



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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District 13 communities anticipate the release of irrigation water

WINDOW ROCK – Following the passage of a resolution on Aug. 24 by the District 13 Council to lift the declaration of emergency for water use for irrigational purposes for local farmers affected by the contamination spill at Gold King Mine, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said there is an understanding that irrigation water will be turned on for farmers in the district as early as Wednesday.

The resolution passed by the District 13 Council — comprised of four chapters including Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, San Juan, Upper Fruitland, and Nenahnezad — requests Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and the Navajo Nation Irrigation Office in Shiprock to release water from the San Juan River immediately to irrigate crops and provide water for livestock.

On Aug. 25, members of the Resources and Development Committee met with officials from the District 13 Council, including chapter officials from Nenahnezad, San Juan, and Upper Fruitland to hear their concerns regarding the impact on crops in the area.

According to RDC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), the majority of the officials said their communities want the water turned on for irrigational purposes.

Delegate Tsosie also stated that there is an understanding that allowing water into fields would be optional for individual farmers because they would still be able to keep their individual head gates closed if the water is released from the San Juan River. He also noted that the RDC directed legislative counsel to begin drafting legislation to lift the emergency declaration to help the farmers who want the water released.

“We tried to defer to the President, but the people and their crops are really beginning to hurt now,” said Delegate Tsosie.

San Juan Chapter president Rickie Nez, said farmers in District 13 anticipate and support the release of water from the San Juan River as early as Wednesday. He also echoed Delegate Tsosie’s notion that farmers will still have the option of keeping individual head gates closed if water is released from the San Juan River.

“Our farmers are in dire need at this point,” stated Nez who also noted that support for the release of the water grew after recent test results indicated that the water is safe for irrigation.

Nez also pointed out that if the water is released it would only reach the communities of San Juan, Upper Fruitland, and Nenahnezad, which operate under a separate irrigation system than other communities.

On Tuesday afternoon, the signed resolution passed by the District 13 Council on Aug. 24 was delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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