



**Metropolitan Water District  
of Southern California**

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**TENTATIVE AGREEMENT WOULD SETTLE  
70-YEAR INDIAN WATER RIGHTS DISPUTE**

A tentative agreement that would settle a decades-long Indian water rights dispute over groundwater in southwest Riverside County and seepage into a 13-mile tunnel along the Colorado River Aqueduct reached a key milestone today.

Terms of the tentative settlement involving the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Eastern Municipal Water District and Lake Hemet Municipal Water District were mailed to the 446 voting members of the tribal community for approval.

“This is an historic day for the tribe,” said Soboba Tribal Chairman Robert Salgado. “We feel that the draft terms and conditions that have been agreed upon by all parties are fair and reasonable.

“The tribe also believes that this agreement would help foster economic and agricultural development, housing, and enhance the general health and welfare of the Soboba community,” Salgado said.

Under the tentative agreement, the Sobobas would receive priority rights for up to 9,000 acre-feet of water a year, a total of 127.7 acres of land and \$28 million. (An acre-foot is nearly 326,000 gallons of water, about the amount used by two typical Southland families in and around their households in a year.)

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The settlement also resolves a federal lawsuit filed by the Sobobas in federal district court in 2000. The agreement must be approved by the governing body of each of the parties and receive approval by way of federal legislation. All the parties hope to finalize the settlement, including the necessary legislation, by the end of the year.

“Metropolitan is encouraged that this long-standing issue may soon come to a conclusion that benefits all the parties,” said MWD board Chairman Phillip J. Pace. “Although serious work remains over the next couple months to wrap up this collaborative and cooperative process, agreement on the principles of this tentative settlement represents a important step forward.”

Representatives of the Sobobas and the water agencies forged broad principles of a tentative agreement at a Las Vegas meeting last December. Under the draft terms mailed today, a contract between Metropolitan and Eastern through 2035 would offset the Soboba’s annual first priority right to 9,000 acre-feet of native groundwater from the San Jacinto River and associated underground basins.

The Sobobas also would receive a total of \$17 million from Eastern and Lake Hemet as representatives of the local agencies and \$11 million from the federal government as part of the settlement. Another \$10 million in federal funds would be used to construct and operate a portion of a local groundwater recharge project that could provide additional water for the settlement.

“The tentative settlement removes a cloud of uncertainty over water rights in the Hemet-San Jacinto Valley area and allows local agencies to proceed with a groundwater management plan that will help future water supplies,” said Tony Pack, Eastern MWD general manager.

Rob Lindquist, Lake Hemet’s general manager, said the tentative settlement “will pave the way to complete the groundwater management plan now being developed by the local agencies.”

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In addition, the tentative settlement calls for Metropolitan and Eastern to transfer two separate land parcels—21.7 and 106 acres, respectively, located near the Riverside County community of Winchester—to the Sobobas. The lands are located near Winchester Road (Highway) 79 and the Domenigoni Parkway.

The water rights dispute dates back as far as the 1880s, and includes Metropolitan's construction of the 13-mile tunnel through the San Jacinto Mountains as part of the district's Colorado River Aqueduct in the early to mid-1930s. Since completion of the MWD tunnel in 1938, the Sobobas have claimed that Metropolitan and Eastern took water that belonged to them. The Sobobas also have asserted that the United States failed to live up to its trust responsibilities by not doing enough to protect the tribe's water resources.

In reaching the tentative agreement, Salgado acknowledged past Soboba tribal leaders who have represented the tribe in this settlement since the 1950s. "We want to acknowledge their hard work, and their determination to see closure on this matter," he said.

"The current tribal council is simply closing the book on this matter, so that we can provide good work and improve our tribe's economic conditions for the future," Salgado added.

Ronald R. Gastelum, Metropolitan president and chief executive officer, recognized the efforts from all the parties toward reaching the pivotal stage, particularly the leadership of Eastern MWD's Tony Pack. "Tony went the extra mile to make this settlement a reality," Gastelum said.

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*The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a cooperative of 26 cities and water agencies serving 18 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other water-management programs.*