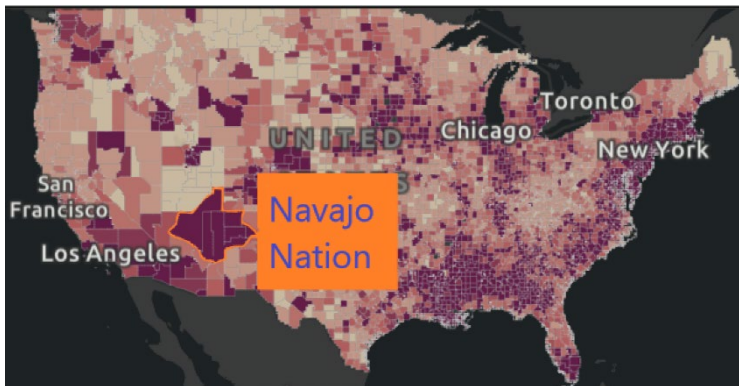


WATER JUSTICE FOR THE NAVAJO NATION

JUNE 2020 FACTSHEET

Clean Water for the Navajo People: The Fierce Urgency of Now

The tragic toll of the coronavirus pandemic on the Navajo Nation underscores the fierce urgent need for Navajo families to have clean water **NOW, NOT AT SOME POINT IN THE DISTANT FUTURE**. The Navajo Nation is experiencing the worst outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States. In the three months since COVID-19 first appeared on the reservation, the Indian Health Services has confirmed about 6700 cases and 319 deaths (as of 6/16/20). The map below graphically illustrates the COVID-19 crisis on the Navajo Nation. It shows confirmed cases per 100k population in the US, coloring counties with the highest infection rates in dark crimson. **See the huge splotch of dark crimson in the area of the Navajo Nation!**



COVID-19 Infection rate per 100,000 people (6/16/20).

The dark crimson areas are grossly higher than the average US infection rate: about 36 standard deviations above the mean. Johns Hopkins University. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu>

The government should allocate resources for critical human needs like drinking water to meet the most pressing needs first. If so, the Navajo people deserve to be first in line.

About 1/3 of Navajo families lack safe tap water. In the midst of a viral pandemic, lack of clean water sharply increases the chance of contracting a COVID-19 infection. Handwashing is extremely difficult for those who must haul water from distant water points on a daily basis. *“If you’re having to haul water from a well many miles down a dirt road, and bring it back to water the animals, and also use it for washing and cooking and things like that, it’s really hard to wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.”* Social distancing is also impossible when Navajo families end up “jammed together” in vehicles to obtain food and water from the limited community water points and grocery stores on the reservation.

CREATION JUSTICE MINISTRIES
info@creationjustice.org
110 Maryland Ave. NE #203
Washington, DC 20002

**WATER JUSTICE FOR THE NAVAJO PEOPLE
REQUIRES THAT NO FAMILY BE LEFT BEHIND --
ALL DESERVE SAFE, AFFORDABLE TAP WATER**



The Navajo understand WATER IS LIFE!



Navajo lands are located in the Four Corners area of the US,

where Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona come together. The Navajo Nation occupies about 27,000 square miles, about the size of West Virginia. The northern and western boundaries of Navajo lands are roughly marked by its rivers, the San Juan River in NM and Utah, the Colorado River in Utah and Arizona, and the Little Colorado River in Arizona. Colorado does not include any Navajo lands because the SW corner of Colorado has two reservations set aside for the Ute tribe. Of the 300,000 enrolled tribal members, 180,000 live on reservation. The 40% of Navajo who live off reservation leave in search of jobs and modern amenities such as electricity, water, and sewer.

See the map on the opposite page.

FAST FACTS ABOUT THE NAVAJO NATION (Pre-pandemic)

- * Median Household Income: \$20,005
- * Unemployment: 42%
- * Poverty: 43% lives below the poverty rate, (in 2020, \$26,200 for a family of four); about 20% suffer extreme poverty (\$13,100 for a family of four).
- * Education (for ages 25+): 56% have a high school diploma; 7% have a college degree

The Navajo have struggled for decades to secure their water rights and the water projects necessary to turn those water rights into "wet water."

They secured those rights through deals with surrounding states and the US government that allow other existing water users to use large amounts of Navajo water in exchange for water projects or money necessary to construct Navajo water distribution systems including tanks and water lines. Yet, the US has implemented in a halting manner – and wet water is promised *someday* – but TOO LATE for those who have suffered and died from COVID-19. The question now is will those families have safe tap water when the second wave comes or when the next pandemic arrives. Water hauling is expensive, grueling, and energy draining, making vulnerable elders even more vulnerable.

Navajo drinking water situation

About 50,000 to 70,000 Navajo people rely on water hauling from community water points and spend about \$170 per 1000 gallons for their drinking water. The same amount of water in Portland OR would cost \$7.14. At times, water haulers end up using non-potable livestock water for drinking. Those with private wells struggle with contamination. Even those with tap water face escalating prices and diminishing service because of the deterioration of aging infrastructure. The Navajo Nation draws most drinking water from wells and the aquifers used are not recharging at the rate of use.

