NAVAJO-GALLUP WATER SUPPLY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Summer 2025

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Project Construction Committee (PCC)
Location: El Morro Events Center, 210 S. Second St., Gallup, NM 87301
Oct. 30, 2025
9 a.m. - 12 p.m.
To participate virtually, please contact jacree@usbr.gov
Ph. 505-324-5504

GET IN TOUCH

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Delivering Hope: Navajo-Gallup Water Project celebrates steps towards completion

Ceremony participants and leaders, including New Mexico Governor's Water Policy Advisor Tanya Trujillo, Navajo Nation Council Delegate Helena Nez Begay, Navajo Nation Delegate Rickie Nez, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren, Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley, Reclamation Acting Commissioner David Palumbo, Upper Colorado Regional Director Wayne Pullan, Jacobs' Executive Vice President of Design-Build Operations Greg Fischer, FCCO Project Engineer and Manager Bart Deming, and Navajo Chapter Official, participate in the official groundbreaking using golden shovels emblazoned with the NGWSP logo. Shiprock mountain is seen in the distant background. Reclamation photo Jenny Erickson

By Jenny Erickson
Upper Colorado Basin Public Affairs

Spanning 7,800 square miles and carrying an estimated cost of $2.2 billion, the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project stands as the Bureau of Reclamation's largest dollar project designed and built by the agency. Since the initial groundbreaking in June 2012, the project has made steady and meaningful progress. In April, this progress was marked with a Navajo blessing ceremony and groundbreaking event for the San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant—one of the project's most critical components.

The ceremony not only celebrated the start of construction on the largest feature of the project but also honored the enduring partnership between the Navajo Nation and Reclamation. Once complete, the water treatment plant will play a central role in delivering clean, dependable water to the Navajo Nation and the City of Gallup.

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Delivering Hope cont.

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"Today marks a historic milestone for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project as we break ground on the San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant that will deliver vital drinking water for the Navajo people and the City of Gallup," said Reclamation Acting Commissioner David Palumbo. *"This monumental infrastructure initiative is not just about pipes and pumps; it is about the lifeblood for those we serve across the American West—water."*

Navajo medicine man Richard Anderson awaits the arrival of invited guests for the blessing ceremony to begin. During the ceremony, he and guests honored the ground with leadership songs and other traditions to bring harmony and good fortune to the new construction. Reclamation photo Jenny Erickson

The event started with a Navajo blessing ceremony, a tradition of the Navajo faith which asks permission to disturb the earth and for a blessing for the project before ground is broken. In addition to honoring the ground with leadership songs and other traditions to bring harmony and good fortune to the new construction, the ceremony also invited attendees to participate in the blessing and recognized the collaboration of the organizations who are working to bring water to these communities.

Many of the day's participants talked about the years of effort that have gone into the project, and how the Navajo people have waited so long to have a water supply in their communities.

"As I always like to say to our Navajo grandchildren, our time is now. I think we waited long enough; we waited too long. We have hauled water for too long," said Navajo Nation Speaker Crystalyne Curley during the event. *"I still haul 500 gallons of water weekly to the back of my home in Fishpoint. The imagery of a truck hauling water, some of our children still draw that, water in the blue barrels and in plastic water bottles because that is how they envision water. It will be good to see when that is a water faucet or a garden."*

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren addresses the audience during the groundbreaking ceremony and spoke of the opportunity and hope the project brings to Navajo communities. Reclamation photo Jenny Erickson

Navajo Nation President Dr. Buu Nygren also spoke at the event about opportunity, promise and a new chapter as this project brings hope to the story of the Navajo Nation.

"This project brings massive economic opportunity. Hundreds of jobs - engineers, pipe fitters, concrete crews, operators and welders; local contractors, Navajo vendors and suppliers will benefit from this long-term engagement in building this project," said President Nygren. *"This project will inject millions of dollars into the regional economy and much of it will stay local. That means food on the table, paychecks in pockets, shoes on little feet and pride in providing for our loved ones."*

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Delivering Hope cont.

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Digital rendering of the future San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant provided by Jacobs.

A view of Pumping Plant 3 in progress, showing the four air chambers within the building. Reclamation photo by Pablo Mena

Pipeline construction on the San Juan Lateral near Pumping Plant 3, showing the 42-inch discharge pipeline that will connect to Reach 4C. Reclamation photo by Pablo Mena

Last fall, Jacobs was awarded a $267 million design and build contract for the San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant. Funding for the project is split between two major sources: the Indian Water Rights Settlement Completion Fund, supported by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Reclamation Water Settlement Fund, established under the Northwestern New Mexico Rural Water Projects Act.

