

Thursday, January 21, 2010

New Mexico Water Settlements Pass U.S. House



Today, two water settlements sponsored by Rep. **Ben Ray Luján** -- the Taos Pueblo Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2009 (**H.R. 3254**) and the Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act of 2009 (**H.R. 3342**) -- passed the U.S. House of Representatives. The bills resolve long-standing water cases in New Mexico. According to a statement released by Luján's office, the Taos Pueblo Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2009 passed by a vote of 254 to 158. The Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act of 2009 passed by a vote of 249 to 153.

“These settlements have taken many years to get where they are today,” Luján said in a written statement. “They have developed over the last two Congresses and much work has gone into the careful consideration of these bills. We now have an opportunity to authorize these settlements, effectively protecting water resources, advancing the implementation of effective water management, and ensuring future access to water resources for all Northern New Mexico residents located in the areas encompassed by these settlements.”

U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall have gained support for the same measures from a key Senate panel -- the Indian Affairs Committee -- and are working toward securing a vote in that chamber in the coming months.

“It’s great news that the House has taken this action. These settlements will bring an end to some of the longest-standing court cases in the country, and in doing so provide water certainty for thousands of New Mexicans. With the House of Representatives vote behind us, we can now build momentum for gaining passage in the Senate as well,” **Senator Bingaman** said.

“After decades of work and negotiation, passage of these two settlements by the House brings us an important step closer to the resolution of decades-old water rights claims for five tribes along the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico,” **Senator Udall** said. “I applaud Rep. Luján for his leadership in shepherding this critical legislation through the House. Now it is the Senate’s turn to act, and I look forward to working with Senator Bingaman and our Senate colleagues to approve these agreements, which are mutually beneficial to all water users in the Taos and Pojoaque valleys.”

For decades, the people of New Mexico have worked to settle these water claims which have been in court since the 1960s. It has taken over 40 years for these bills to come to fruition, and they address important issues from a water management and conservation perspective. Similar legislation was introduced in the 110th Congress and was subject to legislative hearings in both the House and the Senate. Early in the 111th Congress, both Senators Bingaman and Udall introduced the Taos Pueblo Indian Water Rights Settlement Act (S. 965) and the Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act (S.1105) in the Senate with important revisions that have improved both settlements.

Without action on these settlements, the people of the region would face ongoing litigation and uncertain water resources for years to come.

The Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act of 2009 is supported by the State of New Mexico, the Santa Fe County Commission, the Rio Pojoaque Acequia and Water Well Association, the Rio de Tesuque Acequia Association, various individual water users in the Nambe-Pojoaque-Tesuque basin, and the Pueblos of San Ildefonso, Nambe, Pojoaque and Tesuque.

The Taos Pueblo Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2009 is supported by the State of New Mexico, Taos Pueblo, the Rio de Tesuque Acequia Association, the Taos Valley Acequia Association, The Town of Taos, and 12 Taos Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association in the area.