

EL RITO DITCH ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 158
El Rito, NM. 87530

July 1, 2024

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chair, House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515


The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Chair, Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife,
and Fisheries
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: H.R. 8685 *Ohkay Owingeh Rio Chama Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024*
Request for hearing

Dear Chairmen Westerman and Bentz:

I am writing on behalf of the El Rito Ditch Association, an association of the eleven community acequias located near the Village of El Rito in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico, in regard to H.R.8685. This legislation would authorize and approve the Ohkay Owingeh Rio Chama Water rights Settlement Agreement, entered into by the major water users of the Rio Chama, including the El Rito Ditch Association. The El Rito Ditch Association strongly supports the settlement and respectfully asks that you schedule and conduct a hearing on the legislation soon.

The El Rito Ditch Association members provide irrigation water from the Rio El Rito to over four hundred water rights owners who collectively irrigate about 2,500 acres. The Rio El Rito is a tributary to the Rio Chama, and the Association has been actively involved in the water adjudication suit, *State of New Mexico v. Aragon*, US Dist. Ct. No. 69cv07941 D.N.M. since its inception to defend the water rights of the local users. The continuity of irrigation is essential to the lifeblood of the local area. The local settlement agreement of Ohkay Owingeh's water rights claims from the Rio Chama protects the continued water uses that have sustained our rural community since 1780. It is constructed around a water sharing agreement that benefits the historic non-Indian community ditches like El Rito, as well as Ohkay Owingeh pueblo. In addition, the settlement provides that the non-Indian parties will have access to funding provided by the State of New Mexico that will allow improvements to infrastructure owned by the non-Indian acequias. Overall, the settlement agreement is inclusive and comprehensive and will be overall beneficial to all water users on the Rio Chama. The El Rito Ditch Association respectfully request that schedule a hearing on this important legislation, and help the local parties see finality with it is enacted into law.

Respectfully,

Steve Gallegos, President
El Rito Ditch Association

cc: The Honorable. Raul M. Grijalva
The Honorable Jared Huffman