The water treatment plant's initial capacity is treatment of up to 18.8 million gallons of water per day to Safe Drinking Water Act standards, with the capability to treat up to 37.6 million gallons per day at full build-out. Additionally, the Navajo Nation has requested the ability to increase that plant capacity by an additional 7.3 mgd to 44.9 mgd to serve Navajo communities in northeast Arizona through a Contributed Funds Act request that the Nation will fund.

The contract also includes the commissioning and computer control integration of the entire San Juan Lateral system, and 12 months of operations and maintenance necessary to fully test the water treatment plant while making the initial water deliveries.

The overall Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project is now 70% complete with initial water deliveries from the San Jaun Lateral slated for late 2028 and final project completion by the end of 2029.

This project represents a significant collective effort—a true partnership between the Navajo Nation, the State of New Mexico, and the Department of the Interior. Each speaker at the groundbreaking event reminded us that this project is more than just building infrastructure, the goal is to shape a future where every person has access to safe and reliable water.

"[This project] means our people having what every American should expect: Clean reliable water at home," said President Nygren. "It will do more than just deliver water, it will deliver hope."

Faces of NGWSP—Meet Kanani Tapaha

Hello, my name is Kanani Tapaha. I am born into the Many Goats clan and born for the Folding Arms clan. My maternal grandfather's clan is the Water's Edge clan and my paternal grandfather's clan is the Mexican Clan. I am from Teec Nos Pos, Arizona, but my family lives in Kirtland, New Mexico.

I graduated with my bachelor's in civil engineering from the University of New Mexico, and I have been in the construction industry for three years. I started at the City of Farmington as a Project Manager, where I oversaw water pipeline installations and sewer repairs. I then joined Jacobs, working with their Operations and Maintenance team as an authorized service agreement (ASA) manager. In that role, I primarily managed projects involving water distribution pump stations and wastewater lift stations, along with some pipeline work.

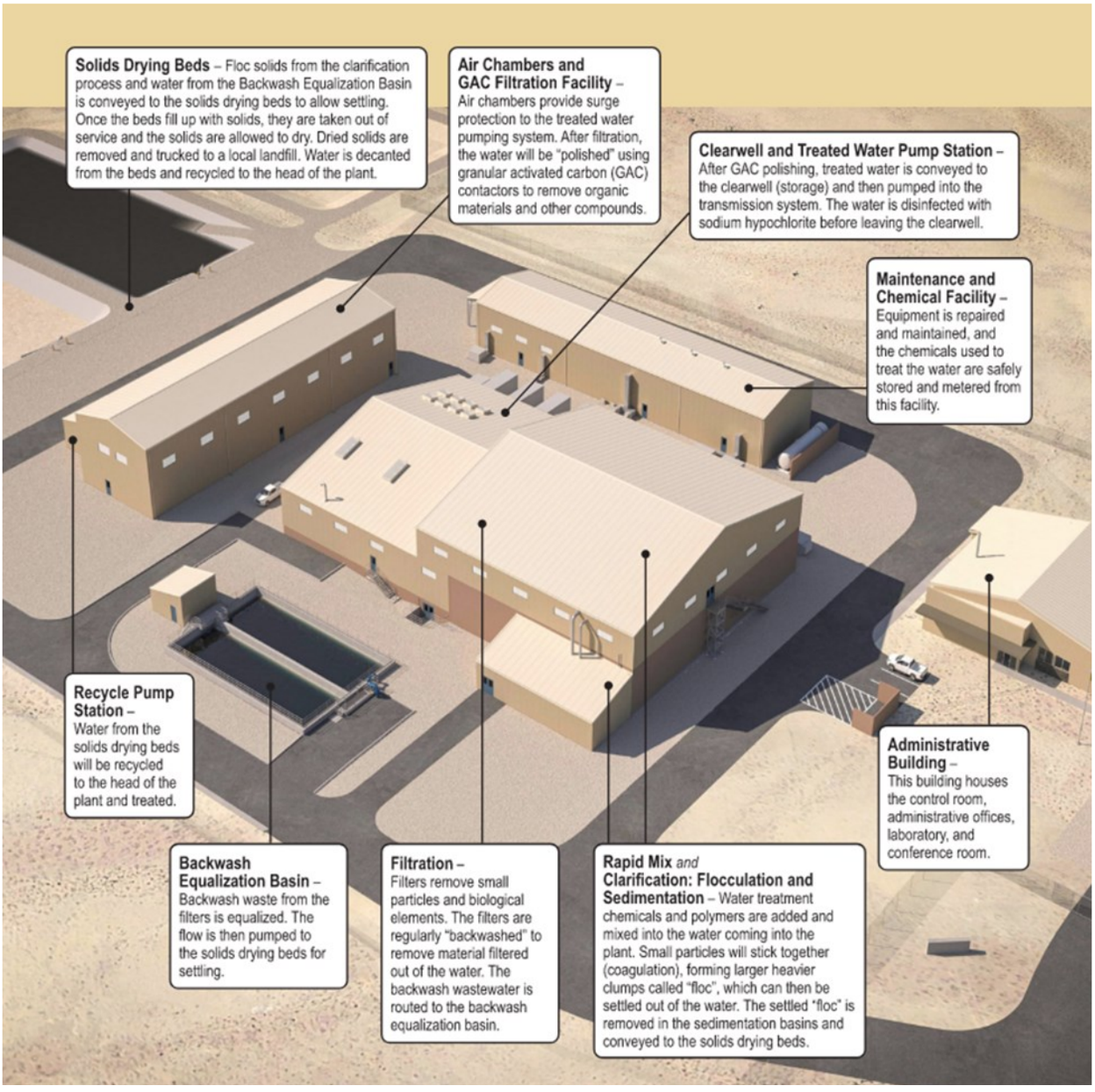
I learned about an opportunity to join Jacobs' design-build team as a project engineer for the San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant. I saw it as a meaningful next step and accepted the role. Now, I coordinate with vendors and subcontractors and manage critical project documentation.

