



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 22, 2017

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Navajo leaders celebrate the start of water projects resulting from the Navajo Nation's \$554 million settlement funds



PHOTO: Speaker LoRenzo Bates, Vice President Jonathan Nez, and Council Delegate Lee Jack, Sr. along with NTUA and federal officials at the groundbreaking ceremony in Greasewood, Ariz. on Sept. 22, 2017.

GREASEWOOD, Ariz. – Members of the Navajo Nation Council and Vice President Jonathan Nez gathered on Friday in the community of Greasewood, for a groundbreaking ceremony hosted by the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority to commence the start of construction of the Ganado, Lower Greasewood, and Dilkon Water Improvement Project, which is one of the first bulk water infrastructure projects funded partially by the \$554 million settlement funds that the Navajo Nation received from the federal government in 2014.

NTUA deputy general manager Rex Kontz, said the \$9.1 million project will double the current water capacity for several communities including Ganado, Cornfields, Lower Greasewood, Dilkon, Indian Wells, Bidahochie, and Teesto, by improving current water well capacities and constructing an additional water well. The project also includes the construction of a water

filtering plant that will remove iron, manganese, and other matter to improve the quality of water for the communities.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) called Friday's event a "historical achievement," adding that since the Navajo Nation received the \$554 million settlement funds in 2014, many have asked how the funding would be used and how it would benefit the Navajo people.

"Today's event illustrates how that money is working for the Navajo people, because we are here today as a direct result of the \$554 million settlement," said Speaker Bates. "It is often said amongst our people that 'water is life', and that statement holds true today as we come together to support and recognize NTUA and many others for their hard work."

Speaker Bates explained that when the Navajo Nation received the \$554 million settlement funds from the federal government in late 2014, the Navajo Nation Council adopted legislation to create the "Síhasin Fund" to invest and grow the funds.

Based off of the results of seven public hearings conducted by the Council, the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee was created and tasked with developing expenditure plans to utilize the funds to address several critical needs including community and economic development and infrastructure development.

In January 2015, the Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved legislation sponsored by Council Delegate Leonard Tsoie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), to provide \$180 million from the Síhasin Fund to help fund bulk water projects throughout the Navajo Nation as part of a comprehensive water development strategy developed by NTUA, the Water Management Branch, and others.

Speaker Bates also recognized and thanked Delegate Tsoie, who chairs the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee, and other subcommittee members, NTUA deputy general manager Rex Kontz, and many others who worked on the project.

Council Delegate Lee Jack, Sr. (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone), who is a member of the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee and a longtime resident of the region, said he can attest to the discoloration of water that is currently provided to homes in the area and applauded NTUA for bringing cleaner water to the communities. He added that the water project will help new developments such as a healthcare center and a public safety facility in the community of Dilkon.

The Síhasin Fund provided over \$1.2 million for the project through a loan agreement with NTUA, which means the funds will be paid back over a period of time. Other funding sources include loans and grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a grant from the federal EPA, and revenue generated by NTUA. Completion of the water project will take approximately 18 months.

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