



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Ak-Chin Indian Community files suit against Central Arizona Water Conservation District (CAWCD)**

*CAWCD refusal to deliver full allocation undermines Ak-Chin water rights, threatens Ak-Chin Farms*

The Ak-Chin Indian Community – located in Pinal County, adjacent to the City of Maricopa – today filed suit against the Central Arizona Water Conservation District (CAWCD). Ak-Chin asks the federal court to ensure delivery of water critical to sustaining tribal farming operations.

Specifically, the lawsuit seeks a declaratory judgment and permanent injunction requiring CAWCD to provide the full Ak-Chin water allocation, in accordance with the Ak-Chin Water Rights Settlement Act of 1984. At stake are 10,000 acre feet of Ak-Chin's annual 85,000-acre-foot allocation. In late 2016, CAWCD informed Ak-Chin that CAWCD would cease delivering the 10,000 acre feet of water in future years.

"This water is more than an asset, it is the lifeblood of the Ak-Chin Indian Community," said Chairman Robert Miguel of the Ak-Chin Indian Community Tribal Council. "Without it, we cannot raise the crops we need to support Ak-Chin Farms and the 84 tribal employees who work there.

"Our people have farmed these lands for millennia. In fact, the very name 'Ak-Chin' is an O'odham word referring to a style of irrigation used in agriculture. Nothing is more important to us than our water to honor Ak-Chin's past and safeguard our future. The generation of tribal leaders that came before us fought hard to secure these rights from the United States, and we cannot stand by as CAWCD attempts to diminish our rights. We're asking the federal court to resolve this matter and ensure our full water allocation is delivered, just as it has been in past years."

To ensure a stable, reliable water supply, the Ak-Chin Indian Community in 1984 reached an agreement with the federal government. The deal stipulates Ak-Chin is to receive 75,000 acre feet of water per year, plus an added 10,000 acre feet "in any year in which sufficient surface water is available." The full allocation has always been delivered in each year it was ordered since the settlement was reached. CAWCD's unilateral decision is particularly baffling as it comes on the heels of a winter in which snowfall across the West has been the strongest in memory.

Added Chairman Miguel: "We strongly disagree with the Central Arizona Water Conservation District and are confident a federal court will affirm the long-held water rights of the Ak-Chin Indian Community."

**Background:** The Ak-Chin Indian Community has an enrollment of 1,067 tribal members, a reservation of just over 23,000 acres, and is home to Ak-Chin Farms. The agricultural operation currently harvests 15,000 acres of land, with cotton, barley, potatoes, alfalfa and corn as the principal crops. Ak-Chin Farms accounts for critical income that supports many important programs for the Community, and is a major tribal employer.

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