



Symposium on the Settlement of Indian Reserved Water Rights Claims

**Held Virtually
August 6, 2025**

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

JOHN BEZDEK is a Shareholder of the WATER AND POWER LAW GROUP PC. John has more than 23 years of experience in developing innovative solutions for resolution of conflicts in the protection and enhancement of tribal water and fishing rights, development and management of water resources, and protection and propagation of endangered species. Over the course of a twenty-year federal career, John was Counselor to the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior, Assistant Solicitor for Water and Power Resources, and Deputy Director of the Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office. John negotiated complex water rights settlements in the Klamath River Basin (Oregon and California), Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park (Colorado), with the Navajo Nation (New Mexico) and the Colorado Ute Tribes (New Mexico and Colorado). John directed the efforts of 21 negotiating teams in Interior's Indian Water Rights Office and was responsible for developing innovative new financing strategies for the development of major public works projects. John is an expert in Reclamation law, including the development of water projects and allocation of costs, as well as the development and marketing of hydropower. John has worked directly with Interior Secretaries Bruce Babbitt, Gale Norton, Dirk Kempthorne, Ken Salazar, and Sally Jewell in addition to other senior officials across three Presidential Administrations; members of Congress; State and local officials; tribes; and other stakeholders. John has appeared before Congress on multiple occasions. John is a frequent public speaker on Indian Water Rights, development of water resources, and how to conduct complex negotiations.

KAREN BUDD-FALEN, Associate Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior.. Karen, from Cheyenne, Wyoming, served for three years in the Reagan Administration, U.S. Department of the Interior, as a Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management. She also worked at Interior in the first Trump Administration as Deputy Solicitor for Wildlife and Parks. As Deputy Solicitor, Karen was the lead attorney in revising the regulations implementing the Endangered Species Act (ESA), appealing wetland maps on National Wildlife Refuge System and was Interior's representative in revising the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

GUSS GUARINO has been a Trial Attorney with the Tribal Resources Section/Environment and Natural Resources Division, U.S. Department of Justice since 2007. In that role, he has handled

Tribal land, water, and water rights matters related to the trust responsibility that the United States holds for Tribes across the west. In numerous contexts, he has addressed the resolution of tribal and non-tribal water rights in administrative proceedings and state and federal court through decree (litigation) and agreement (settlement). Mr. Guarino is a CU Law grad (1992), clerked in Colorado state district court, and has practiced / litigated since 1993 in a host of state and federal civil and criminal contexts.

MARISA HAZELL is a Trial Attorney with the Tribal Resources Section/Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. She has worked in this role since joining the Division as an Honors Attorney in 2019. Through this work, Ms. Hazell has handled Tribal land, water, and treaty resource matters in the United States' capacity as trustee for federally recognized tribes across the country. This has included litigation in both state and federal court on cases involving the entitlement, quantification, and enforcement of federal Indian reserved water rights. Ms. Hazell is a graduate of the University of Colorado Law School (2019).

SARAH LAFLORE, Acting Director, U.S. Department of the Interior, Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office. Sarah, a citizen of the Choctaw Nation, has been with the SIWRO office since 2022, as a policy analyst and now as Acting Director. Prior to joining the Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office, she was an attorney in the Interior Department's Solicitor's Office for nearly ten years and specialized in Indian water rights.

FREDERICK LOMAYESVA (pronounced Loma yes va) is the General Counsel for the Hopi Tribe. He is a member of the Hopi Tribe from the Village of Shungopavi (place of the reeds). He is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Arizona's College of Law. The Office of General Counsel is the in-house counsel for the tribe and as an office manages a number of legal issues, litigation, and outside counsel who work on behalf of the tribe.

JEFF MONTOKA growing up as a tribal member of Pueblo of Pojoaque, Jeff was taught to be kind and respectful. Jeff Montoya understood the value of hard work and dedication. As a Tribal Council Member, he was shown the importance of preservation of Pueblo resources. As Director of Special Projects, he worked to cultivate relationships with the surrounding communities and Governments. His dedication had led him to be the direct contact for the Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System for the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

GRACE REBLING is a member of the Phoenix law firm Osborn Maledon, where she represents Indian tribes on a variety of matters – including Indian water rights, natural resources, land into trust, and economic development. She represented the Hopi Tribe in the adjudication of its water rights in the Little Colorado River Adjudication in Arizona, and she was one of the legal and technical experts on the Hopi Tribe's settlement team that negotiated the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement.

