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Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Legislation Reintroduced in Congress

Washington, D.C. – Jan 13, 2026 – Bipartisan legislation to authorize the historic Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Agreement was introduced in the U.S. House and Senate. The settlement will finally resolve the Nation’s long-standing water rights claims in the Verde River Watershed and secure a sustainable water future for its people.

Congressman Eli Crane (R-Ariz.) introduced H.R. 6931 on December 26, 2025 and Senators Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) and Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.) introduced S.3617 on Jan 13, 2026. This legislation marks a critical step toward enacting a settlement that is the culmination of decades of negotiation among the Yavapai-Apache Nation, the United States, the State of Arizona, the Town of Clarkdale, the Town of Camp Verde, the City of Cottonwood, the Salt River Project, the Central Arizona Water Conservation District, and other stakeholders.

The settlement quantifies a diverse water portfolio for the Nation, including water sources from the C.C. Cragin Dam and Reservoir, existing surface water rights, limited groundwater, and access to the Nation’s existing Central Arizona Project allocation. Securing this reliable supply is essential to support the Nation’s young and growing population, future housing, and economic development.

“The Settlement fully resolves the water rights claims by and for the Nation that have been awaiting decision in Arizona’s courts for over four decades,” said Yavapai-Apache Nation Chairman Buddy Rocha, Jr. “The Agreement safeguards our water future, helps protect the Verde River and local groundwater supplies, and provides for the delivery and treatment of sustainable water imported from outside the Verde Valley to our Reservation homeland. The framework of the Settlement underscores the remarkable power of the parties’ good faith efforts and cooperation.”

Under the legislation, Congress would authorize funding to construct vital water infrastructure for the Nation, including a water delivery pipeline from the C.C. Cragin Dam and Reservoir to the Verde Valley. Once delivered, this water will be treated at a modern facility and used to meet the drinking water needs of the Nation, reducing reliance on local groundwater and helping to protect flows in the culturally vital Verde River. The Settlement also creates a pathway for other Verde Valley communities to benefit from the infrastructure developed under the Settlement.

In exchange for the water rights and infrastructure confirmed in the Settlement, the Nation and the United States on the Nation’s behalf, have agreed to waive claims for water rights and water related damages against current water users in the Verde River Watershed. This provides long-needed certainty for all water users in the region and concludes the Nation’s litigation in the massive, decades-long Gila River General Stream Adjudication, except for limited proceedings related to future injury to its decreed rights and other technical matters.

“The Settlement also keeps current irrigation ditch users whole and helps keep water flowing in the Verde River as a cultural resource for the Nation and an economic driver for the entire Verde Valley,” Chairman Rocha added.

The Yavapai-Apache Nation and all settling parties now urge Congress to swiftly approve this vital legislation, which represents a win-win solution for the Nation, its neighbors, and the health of the Verde River Watershed.

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