Growing up, I was always told to go to school and come back to help our communities. This project felt like the perfect way to do just that – contributing to something that will benefit our local chapters and our people for generations to come. It also presented an opportunity to expand my knowledge and continue building a strong foundation in my career. Being a part of this project is more than just work – it's a way to invest in the future of our Diné people.

How its going:
Check out the excavation progress for the San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant.

Treating and Delivering Safe Water: The San Juan Lateral WTP

A modern facility designed to meet today's needs and tomorrow's demands



By Jacobs Construction

SJLWTP Treatment Process

The San Juan Lateral Water Treatment Plant has been designed to treat and deliver up to 18.8 million gallons per day (mgd) of water coming from the San Juan River via the Frank Chee Willeto Reservoir. The plant can be expanded to 37.6 mgd (Phase 2) to meet future demands authorized in the Northwest New Mexico Rural Water Projects Act for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project. Additionally, the Navajo Nation has requested the ability to increase that plant capacity by an additional 7.3 mgd to 44.9 mgd to serve Navajo communities in northeast Arizona through a Contributed Funds Act request that the Nation will fund. The water treatment process is designed to remove inorganic, organic, and microbiological contaminants in accordance with Federal Safe Drinking Water Act regulations for the protection of public health. The treatment process is considered a conventional treatment process, very similar to the NGWSP's Cutter Lateral Water Treatment Plant, and includes the following steps:

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Safe Water cont.

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Water Treatment

Clarification: This is the first step in cleaning the water. A special chemical called a coagulant is added to the water to help tiny particles stick together (coagulation). These clumps, called floc, become heavy and sink to the bottom (flocculation). The settled floc is then removed (sedimentation) and sent to drying beds.

Filtration: Next, the water passes through sand and granular activated carbon media filters to catch any small particles that are still left. These filters collect dirt over time and are regularly cleaned through a process called backwashing. The waste from this process is also sent to the drying beds.

GAC Filtration (Granular Activated Carbon): The water goes through one more cleaning step using special carbon filters. This helps remove any leftover chemicals or organic materials necessary to meet the Safe Drinking Water Standards for disinfection by-products.

Treated Water Pump Station: Finally, the clean water is disinfected with a chlorine-based solution (sodium hypochlorite) and then pumped through the San Juan Lateral pipeline. From there, water is delivered to local communities through smaller pipelines at various locations along the way.

Solids Handling

Backwash Equalization Basin – Backwash waste from the filters is stored in an equalization basin before being pumped to the solids drying beds.

Solids Drying Beds – Settled "floc" and backwash water from the filters are conveyed to solids drying beds to allow settling. Once the beds fill up with solids, they are taken out of service and the solids allowed to dry. Dried solids are removed and trucked to a local landfill. Water is decanted from the beds or filtered through the beds and recycled to the head of the plant. There is very little water loss in the overall treatment process.

