

Testimony of Lionel Haskie
Director of Operations – Public Law 638 and Government Relations
Navajo Agricultural Products Industry
to the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day
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Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Lionel Haskie and I serve as Director of Operations – Public Law 638 and Government Relations for the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry. On behalf of the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, referred to as NAPI, we thank you for allowing us to testify to the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives today. My testimony today will focus on the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) and the critical need for increased funding for Indian Irrigation Projects that continue to have increasing costs in the FY 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

In 1970, the Navajo Nation established NAPI to operate and manage the Navajo Nation’s industrial agricultural efforts as well as the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, referred to as the NIIP. The NIIP arises from Public Law 87-483, which was signed in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy. Public Law 87-483 authorized construction of 110,630 acres of farmland and the diversion of 508,000 acre-feet of water from the Navajo Reservoir to NIIP lands in exchange for the diversion of 110,000 acre-feet of water from the Navajo Nation’s claim in the San Juan Basin to the Rio Grande Basin.

NAPI, which is wholly owned by the Navajo Nation, has diligently served its dual roles since its inception. NAPI runs a successful farm that employs 300 people annually and an additional 350-375 seasonal workers during harvest, and which produces potatoes, wheat, beans, alfalfa, chili, organic watermelon, organic squash, sumac, corn, and other agricultural products. NAPI also continues to oversee and facilitate the continued operation of the NIIP. There are three (3) contracted farm operations on the NIIP that also employ 100 people annually and an additional 400-500 seasonal workers to grow chipper potatoes, pumpkins, and popcorn.

NAPI’s efforts are hindered by the federal government’s failure to meet its requirements under Public Law 87-483 and to provide necessary funding for NIIP operation and maintenance expenses as obligated by an existing Public Law 93-638 Indian Self Determination Act contract.

As noted, Public Law 87-483 required the federal government to construct and facilitate the use of 110,630 acres of farmland. The federal government has not fulfilled its obligations and approximately 30,000 acres of farmland remain undeveloped. Additionally, the federal government has not met its obligations concerning NIIP development and failed to provide necessary operation and maintenance costs.

In 2019, the Bureau of Reclamation estimated it would cost \$985 million for the United States to complete its Public Law 87-483 NIIP development obligations. Separately, an assessment

conducted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2016, solely regarding the NIIP operations and maintenance backlog, estimated over \$175 million in additional necessary remediation costs.

To continue to work towards meeting its outstanding obligations, the federal government must provide the below funding to allow Tribes to operate and maintain the Nation's Indian Irrigation Projects:

- Economic factors compounded by the existing federal funding backlog will drive NIIP's operations and maintenance costs to \$8.7 million for fiscal year 2025. We therefore request that the Natural Resources Management; Irrigation Operations & Maintenance funding be increased to \$25.5 million total in fiscal year 2025.
- Increasing funding for the WIIN Act, Public Law 114-322, Title III, Subtitle B, Irrigation Rehabilitation and Renovation for Indian Tribal Governments and their Economies to \$35 million annually.
- NAPI is ready to complete the development of a significant portion of the 30,000 acres of farmland and relevant infrastructure the federal government has yet to construct (specifically, block 9, stage 2 and 3 of the NIIP). To facilitate this development and to support the federal government in meeting its obligations under Public Law 87-483, we respectfully request that the Resources Management Construction Fund be increased to \$90 million in fiscal year 2025, and that \$30 million be specifically allocated for irrigation construction funding, and that the NIIP receive no less than \$12 million.

NAPI continues to be hindered in its operation and management of its agricultural efforts and the NIIP due to the federal government's continued failure to fulfill its obligations under Public Law 87-483 and Public Law 93-638. As a result, valuable Navajo Nation lands remains unfarmed, Navajo Nation water rights entitlements go unused, and NAPI is forced to cover continued federal government operations and maintenance funding short falls. Because the federal government has yet to meet its obligations under Public Law 87-483 for over 60 years, the Navajo Nation is unable to reap its full entitlements under the law and the NAPI farm is hindered in meeting its economic potential. The measures requested today will support the federal government in meeting its legal, trust, and moral obligations concerning the use and completion of the NIIP as well related farming operations. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.