



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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Navajo Utah Commission reviews water rights settlement implementation, community oversight, and long-term planning



Navajo Utah Commission received update reports on the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act and long-term planning goals.

MONTEZUMA CREEK, Utah – On Tuesday, the Navajo Utah Commission convened to address water access challenges and infrastructure planning for Navajo communities in Utah. Discussions focused on refining a comprehensive white paper, implementing the Utah Navajo water decree, and aligning budget priorities with phased, long-term planning goals under the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act (NUWRSA).

The Navajo Nation Legal and Technical Team — including the Department of Justice Water Rights Unit, Department of Water Resources, and Water Rights Commission — reported that the white paper consolidates technical findings, legal considerations, and community priorities related to water rights, infrastructure gaps, and implementation timelines.

“The document is designed to guide coordination with federal, state, and local partners while giving Navajo chapters a clear planning framework as settlement activities advance,” said Council Delegate Curtis Yanito (Mexican Water, To’likan, Teenospos, Aneth, Red Mesa). “Updated estimates reflect approximately \$210 million in overall needs, including about \$183 million dedicated to water infrastructure such as treatment facilities, transmission lines, storage, and related systems.”

The Technical Team also reported ongoing work to implement planning tied to the Utah Navajo water decree, which secures 81,500 acre-feet of water for Navajo communities in Utah and establishes the legal foundation for the development, operation, and maintenance of water infrastructure.

Commission members emphasized that translating the decree into on-the-ground improvements will require careful project sequencing, accurate cost estimates, and sustained funding commitments over multiple phases. Members stressed the importance of a formal fund management and expenditure plan to ensure transparency, fiscal accountability, and chapter-level input before settlement funds are allocated.

The Commission reviewed proposed budget figures reflecting planning, design, and early implementation costs, including engineering assessments, hydrographic surveys, project management, and coordination with existing water and utility systems. Presenters noted that the scalable budget framework allows future appropriations to align with project readiness, construction cost inflation, and evolving community needs, while accounting for long-term operation, maintenance, and replacement costs.

Delegate Yanito said the Commission's approach is grounded in clarity, accountability, and community engagement, emphasizing that the white paper serves as a practical roadmap connecting the legal outcomes of the water decree to community-level implementation.

Delegate Herman Daniels Jr. (Ts'ah Bii Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato) underscored the importance of proactive planning supported by realistic budget projections.

"Aligning water allocations with a structured, long-term plan strengthens the Navajo Nation's position with state and federal partners and helps ensure recognized water rights result in reliable, functional infrastructure," Daniels said.

Commission members supported integrating policy analysis, legal implementation, and detailed budget planning as a critical step toward addressing long-standing infrastructure inequities in Utah Navajo communities.

The Commission also discussed establishing a NUWRSA public outreach plan that includes Diné bizaad interpretation, chapter-level presentations, and accessible materials to ensure communities understand the settlement and proposed projects.

The Navajo Utah Commission will continue refining the white paper, coordinating with technical experts and utility partners, and advancing budget and fund management discussions as part of its ongoing mandate to advocate for sustainable, long-term water solutions in Utah Navajo communities.

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