RYAN RUSCHE joined Sonosky Chambers as a partner in 2022. Mr. Rusche has spent his career advancing the interests and goals of Indian tribes and will work in all areas of the firm's

practice. Prior to joining the firm Mr. Rusche worked in house for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of the Flathead Reservation where he focused on the federal ratification of the Tribes' water rights compact and settlement of the Tribes' water-related claims against the federal government. His efforts resulted in enactment of a landmark \$1.9 billion water rights settlement in December 2021, that comprehensively secures water rights for the Tribes and address decades of environmental and natural resources damages caused by the federal government on the Reservation. Prior to his work at CSKT, Mr. Rusche worked for his own Tribe, Ft. Peck serving as both in-house and outside counsel. Mr. Rusche also successfully ran and was elected as the County Attorney of Roosevelt County. Mr. Rusche advises tribal clients on complex matters including protection of treaty rights, taxation, environmental law, water, energy, business, and infrastructure development, as well general counsel matters and Indian Child Welfare Act issues. Ryan grew up on the Fort Peck Reservation in northeastern Montana.

RYAN SMITH, Shareholder, Brownstein and Chair of the firm's American Indian Law Policy Group. Represents tribal nations, those doing business with tribes and western water districts. Proven ability to resolve natural resource and water disputes before Congress and the Department of the Interior. Ryan Smith represents tribes, water districts and corporations before Congress, the Department of the Interior and the courts on tribal issues and Western natural resource issues. He has significant government and private practice experience working on matters relating to Indian water rights; Colorado River and western water issues; lands into trust; and tribal gaming issues. Ryan has been the lead on several major Indian water settlements, ushering a number of settlements through Congress while serving in government and in private practice. In addition, he has been instrumental in the development of federal policy relating to western natural resources the Colorado River, water management and federal funding for Indian country. Before joining Brownstein, Ryan served as a senior legislative advisor to former Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl (R-AZ) on water and tribal issues and served as deputy counsel for the Arizona Department of Water Resources, advising the state of Arizona on Colorado River, tribal and water banking matters.

TOMAS STOCKTON is a licensed professional engineer that works for the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer's Bureau for Pueblos Tribes and Nations. Tomas works as a technical liaison between the attorneys in the Litigation and Adjudication Program, the hydrologists and engineers in the Hydrology Bureau, and the water right specialists in Water Rights Allocation Program at the NMOSE on the construction and implementation of Native Nation's water rights settlements. Tomas's previous experience includes work in water rights and water administration for the Water Rights Allocation Program at the NMOSE; surface water computer modeling for water administration and NEPA as a contractor for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with his own business; and hydrographic surveying, hydraulic engineering and hydrology as a contractor for various state and federal agencies with Tetra Tech, Inc. Before his professional career, Tomas worked part-time for many years as a farm and ranch hand on his grandparent's ranch in northeastern New Mexico.

RYAN SWAZO-HINDS is the Environmental Biologist for the Pueblo of Tesuque Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Ryan has been employed by the Pueblo of Tesuque for twenty (20) years. Ryan is an enrolled participating tribal member of Tesuque Pueblo. Ryan possesses a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Biology from Fort Lewis College and has completed graduate level course work in water resources from the University of New Mexico. Ryan has served on Tribal Council for Tesuque Pueblo six (6) annual appointments and is

currently serving as the Vice-Chairman for the Northern Pueblos Tributary Water Rights Association (NPTWRA) since 2023.

JAY WEINER is a longtime State of Montana employee who spent nine years as a staff attorney for the Montana Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission, worked in the Montana Attorney General's Office litigating water matters including the decree of approved water rights settlements, and is now an administrative law judge for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

WES WILLIAMS JR. owns and operates his solo law practice out of Schurz, Nevada. He has a civil engineering degree from Stanford University and a law degree from the University of California, Davis. He has a general civil practice, concentrating on representing Tribal governments, businesses and individuals in employment law, construction law, commercial transactions, personal injury, leasing and economic development. He is licensed in the state and federal courts in Nevada and is also a member of the State Bars of Colorado and Arizona. Mr. Williams has served as a tribal court and appellate court judge for a number of Indian tribes. This has led him to work as a mediator and arbitrator on various types of cases. On water-related matters, Mr. Williams represents the Walker River Paiute Tribe in the Walker River Decree Court pending in the Federal District Court for Nevada in Reno.