



25th Navajo Nation Council

# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Naabik'iyáti' Committee unanimously supports the Rio San José Water Rights Settlement Agreement, moves forward to Council**



**Photo Left to Right: Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch, Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley, and Department of Water Resources Director Jason John.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The 25th Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee unanimously supported Legislation No. 0107-24, the Rio San José Stream System Water Rights Settlement Agreement, quantifying the Nation's water rights in the Rio San José Stream System and the Rio Puerco Basin in New Mexico. The bill now moves forward to the Navajo Nation Council for consideration.

Legislation sponsor Speaker Crystalyne Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) said the proposed settlement will help ensure stability and prosperity for the Eastern Navajo communities by closing the water gap that these communities currently face.

"Last year, the Navajo Nation Council celebrated its centennial commemorating our historical leaders' foresight to strengthen the prosperity of our people. By approving this legislation, the 25th Navajo Nation Council is looking forward and planning for the next 100 years of our Nation," Speaker Curley said. "This agreement not only acknowledges our inherent rights, but also empowers our communities to manage and sustain our water resources for generations to come."

This settlement will directly impact nine Navajo chapter communities nestled within the Rio San Jose Basin, including Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Crownpoint, Littlewater, Mariano Lake, Ramah, Smith Lake, Thoreau, and Tóhajiilee, as well as seven chapters within the Rio Puerco Basin: Tóhajiilee, Torreon, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Whitehorse Lake, Counselor, and Littlewater.

If approved by the Navajo Nation Council, this settlement would become an addendum to the settlement agreement dated May 13, 2022, that quantified the water rights of the Pueblo of Acoma and the Pueblo of Laguna in the Rio San José and Rio Puerco Basins.

Once the settlement is approved by the Navajo Nation, a bill is expected to be introduced in Congress to fund infrastructure for water delivery to many rural Navajo communities in New Mexico. The water rights settlements were reached with New Mexico and non-Indian water users in the basins, which will also require congressional approval.

The proposed amount for the settlement fund is \$243 million. Funding is anticipated to go toward wastewater development, chlorination stations, water hauling stations, an operation and maintenance trust fund, a regional water system to import water, and a water acquisition fund.

The Navajo Nation's water claims quantified in the settlement are as follows:

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

Speaker Curley was joined by Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch, who noted that timeliness in approving the legislation and moving it forward for Congressional approval is critical.

"There will be only one Indian water rights settlement hearing before the House Natural Resources Committee before the end of this Congress. That will take place in June, and that's why it's important to move forward with this legislation at this time." Attorney General Branch said.

The Naabik'iyáti' Committee unanimously supported Legislation No. 0107-24 with a vote of 18 in favor and none opposed. The 25th Navajo Nation Council is scheduled to consider the legislation during a special session beginning at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 23rd at the Council Chamber in Window Rock, Ariz. The special session will also be live-streamed on the Council's YouTube channel.

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