

## THE INDIAN WATER WORKING GROUP

The Indian Water Working Group (IWWG) is an informal affiliation of tribal, federal and state entities, non-governmental organizations, professionals and academic experts involved with tribal water rights and water resource issues in Indian Country. Formed in 2010, participants include the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Utton Transboundary Resources Center, Sandia National Laboratories, and the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, among others.

### Mission of the IWWG

The mission of the IWWG is to advance the resolution of Indian water rights through the identification of the legal, financial, political, cultural and technological challenges that exist in the current water rights adjudication paradigm, to develop solutions to overcome these barriers, and to act as a conduit for this information to Tribes, federal agencies, state governments and local communities.

### Activities of the IWWG

#### National Meeting on Indian Water Rights

In November of 2010, the IWWG convened a meeting at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico of tribal, federal and state leaders, professionals and experts in the field of Indian water rights to discuss the challenges, barriers and opportunities for resolving tribal water rights. Representatives from NARF, NCAI, the Department of Interior, the Western States Water Council, and others also attended. The goals of the meeting were to discuss:

- The current and future state of Indian water rights resolution
- Barriers to, and opportunities for, resolving Indian water rights issues
- The possibility of developing a foundation and framework for a collaborative, intergovernmental and nongovernmental water rights working group
- Provide direction for the group's work, including an inclusive approach to developing tools and strategies (both technical and political) to facilitate water rights resolution.
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Participants identified six critical areas in need of further development to improve the resolution of Indian water rights.

1. **Resources:** Identifying new and tapping into existing resources to make funds available to gather data critical to watershed planning, to facilitate and pay for professional services, to support tribal water (both quantity and quality) management activities, and to facilitate litigation, settlement negotiation and other conflict resolution processes, and for the implementation of settlements.
2. **Capacity Building:** Helping tribes and partner communities and states gain knowledge and access to resources to better support resolution efforts.
3. **Information and Technology Transfers:** Learning from other communities' and states' experiences and sharing information to guide new efforts and develop best practices.

4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Effectively engaging all stakeholders a meaningful processes with a level playing fields through public education and outreach;
5. **Thinking Outside the Box:** Thinking creatively about the future of water resource shortages, development, climate change, and increasingly scarce economic resources and what kinds of new strategies for managing water conflicts can be developed.
6. **Creating More Synergies:** Building on the strengths of existing organizational efforts by creating networks of organizations whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

### White Paper - Water in Indian Country: Challenges and Opportunities

The IWWG is developing a white paper on the state of water in Indian Country. The paper will address the challenges and opportunities facing Tribes relative to the interaction between water quality, ecosystem and fisheries, infrastructure, energy development, climate change and the quantification and resolution of Indian water rights

### **Plans and Goals for the Future**

*Short Term:* The IWWG will complete the white paper on the key issues regarding water in Indian Country.

*Near Term:* The IWWG will look for guidance from tribal, state and federal leaders to assist with the identification of projects and initiatives, which address critical needs, priorities and opportunities for improving the resolution of Indian water rights.

*Long Term:* Coordinate with tribal, federal and state governments and non-governmental organizations to communicate and publish findings, reports and projects that the IWWG produces.

### **Joining the IWWG**

The IWWG seeks members with expertise in any facet of Indian water rights, including those with experience in political, economic and cultural issues, community outreach, engineering and the quantification of water rights.

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