

Navajo Generating Station: Opportunities for Using Water on Tribal Lands

The water currently used at the Navajo Generating Station could be repurposed to meet water demands on the Navajo Nation, including domestic, agricultural, or other industrial needs, if NGS closes.

- Under the Colorado River Compact and the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact, Arizona is allocated 50,000 acre feet per year (AFY) for use in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which is northeastern Arizona (almost entirely but not exclusively within the Navajo Nation).
- Arizona's Upper Basin Colorado River water is set aside for diversion in Arizona's part of the Upper Basin – any attempt to divert Arizona's Upper Basin allocation (including water currently used at NGS) in the Lower Basin would conflict with the Law of the River and would likely be vigorously opposed by the Upper Basin states.
- Most of Arizona's Upper Basin Allocation – 34,100 out of 50,000 AFY – is currently used at NGS, under a contract between Salt River Project and the Bureau of Reclamation and pursuant to a water right administered by ADWR. SRP may transfer this water contract to a subsequent owner of the power plant with Reclamation approval, but the contract is specific to supplying water for power generation at NGS and does not allow other unrelated uses.

If NGS closes, the contract for water use at the plant would end. The Navajo Nation could apply for a new contract with the Bureau of Reclamation for delivery of water to the Navajo Nation using existing facilities, and would have the flexibility to use that water for other purposes, including domestic or agricultural needs.

The Navajo Nation has additional, unresolved water rights that predate the Colorado River Compact.

- The Tribal water rights, or Federal Reserved rights, may represent a much larger volume of water, but have not been quantified. Securing those water rights would require a broader settlement with other states in the Colorado River Basin and Congressional approval.

The Extension Lease agreement, signed in 2017, can provide important benefits to expanding access to water on the Navajo Nation.

- SRP has agreed to transfer the water pumping infrastructure to the Navajo Nation when the plant closes. This infrastructure could form the basis for a broader distribution system.
- SRP has also agreed to “support the Nation's efforts to acquire the use of a portion of the 50,000 acre-feet annually allocated to the State of Arizona” under the Colorado River compacts.

Questions? Contact

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