



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation leaders oppose challenges to the San Juan River water settlement

WINDOW ROCK – Leaders of the Navajo Nation are strongly opposing a petition purportedly filed with the New Mexico Supreme Court by New Mexico state legislators on Friday, which asks the state’s highest court to nullify the San Juan River water settlement agreement between the state and the Navajo Nation. Although the settlement was approved by Congress and signed in 2010, the petition claims that the settlement must be submitted to the New Mexico State Legislature for consideration.

Since the settlement was finalized years ago, Navajo and non-Navajo stakeholders have benefitted from its water allocations and water sharing provisions, and millions have been invested into water projects for municipal, agricultural, and other uses.

"This was a settlement that was negotiated in good faith with all stakeholders and received the support of the Navajo Nation Council, Navajo Nation President, Congress, and the President of the United States. This settlement is not an interstate compact and does not require the approval of the State Legislature," stated Speaker LoRenzo Bates.

In April, the New Mexico Court of Appeals upheld the water settlement and rejected four challenges filed by water and irrigation districts, reaffirming the Navajo Nation’s water rights pertaining to the San Juan River basin in the northwestern part of the state. The state Supreme Court also rejected a similar petition in 2014, filed by lawmakers and a local farmer. The San Juan Adjudication Court, the New Mexico Court of Appeals, and the Federal District Court in the Aamodt Adjudication rejected similar claims that the settlement required the approval of the State Legislature.

"It’s disappointing that certain legislators continue to challenge a settlement that is mutually beneficial for the Navajo Nation and the State of New Mexico," added Speaker Bates. "The previous rulings by state and federal courts rejecting this challenge should implore all stakeholders to move on from this issue, so that all communities will continue to benefit from the San Juan River for many years to come."

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