Support Facilities

Administration Facility – The administration facility houses the control room, administrative offices, water process laboratory, a conference room, and restrooms.

Maintenance and Chemical Facility – This building provides work and storage space for the staff to maintain equipment. The chemicals used to treat the water are safely stored and metered from this facility.

Stormwater Pond – Stormwater from the site is collected in the pond and seeps back into the ground over time.

Building pathways for waterways:
The right-of-way process for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project

By Malcolm Begay

As part of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, surveyors, realty specialists, civil engineers, archaeologists, and environmental specialists work together to acquire easements or Right-of-Way (ROW) from underlying landowners for construction and the future operation and maintenance of the facilities. Utilities and facilities, such as the pipeline and pumping plants in the NGWSP are legally required to have ROW for access and for construction, operation, and maintenance. The process for acquiring ROW for the NGWSP consists of many steps that must take place prior to receiving an approved ROW.

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Building pathways cont.

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Depending on the landowner type, the federal requirements for ROW acquisition involve performing land surveys and environmental, cultural, and biological surveys/ studies, and on private land, appraisals. Further complicating the ROW acquisition process is the different type of land ownership the NGWSP crosses along its route between the San Juan River and downstream communities. For example, the NGWSP Reach 2 pipeline and Pumping Plant 1 is located on federal, state, Tribal, and private lands.

Survey Instrument near Reaches 4A and 4B. Photo by Matthew Tom

Whenever a project location and suitable area has been determined for its facilities, like a pipeline, pump house, or water treatment plant, the process for obtaining ROW can start. Most of the NGWSP is on Navajo Nation Tribal Trust Land, which needs approval from two jurisdictions: the Navajo Nation who grants consent to the use of its lands and Bureau of Indian Affairs who grants the ROW). The Navajo Nation and BIA each require unique ROW packages be prepared by anyone acquiring ROW on Tribal Trust Land. Currently Reclamation has applied for ROW to the Navajo Nation for the Reaches 2-3 pipeline and Pumping Plant 1 both located on Tribal trust land.

Cadastral survey monument near the NGWSP pipeline alignment Photo by Ben Matchers

What is the process? Before a Right-of-Way (ROW) application can be submitted, surveyors collect project details—such as the planned pipeline path or pump house location—to see which properties will be affected. To figure out who owns the land, surveyors and realty specialists review public records like maps, land patents, and ownership documents. Once ownership and boundaries are confirmed, surveyors visit the site to locate property markers and complete a survey. Engineers and realty staff then use this survey to create a map, called a ROW plat, which becomes part of the application package. For the NGWSP, most of this process involves Tribal Trust Land.

Securing Rights-of-Way is a complex but essential part of building the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project. By carefully coordinating with landowners, Tribes, federal and state agencies, and local communities, Reclamation ensures that the project can move forward while respecting cultural, environmental, and legal requirements. Each completed ROW brings the project one step closer to delivering a reliable and sustainable water supply to the Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, and surrounding communities for generations to come.

The big lift

The Reaches 4A and 4B contractor, SJ Louis Construction, and their subcontractor Atlas Trenchless recently completed a Horizontal Directional Drill and pipe pullback on Reach 4B near Shiprock, New Mexico. This type of pullback is used to install a pipeline underground without trenching and typically used in terrain where ground disturbance has to be limited, such as at a river or arroyo crossing. This pipe arrived in 31 sections and was welded and a protective coating was applied on site over the course of 45 days. Once the entire 1,240 feet of pipe was connected, it was time to install the pipe using the previously drilled and reamed horizontal directional drill.

How did they do that?

First a small-diameter hole is drilled along a pre-planned path using the directional drill. The pilot hole is gradually enlarged with reamers to accommodate the final pipe diameter, which in this case is 42”. Then the prefabricated pipeline section is attached to the reamer or swivel and pulled back through the hole from the exit point to the drill rig. This pipe is heavy- each 40-foot-long section weighs over 10,000 lbs, so cranes are used to lift and maneuver it so that it can be fed underground and through the hole. This maneuver used seven cranes, three excavators and took 12 hours to complete. Once the San Juan Lateral is operational in early 2029, the Reach 4B pipeline will be used to deliver drinking water to downstream Navajo and City of Gallup communities along the Highway 491 corridor, the Beacon Bisti N9 Lateral, the Window Rock Lateral and around the Gallup Regional System in McKinley County.

Photos by Rod Watkins