



# Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project Newsletter

4th Quarter, July 2022

## The Story of the Cutter Lateral Waterline as told by Leonard Tsosie

Leonard Tsosie, Executive Staff Assistant, Office of the President and Vice President of the Navajo Nation

My name is Leonard Tsosie, I grew up in the community of Whitehorse Lake, New Mexico. Like many Navajos, my family had no water or indoor bathrooms at home, except at the kindergarten school. Water was needed for my family and our livestock, and we had to get water from a hand-pumped well, a windmill, an earth dam and snow drifts. After going to college at the University of New Mexico, I came back to help my community, and was put on a community planning committee where I realized that Whitehorse Lake Chapter needed water for its socio-economic development.

After graduating from law school in 1992, I was elected to the New Mexico State Senate from District 22 and began to consider the infrastructure development for the 11 Navajo Chapters that I was representing. I began to find funding for the Whitehorse Lake water project and my office helped to fund two water drilling projects, but disappointingly, no major source of water was discovered.

Navajo people pray early in the morning for blessings. These blessings brought news on April 19, 2005, that the State of New Mexico executed a settlement agreement to resolve the claims of the Navajo Nation for use of waters in the San Juan River Basin in northwestern New Mexico. During the discussions on the water settlement, no water project was proposed for the Chaco area which I continued to represent as a state senator, and I pled with the Navajo Nation to support a water project for that area. After some tough conversations and engineering assistance from a young water engineer, Andrew Robertson, the Cutter Lateral waterline was developed. Navajo Nation's lawyer Stanley Pollack began to impress upon Congress to resolve the water case, and New Mexico was fortunate to have Senator Jeff Bingaman and Senator Pete Domenici to push for the settlement in Congress. Mr. Pollack's effort led to a signing ceremony between Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley and U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

In 2007, Governor Richardson declared New Mexico's priority as the "Year of the Water." He invited me to a press conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico where we announced projects, including \$15.3 million for the Eastern Navajo Water Project. This allowed for serious planning and soon after, previously isolated water lines in Torreon, Ojo Encino, Whitehorse Lake, Counselor, Nageezi, Huerfano and Burnham communities were being interconnected.

Later, I was sworn-in as a Navajo Nation Council Delegate in 2007 representing eight Navajo Chapters, and I continued to push for the completion of the Cutter Lateral. Pueblo Pintado President and Navajo Code Talker, Frank C. Willetto, at a White House Ceremony to recognize the Navajo Code Talkers, shook the hand of President Obama and asked "Mr. President, we are working on a big water project in New Mexico, and we need your help." Later when signing the federal legislation, President Obama stated "Because of this legislation, Frank Willetto, along with 80,000 Navajo people, will have access to clean running water for the very first time." On March 30, 2009, President Obama signed federal legislation authorizing and providing funding for the Navajo Nation Water Rights settlement, and a revised settlement agreement was executed December 17, 2010.

As a result, major funding was given to the Bureau of Reclamation to design and construct waterlines, for not only the benefit of Navajo people, but the city of Gallup and the Jicarilla Apache. I have always been thankful to Stanley Pollack, Andrew Robertson, Frank C. Willetto, Governor Bill Richardson for their thoughts, resolve, skills and actions to bring water to the Cutter Lateral area. I got to witness Stanley Pollack's zealous legal representation of the Navajo Nation water rights case at the Aztec courthouse and thought of him as a true "Navajo Leader" who has brought thousands of acre-feet of water to Navajo land.

It is humbling to realize that after 40 years of my initial introduction to the water need in Whitehorse Lake, a waterline project extending over 90 miles, rising about 1000 feet high and costing about \$145 million dollars has been completed. And, with the teachings, blessings and prayers of the Navajo people, I was able to help. Along the way, I met good friends and workers to help. I am grateful to have been part of the Cutter Lateral project and seeing this blessing completed.



BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

If you would like to learn more, visit our website at <https://www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/navajo-gallup/>.



## Navajo Code Talkers Museum Board signs NGWSP Reach 12.2 Water Transmission Pipeline Right-of-Way

By Ryan Seamus Royer, Civil Engineer and Jim E. Formea, Realty Specialist, Bureau of Reclamation

On Friday April 22, after more than nine years of coordination and negotiations, the Navajo Code Talkers Museum (NCTM) board approved a right-of-way contract for installation of a 24-inch water transmission pipeline, granting Reclamation the ability to construct the Reach 12.2 pipeline across the NCTM property east of Tse Bonito. The Reach 12.1 and 12.2 pipeline, also named the Navajo Code Talkers Sublateral as a tribute to our heroes, is a part of the NGWSP and will provide a consistent supply of clean, potable drinking water to the Navajo people who live and work in the surrounding



Front row: Navajo Code Talkers Samuel Sandoval and Peter MacDonald Sr.

area, including the Window Rock/Ft. Defiance communities.

In addition, Reclamation and the NCTM board also signed an agreement for the installation of a tee connection on Reach 12.2 and

additional infrastructure which will provide project drinking water to the future NCTM. Reclamation anticipates construction for this section of the NGWSP to start in late 2022, with water delivery scheduled for 2028--after the completion and commissioning of the San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant and associated pipeline and pumping plants.

It is with great pride and honor that Reclamation was able to partner with the NCTM to help bring water to Navajo communities and the future Code Talkers Museum. Ahéhee Code Talkers, and ahéhee NCTM!

## Cutter Lateral Partners Celebrate Cutter Lateral Completion and Transfer of Operation Maintenance and Replacement Responsibilities to Navajo Nation and NTUA

By: Becky Begay, Navajo Outreach Coordinator and Bart Deming, Construction Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation



On a hot, breezy, sunny day June 9, the Navajo Nation and the Bureau of Reclamation welcomed the U.S. Department of Interior's Assistant Secretary for Water & Science Tanya Trujillo, New Mexico Congresswoman Theresa Leger-Fernandez, and representatives from Cutter Lateral Chapter Officials, the State of New Mexico, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and City of Gallup to Dzilh-Na-O'Dith-Hle, New Mexico to celebrate the completion of the Cutter Lateral and transfer of operation, maintenance and replacement (OM & R)

responsibilities for Reclamation-owned Reaches 22a, 22b, and the Cutter Lateral Water Treatment Plant to the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority. NTUA already owns and operates the Cutter Lateral reaches south of the water treatment plant.

"I want to especially thank the members of the Navajo nation who have worked on this project for many many years. It has always been important to remember that our goal is to bring real water to real people in real time, and this project today is a prime example of how we've been able to do that," said Trujillo.

The significant event highlighted the completion of the first half of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project with the Cutter Lateral. The Cutter Lateral was completed in October 2020 and has been providing reliable and clean drinking water to eight of the eastern Navajo Nation communities: Counselor Chapter, Pueblo Pintado Chapter, Burnham Chapter, Ojo Encino Chapter, Huerfano Chapter, Torreon/Star Lake Chapter, Whitehorse Lake Chapter, and Nageezi Chapter, and later this year to the Jicarilla Apache Nation. The celebratory event acknowledged the hard work and collaborative partnership between the Navajo Nation and Navajo Chapters, Reclamation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, NTUA, Jacobs, Souder Miller & Associates, and Navajo Engineering Construction Authority in making water deliveries to indigenous communities a reality.



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