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Navajo Nation and State of Utah reach another water rights milestone

SALT LAKE CITY — The State of Utah and the Navajo Nation are celebrating the finalization of a landmark water rights agreement.

On Jan. 31, 2025, the state confirmed and quantified water rights – totalling 81,500 acre-feet per year – now belong to the Navajo Nation in Utah.

A formal ceremony will be held on Feb. 19, 2025 at 1 p.m., in the Utah State Capitol's Gold Room.

“The Navajo people's history in the San Juan River area stretches back more than 400 years, and they still call that area ‘home,’” Lt. Gov Deidre Henderson said. “This latest accomplishment grants water rights autonomy and ownership to the Tribe, and it allows them to pursue the additional funding they need to build a stronger community.”

Henderson will speak to commemorate the signing of the “*Interlocutory Decree on the Navajo Nation Subdivision of the Southeastern Colorado River Water Rights General Adjudication*,” along with Utah State Engineer Teresa Wilhelmsen, Navajo Nation Council Members Shaandiin Parish and Herman Daniels, Jr., and Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources Joel Ferry.

This decree signifies the completion of a decades-long effort between the state and the Navajo Nation. It clarifies water rights and grants the Tribe its fully quantified and adjudicated federal reserved water rights – an accomplishment that is expected to markedly improve the lives of those who live in Utah Navajo territories.

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“Water is the foundation of our culture, tradition and identity as Navajo People,” said Crystalyne Curley, Speaker of the 25th Navajo Nation Council. “Our connection to the land and water is inseparable. For our Navajo-Utah residents, securing our water rights is essential in protecting our way of life. This agreement is not just a legal victory; it is a reaffirmation of our sovereignty and our right to care for the resources that sustain us. We thank the state of Utah and its Division of Water Rights for recognizing our sovereignty and quantifying water rights that will help to empower our people.”

The Decree also gives administrative authority to the Tribe and protects reserved water rights in perpetuity.

“Three years ago, we signed the Utah-Navajo Nation Water right Settlement Agreement. It was a meaningful step in the right direction, but a lot of technical and administrative work still needed to be done,” said Utah State Engineer and Division of Water Rights Director Teresa Wilhelmsen. “I’m grateful to our adjudication team that carefully and fairly completed this adjudication. Every action taken moves toward a better future for Navajo-Utah residents. And it’s been a privilege and an honor to complete this historic effort with them.”

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The [Utah Division of Water Rights](#) is a Utah State Government agency within the [Department of Natural Resources](#). The division administers the measurement, appropriation, apportionment and distribution of the state's valuable water resources. The division operates under the direction of the Utah State Engineer.

