

## **New Report Examines Causes of Clean Water Access Deficits Among 30 Tribes in the Colorado River Basin**

*Tribal communities, disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, continue to suffer adverse impacts relating to lack of piped water services, inadequate water quality, and other factors.*

**April 28, 2021**

Contact: [Sean.Keady@berlinrosen.com](mailto:Sean.Keady@berlinrosen.com)

INDIAN COUNTRY, USA – Today, the Colorado River **Water & Tribes Initiative** released a first of its kind, comprehensive analysis examining the underlying causes of the lack of access to clean drinking water affecting 30 tribes in the Colorado River Basin. The report finds four main factors exacerbate gaps in tribal drinking water access, and in turn hurt public health and economic growth:

- **Lack of piped water services**—Native American households are more likely to lack piped water services than any other racial group. Navajo residents are 67 times more likely than other Americans to live without access to running water.
- **Inadequate water quality**—poor quality is pervasive in Indian Country. The Hopi Tribe, which has struggled with arsenic contamination since the 1960s, estimates that approximately 75 percent of people living on Hopi land are drinking contaminated water.
- **Deteriorating or inadequate water infrastructure**—infrastructure investments haven't kept up with need, resulting in interruptions in service and potential contamination of supplies.
- Many tribes, such as the Jicarilla Apache Nation, continue to face **structural challenges in supporting the operation and maintenance** requirements of existing water systems.

The report also outlines specific recommendations for how the federal government can approach addressing lack of access to clean water for tribal communities, including removing unnecessary or conflicting requirements and pooling resources and expertise to get the job done.

“American Indians and Alaskan Natives are still dying of COVID-19 at unacceptably high rates—and lack of clean water access is part of the reason why,” said **Bidtah Becker**, an attorney with the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority. “The federal government must keep its promises to Indian country. The pandemic presents an opportunity and an inflection point to finally tackle these problems.”

“We know that tribal communities lack clean drinking water, and now as we rebuild from the pandemic, there's an opportunity to make real progress,” said **Heather Tanana**, lead author of the report and Assistant Professor at the S.J. Quinney College of Law at the University of Utah. “No family should have to choose between washing their hands, cooking their food with clean water, or brushing their teeth in the morning. We can do better.”

“The federal government has the tools needed to improve tribal water access,” said **Anne Castle**, Senior Fellow at the Getches-Wilkinson Center at the University of Colorado Law School and former Assistant

Secretary for Water and Science at the U.S. Department of the Interior. “More interagency coordination, and better funding for clean water infrastructure is a good start. President Biden’s recovery and infrastructure plan must provide tribes with adequate funding and support, or this tragedy will only continue.”

*The Water & Tribes Initiative advocates on behalf of the 30 federally recognized tribes in the Colorado River Basin to improve access to clean water.*