, chlorination stations, water hauling stations, operation and maintenance trust fund,

a regional water system to import water and a water acquisition fund.

The settlement would also bring needed waterline extensions and bathroom additions to many families, which has been a priority of the Nygren administration.

The far larger Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Agreement includes the Hopi and San Juan Southern Paiute tribes, the United States, and the state of Arizona and 13 other parties.

The Navajo Nation would receive a substantial amount of Arizona's allocation of Colorado River Upper Basin water, some Lower Basin water, all groundwater beneath the Navajo Nation, and all surface water that reaches the Navajo Nation from the Little Colorado River.

Wash water and Navajo Aquifer water will be governed by an intertribal management plan.

Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch said if the proposed settlement agreement is authorized and funded by Congress, it would provide up to \$5 billion dollars worth of water infrastructure and development for Navajo, Hopi and San Juan Southern Paiute tribes in Arizona.

Navajo communities have endured hardship for decades because of lack of infrastructure to access water, she said. This settlement would allow long-awaited economic growth for the Nation and a way home for Navajos for many generations to come, she said.

The Arizona settlement authorizes the Navajo Nation to divert Arizona water in Utah and New Mexico for delivery to Navajo communities in Arizona.

For the first time, it would allow water to move across the upper and lower basins of the Colorado River to provide Arizona Navajo community residents access to Colorado River surface water.

"Securing this settlement, delivering water to our homes, is not just a promise, it's my priority," President Nygren said. "This agreement brings us closer to making that a reality for every Navajo family. This water is needed to build roads, schools, clinics, businesses, housing and all kinds of economic development across our Nation to secure our future."

Among the settlement projects that would need funding by Congress are:

- The *iiná bá-paa tuwaqat'si* pipeline, formerly known as the Western Navajo Pipeline.
- The Four Corners Project.
- The Southwest Regional Groundwater Project.
- The Ganado Regional Groundwater Project.
- The Black Mesa Regional Groundwater Project.
- The Lupton Area Project.
- The Kayenta Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project.
- And the Code Talker Lateral Extension.

For information about the settlements, visit <https://nnwrc.navajo-nsn.gov/>.

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