Water is Life for the Navajo Nation

Colorado River Water Users Association (CRWUA)

Tribal Water: Opportunities & Challenges Panel

December 13, 2018
Navajo Nation & the River

• **Water is life.** Diné people say, “Tó éí iiná” or water is life. Our people have been living, drinking, ranching, and farming with all the rivers in our area including the Colorado River, the Little Colorado River, the San Juan River since time immemorial.

• **The Navajo Nation will aggressively protect its water and land for our people.**

• **Significant Colorado River presence.** The historical Diné boundaries range from Flagstaff, AZ to Alamosa, CO, and to Grants, NM, and everything between.

• **150th Anniversary of Treaty.** The final Navajo Nation treaty with the US was ratified by Congress in 1868, before any of the surrounding states entered the Union. (Colorado 1876; Utah 1896; Arizona 1912; New Mexico 1912.)
**Geography**

*Does not include Wolf Springs Ranch, CO.*

*Source: American Rivers*

*Source: Navajo Nation Maps Dept.*
Primary Challenge – Simple Access to Water to our People

• **Struggle.** It has been a struggle to deliver basic water to our Navajo people.
  • **Access to drinking water.** Our people have some of the highest rates of homes without access to running water.
    • Nearly 1/3 of Navajo families haul water for daily activities.
    • Some families use water from sources designed for livestock.
  • **Farms.** Farms do not have equal access to irrigation.

• **Paradox.** There are many rivers that flow near and through the Navajo Nation, our people have been here from time immemorial, well before the states, we have a treaty older than the states, yet the states have much greater access to water than the Navajo people.
Further Challenges – Constricted Water Supply

• **Drought.** Like much of the Southwest, the Navajo Nation is in the midst of a severe drought. This further harms the Nation’s access to water.

• **Impact on Animals.** 111 horses died near an empty water hole near Cameron, AZ. This was partially due to drought. This is just one example of many.

• **Gold King Mine.** Navajo farms are still recovering from the damage from the Gold King Mine Spill that polluted the San Juan River directly upstream of the Nation.
Challenges – Political

• **Drinking water supply in Arizona.** AZ water users persuaded the State to insist that drinking water not be provided to Navajo citizens in Arizona water through the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project until the Navajo Nation settles its water rights claims to the Little Colorado River and Colorado River in Arizona.

  • But the State of AZ also insists that no settlement can be achieved that does not settle the Hopi Tribe’s claims.
  • The Navajo Nation has no control over the Hopi Tribe.
  • *This political challenge prevents Navajo from using 6,411 ACF of water that is already reserved for the Nation.*
Challenges – NIIP

• **Approved 1962.** Congress approved the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) in 1962.

• **Still not completed in 2018.** It has yet to be completed while other water infrastructure projects of the era were completed expeditiously.

Navajo Chairman Paul Jones and US President John F. Kennedy signing the NIIP in 1962.
Opportunities

• **Legislation.** Navajo Nation is currently working with Congress to pass the Navajo-Utah Water Settlement Act.

• The legislation (S. 664), will help provide much-needed infrastructure for Navajo families.

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs hearing on S. 664
Opportunities – Retention of NGS Water

• **Water for energy.** The Navajo Generating Station (NGS) currently uses nearly 30,000 ACF of water.

• **All utilized on Navajo.** NGS is located on Navajo land. All this water is used on the Navajo Nation. NGS also uses only Navajo coal and primarily Navajo labor.

• **Retention.** If NGS closes, all the water should be retained for the continued use on the Nation.
  
  • *NGS has used Navajo water on our land for 50 years – if NGS closes, it cannot take both revenue and water from the Nation.*
Opportunities – 
Collaboration and Joint Investment

• **Sihasin & Tribal Fund Investments.** The Navajo Nation has committed more than $245M of tribal funds towards infrastructure development.

• **Federal & State Investment.** We urge the federal government and states to match or contribute to a joint investment pool for water infrastructure. The economic development opportunities that will result will offer great returns for all parties and help minimize future liabilities to the federal government and states.