



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act finalized by the Navajo Nation, State of Utah, and the Interior Department

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PHOTO: Navajo Nation leaders, Utah Leaders, and the U.S. Department of Interior gathered with their constituents in Monument Valley, Utah to execute the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Agreement.

OLJATO-MONUMENT VALLEY, Utah — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council were joined by President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer to officially welcome Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, United States Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT), Utah Governor Spencer Cox, and Lt. Governor Deidre Henderson for a historic signing ceremony to execute the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Agreement.

The agreement, which was approved by Congress in 2020, will recognize the water rights of the Navajo Nation in Utah and authorizes funding for water infrastructure development. President Joe Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that allocates \$2.5 billion to address Indian water rights settlements.

“This is a historic day for Utah Navajo families. We send our appreciation to the Navajo Nation Council and President Jonathan Nez for holding the federal government and the State of Utah accountable for our most precious resource - our Diné water. The bipartisan infrastructure law now allows us to upgrade our water infrastructure projects and expand water delivery to the rural areas of Utah Navajo. Now our elders, veterans, and most vulnerable relatives will soon have access to clean, potable drinking water in their homes,” said Council Delegate Herman Daniels Jr. (Ts’ah Bii’ Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato).

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The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement now confirms the Navajo Nation's right to deplete 81,500 acre-feet of water per year from Utah's Colorado River Basin apportionment and authorizes around \$220 million for water infrastructure projects. The state has already invested \$8 million in the Navajo Utah Settlement Trust Fund.

"Our families celebrate this moment in history after decades of fighting for the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement. It is clear drought conditions are affecting water levels across the country. Many of our elders haul drinking water from miles away while we work to get proper water infrastructure projects completed. This settlement allows us to begin connecting our water lines to the most rural areas of my chapters," said Council Delegate Charlene Tso (Mexican Water, Tółikan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa).

According to the State of Utah, over 5,000 Navajo people reside in the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation. Only half of the households within this area have indoor plumbing, must haul water over vast distances, and many lack access to clean drinking water.

"The Navajo people appreciate the leadership of Honorable Herman Daniels Jr. and Honorable Charlene Tso for their advocacy and leadership in finalizing this historic agreement. Now clean drinking water will be provided to 40 percent of our Navajo families in southern Utah. Tóéí'ina means our water provides life for all living beings on Mother Earth. We must protect our natural resources - the land, air, and water - for the next seven generations. The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement secures that future," said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

Yesterday, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee passed Legislation No. 0094-22 also approving and accepting the revised Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Agreement.

"The nation-to-nation relationship brought us together to resolve the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Agreement. Tóéí'ina means our water is life - it sustains us and provides for our livestock, rejuvenates our cornfields, and strengthens us as human beings. This is a historic day for the Navajo people as clean drinking water can now flow freely into the communities of our Utah Navajo families," said Chairman Rickie Nez (T'iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K'aan, Newcomb, San Juan).

Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. was joined by Resources and Development Committee Chairman Rickie Nez, Council Delegate Mark Freeland, Council Delegate Charlene Tso, and Vice Chairman Raymond Smith, Jr. for the signing ceremony.

The Navajo Nation Council presented an honorary blanket commending the leadership of Senator Mitt Romney for sponsoring the settlement bill passed by the United States Senate last year.

Noting the historic nature of the day, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland commended Navajo and Utah leaders for successfully negotiating the agreement. She added, "Having modern water infrastructure is not only crucial to the health of our kids and families - it's also important to economic opportunity, job creation, and responding to the intensifying effects of climate change. As we seek to strengthen Indigenous communities and support Tribal self-governance, today's action and investments from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will help provide the Navajo Nation with the autonomy and flexibility to design and build appropriate water projects that will address current and future water needs."

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