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Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today announced a landmark agreement to allow construction on the Animas-La Plata water project in southwestern Colorado and northwestern New Mexico.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding, the endangered fish species in the San Juan Basin will be protected by the water releases from the Navajo Reservoir. In addition, there will be a recovery program for the endangered fish species.

"These are challenging times in resources development and management. This project meets both environmental protection and water resource needs," Lujan said.

The Animas-La Plata project will provide municipal and industrial water for several Colorado and New Mexico communities, for the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribes in Colorado and for the Navajo Indian Nation in New Mexico. The project will also supply water for irrigation of Indian and non-Indian lands in these two states.

The project will be funded through a cost-sharing agreement between the federal government and the project's beneficiaries. The federal and non-federal entities will share the costs of Phase I facilities. Phase II facilities will be funded entirely by the non-federal entities.

Signatories to the MOU are: The Secretary of the Interior, the Governors of Colorado, New Mexico and Utah, and the Chairmen of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe and Jicarilla Apache Tribe.