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O'ODHAM NIA-WE-HEIED
Tohono O'odham

House Natural Resources Committee
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1904, Indian Water Rights Settlement Extension Act

*Response of Edward D. Manuel, Chairman, Tohono O'odham Nation
To Question for the Record Submitted by the Hon. Mike Levin
Member, House Natural Resources Committee*

Question: The American Southwest's 182 federally recognized tribes and tribal communities are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change and drought, and as your testimony mentions, climate change and drought have negatively impacted tribal water rights. How important is it that tribes have water security in times of drought? How will securing permanent funding to implement Indian water settlements help tribes like the Tohono O'odham Nation better adapt to a changing environment?

Response: Arizona currently is experiencing a more than 20-year drought, and these conditions persist across the southwest. The November 2018 National Climate Assessment shows that climate change has resulted in increased average annual temperatures on the Nation's reservation and reduced annual precipitation. This has been confirmed by monitoring done by the Nation. This drought, along with increasing temperatures and decreasing annual precipitation, reduce the recharge of our ground water aquifers, as well as the surface water, forage, and sources of food available for livestock and wildlife. Climate change also negatively impacts the availability of traditional foods that our members rely upon.

Relatedly, the Nation also is experiencing much more extreme weather than ever before, such as intense rain and severe thunderstorms, microbursts and strong winds (called *jevos*). While the annual average precipitation is lower and the rainstorms are fewer, there are shorter, more intense rain events throughout the year. Fifteen of our communities have been impacted by 50-year floods. This has led to the inundation and evacuation of communities, as well as increased stress on existing flood control infrastructure such as

dams and berms. In one location a berm broke as a result of the rain, and about three feet of water swept through the village. Another community got eight inches of rain in six hours. That community is located near a dam, which came very close to overflowing. Had it done so, it would have destroyed the village.

As mentioned in my testimony, these conditions also threaten reliable delivery of Central Arizona Project (CAP) water, which is derived from the Colorado River and which has provided a substitute water supply that is essential to mitigate the damage caused to the Nation by non-Indian reliance on groundwater. As the Committee knows all too well from the recent hearing on the Drought Contingency Plan, drought has raised the potential for serious and lasting shortages of Colorado River water, leading to increased pressure for groundwater pumping and threatening the stability of water delivery under the Nation's existing and future settlements.

A stable source of water settlement funding would greatly help to address all of these concerns. Such funding would allow floodplain mapping, protection, and mitigation, public water supply improvements and community water rate stabilization, groundwater monitoring and management, and better agriculture development. At a more fundamental level, rather than the current constant state of crisis, such funding would allow the Nation to sensibly and reliably plan for the future water resources needs – and the safety and security – of its people.