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June 4, 2025

Tribe, Water Districts Reach Water Rights Settlement

Agreement identifies plans for future water management and supply

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) and Desert Water Agency (DWA) have reached an agreement to settle two long-standing water rights lawsuits that enhances certainty and stability over the future of water management and increases supply reliability for Coachella Valley residents.

“The agreement affirms the Tribe’s right to manage, regulate, and govern the use of the Tribal Water Right in the Coachella Valley, and at the same time will provide a real benefit to the entire Coachella Valley,” says Tribal Chairman Reid D. Milanovich. “We all rolled up our sleeves and worked together to come to an agreement that recognizes the Tribe’s water rights and sovereignty, considers the unique jurisdictional issues of our checkerboard reservation, and respects our traditional and cultural uses for our tribal community. It also ensures that Coachella Valley residents from now and into the distant future can be assured that the water management of this basin is done jointly with a continued focus on water sustainability and reliability for all. The Tribe appreciates and recognizes the long-standing relationship with, and continued support of, Riverside County’s Fourth District Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, and looks forward to collaborating on the implementation of the water settlement.”

“Desert Water Agency customers can be certain this agreement will not affect our ability to provide safe and reliable water. They will continue to receive dedicated customer service and high-quality water. This settlement respects the Tribe’s sovereign rights to help manage and regulate water within a portion of our vast aquifer. Together, we will ensure the reliability and

sustainability of our region’s water supply,” says Paul Ortega, Desert Water Agency Board President.

“The settlement with the Tribe will benefit the Coachella Valley for years to come as it brings essential collaboration on local water resources and recognizes Tribal Water Rights,” says John Powell Jr, Coachella Valley Water District Board President. “For over a century, CVWD has proudly served our community with vital water services, guided by responsible groundwater management and a diversified water portfolio that supports our local economy. We are committed to continuing to serve our customers and future generations, ensuring our region thrives for decades ahead.”

The Tribe and water districts will next jointly seek legislation from Congress to approve the settlement and authorize up to \$500 million in federal funding for water projects that would improve the sustainability of the Indio Subbasin. The funds would support a range of efforts, including improving water infrastructure and supplies, supporting groundwater replenishment, and advancing water management within the Indio Subbasin and under the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation.

For more information: <https://www.aguacaliente.org/watersettlement>

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