Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today welcomed leadership from the Hopi Tribe and the Navajo Nation to Washington, D.C. to hold discussions on a potential Little Colorado River water settlement that could be acted upon by Congress. This is the first time that leaders of the two tribes have joined with a Secretary of the Interior to address this shared water issue.

“I thank the Navajo and Hopi leadership for participating in today’s historic discussions, and for the decades of work that they have put into solving this issue,” Salazar said. “We had an extremely meaningful dialogue today that I believe will lay the groundwork for a fair and mutually beneficial agreement that the two tribes, the United States, and the state parties can agree upon. I deeply respect the sovereignty of the Hopi Tribe and the Navajo Nation and know that, for any water settlement to be successful, the tribes must be fully committed to it. It is my hope that over the coming days and weeks that we may work together to finalize the details of a settlement that will deliver critical water, infrastructure and economic development to the Navajo and Hopi people.”

While there has been general agreement on key aspects of a proposed Little Colorado River water settlement, including the potential investment of nearly $360 million to fund construction of major water delivery systems on the Hopi Reservation and the Arizona side of the Navajo Reservation, both tribes had expressed serious concerns about various aspects of the proposed settlement.

“Today’s historic meeting provided the Hopi Nation with an opportunity to identify outstanding issues that need to be resolved before a settlement can move forward,” said Chairman Leroy Shingoitewa of the Hopi Nation. “Because of the high level involvement of our leadership, the Navajo leadership, and Secretary Salazar and his team, I believe that we can and should move forward.”

"We made practical progress today, thanks to Secretary Salazar's personal involvement and commitment, to open possibilities for our nation to convert 'paper' water rights into 'wet' water that our people need and deserve," said Speaker Johnny Naize of the Navajo Nation.

Today’s historic meetings grew out of an invitation that Salazar issued to both tribes last month, when he met with them in Arizona. The Secretary also invited Senator Jon Kyl to the opening session today because of the constructive role that he has been playing in working toward a settlement of the long-standing Little Colorado River water rights claims. Any settlement would have to be enacted by Congress.

“The Obama Administration has reenergized the federal government’s commitment to resolve Indian water rights and to provide settlements that truly benefit Indian tribes,” said David J. Hayes, Deputy Secretary of the Interior. “We appreciate the candor and seriousness with which both tribes approached today’s discussions, and we look forward to continuing this critical conversation in the near future.”

Since 2009, the Obama Administration has enacted six water settlements, totaling more than $2 billion, that will provide permanent water supplies and offer economic security. The settlements include the Taos Pueblo and Aamodt case pueblos, including the Pojoaque, Tesuque, San Ildefonso, and Nambe

pueblos in New Mexico; as well as the Crow Tribe of Montana; the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona; the Navajo Nation in New Mexico; and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes in Nevada.

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