

RESOLUTION
of the
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL
in support of
INDIAN WATER RIGHTS SETTLEMENTS
Oklahoma City, OK
October 17, 2008

WHEREAS, the Western States Water Council, an organization of eighteen western states, and adjunct to the Western Governors' Association has consistently supported negotiated settlement of Indian water rights disputes; and

WHEREAS, the public interest and sound public policy require the resolution of Indian water rights claims in a manner that is least disruptive to existing uses of water; and

WHEREAS, negotiated quantification of Indian water rights claims is a highly desirable process which can achieve quantifications fairly, efficiently, and with the least cost; and

WHEREAS, the advantages of negotiated settlements include: (i) the ability to be flexible and to tailor solutions to the unique circumstances of each situation; (ii) the ability to promote conservation and sound water management practices; and (iii) the ability to establish the basis for cooperative partnerships between Indian and non-Indian communities; and

WHEREAS, the successful resolution of certain claims may require "physical solutions," such as development of federal water projects and improved water delivery and application techniques; and

WHEREAS, the United States has developed many major water projects that compete for use of waters claimed by Indians and non-Indians, and has a responsibility to both to assist in resolving such conflicts; and

WHEREAS, the settlement of Native American water claims, and land claims, is one of the most important aspects of the United States' trust obligation to Native Americans and is of vital importance to the country as a whole; and

WHEREAS, current budgetary policy makes it difficult for the Administration, the states and the tribes to negotiate settlements knowing that the settlements may not be funded because funding must be offset by a corresponding reduction in some other tribe or essential Interior Department program.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Western States Water Council reiterates its support for the policy of encouraging negotiated settlements of Indian water rights disputes as the best solution to a critical problem that affects almost all of the Western States; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Western States Water Council urges the Administration to support its stated policy in favor of Indian land and water settlements with a strong fiscal commitment for meaningful federal contributions to these settlements that recognizes the trust obligations of the United States government; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress should explore opportunities to provide funding for the Bureau of Reclamation to undertake project construction related to settlements from revenues accruing to the Reclamation Fund, recognizing the existence of other legitimate needs that may be financed by these reserves.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that steps be taken to change current budgetary policy to ensure that any land or water settlement, once authorized by the Congress and approved by the President, will be funded without a corresponding offset to some other tribe or essential Interior Department program.

Position No. 310

(See also Nos. 250 and 275)
Originally adopted March 21, 2003
Revised and reaffirmed Mar 29, 2006

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