COLORADO RIVER

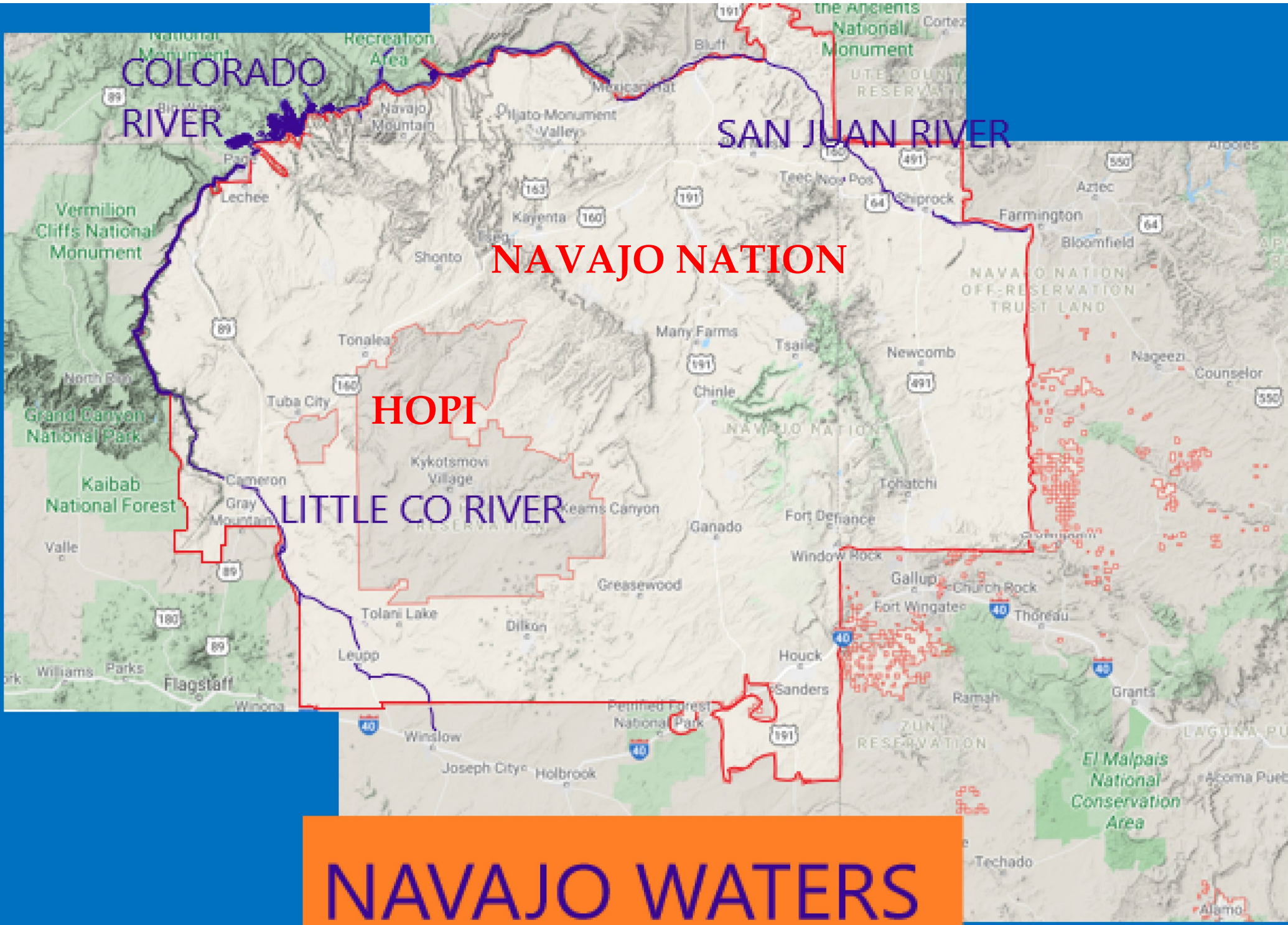
SAN JUAN RIVER

NAVAJO NATION

HOPI

LITTLE CO RIVER

NAVAJO WATERS



THE UNITED STATE GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NAVAJO DRINKING WATER PROBLEM

It forcibly removed the Navajo people from their homelands. It signed and then violated the 1868 treaty with the Navajo. It failed to uphold the trust duties it assumed for the health and welfare of the Navajo. It approved uranium mining that contaminated the drinking water. It deliberately withheld water projects that might benefit the Navajo to induce them to trade away their water rights. It has failed to realize the internationally recognized human right to clean water of the Navajo people.

“**SOMEDAY**” does not discharge the US government’s responsibilities to the Navajo people.

The Solution

With the combined resources now at their disposal, the Navajo almost have the financial resources to provide safe drinking water *someday* to most Navajo families. They will have the money promised in the Utah water rights settlement, the water projects promised in the NM water rights settlement, the improvements from EPA efforts to remedy uranium contamination, and the \$600 million that the Navajo forced the US to allocate from the CARES Act. When the Navajo can complete the necessary infrastructure is anyone’s guess. The endeavor requires effective management of a massive portfolio of infrastructure projects while negotiating a bewildering maze of red tape (along with Congressional control of the financial spigot for the promised NM projects).

The US should NOW provide an emergency solution for the families who haul water. We should give first priority to the families who will be left behind without tap water when the contemplated water projects are complete. We should give second priority to families who will only get tap water in the distant future (more than 5 years out). Let’s see who can get water to these families first!

Next steps for action

1. Enlist in the CJM Navajo water working group by emailing info@creationjustice.org.
2. Call your congressional representative and support immediate passage of S.1207, the Utah water rights settlement bill. When S. 1207 passes, call the White House to urge Trump to sign S. 1207.
3. Help develop and support federal legislation to bring clean water to all Navajo families on an emergency basis.
4. Support a permanent annual appropriation to the Navajo Nation for water infrastructure development, maintenance and replacement.