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Hopi Tribe Endorses Historic Little Colorado Water Rights Settlement

Kykotsmovi, Ariz. (June 21, 2012) – The Hopi Tribal Council voted today to endorse a proposed water right settlement for the Tribe’s Little Colorado River water right claims. The proposed settlement would end decades-long water rights adjudication and is the first step in ensuring a dependable supply of clean water for the Tribe. “I am greatly pleased by the Council’s decision,” stated Hopi Tribal Chairman LeRoy Shingoitewa. “For the first time since our reservation was established we will be able to guarantee clean, reliable water supplies for our people.”

Council Representative George Mase, Chairman of the Tribal Council’s Water and Energy Team, agreed with Chairman Shingoitewa’s assessment: “After talking to the Hopi people and hearing their concerns, it is clear that the people want a clean and reliable water supply. Our team negotiated for years to reach a settlement, and I am pleased that the Council decided to endorse the settlement.”

The Hopi Tribe has claimed reserved water rights from four sources: on-reservation surface water and groundwater, surface water from the Little Colorado River, and surface water from the mainstem Colorado River. The proposed settlement would confirm the Hopi Tribe’s rights to on-reservation surface water and groundwater, reserve a quantity of water from the mainstem Colorado River for a future settlement the Hopi Tribe’s mainstem water rights claims, provide for the development of essential on-reservation water delivery infrastructure, and establish a framework for the sustainable management of the N-Aquifer which is currently threatened by unmanaged pumping. In return, the Tribe would waive its claims to the Little Colorado River and its damages claims for injuries to water rights or water quality that occur before the settlement goes into effect.

“The Little Colorado River is by far the least reliable of our four potential water sources,” explained Councilman Mase. “This is a fair tradeoff.”

Chairman Shingoitewa agreed with Councilman Mase’s assessment. “We are confident the benefits for the Hopi Tribe outweigh the risks of continued litigation,” explained Chairman Shingoitewa. “The settlement proposal provides a path to ensure a lasting supply of clean water for both tribes. Hopefully the Navajo Nation will endorse the settlement as well.”

In order to become effective, Congress also must ratify the settlement and appropriate funds for the development of projects specified in the settlement. The Hopi Tribal Council voiced its concerns about the proposed federal legislation, which was introduced before the agreement was reached. The Council has previously instructed Chairman Shingoitewa and Water and Energy Team’s Chairman Mase to co-sign a letter to Senators Kyl and McCain asking for changes in their proposed legislation. Specifically, the Tribal Council will be asking Senators Kyl and McCain to remove provisions related to the Navajo Generating Station and other items contained in the federal legislation .

“These provisions have nothing to do with our settlement,” explained Chairman Shingoitewa. “Therefore, we are asking Senators Kyl and McCain to remove them from the settlement legislation.”

The Hopi Tribe also will seek support for solutions to address water contamination at Moenkopi, First Mesa, and Keams Canyon. “These are important outstanding issues,” said Councilman Mase. “We aren’t waiting for the proposed Hopi Groundwater Project to get them resolved.”

Finally, if the proposed settlement is enacted, the Hopi Tribe will pursue its claims to mainstem Colorado River water to ensure a permanent homeland for the Tribe. “Our claims to water from the mainstem Colorado River are not affected by this settlement,” explained Councilman Mase. “We will pursue these once the Little Colorado River settlement is ratified by Congress.”

For more information about the settlement, visit the Hopi Tribe's website at <http://www.hopi-nsn.gov/>, or call the Office of Chairman, at (928) 734-3106.

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