

Chapter 7: Creation of the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

The Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project (P-MIP) was established by Community Council resolution and its mission is to construct an irrigation distribution system to deliver water to the agricultural lands and riparian habitat areas of our Community. To fulfill this mission, P-MIP works toward several goals, including constructing a water delivery system that will enable us to use our settlement and existing waters, and exercising sound management principles in developing our irrigation delivery system. These goals will help ensure the continuity of our traditional economy and culture of agriculture.

The genesis of the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project was in the 1970s, when the federal Bureau of Reclamation considered several options for restoring water to our Community. This was a direct result of our claims against the United States Government and local cities, irrigation districts and corporations for the loss of our water over the past century. The initial settlement proposal made by the Bureau of Reclamation was unacceptable to us so our Council rejected it. In 1984, the Bureau of Reclamation increased the proposed settlement to 173,100 acre-feet of water, which was to be delivered through a number of existing delivery points outside of our Community. A year later we adopted our Master Plan, which identified and targeted 146,330 acres of agricultural lands going back into production.

It was not until 1992 that our Community and the Bureau of Reclamation came to an agreement on a water delivery contract for the 173,100 acre-feet of water. After rejecting Central Arizona Project water and/or terms of conditions several times, we accepted the federal proposal. By so doing, we agreed to create a single common use irrigation delivery system, meaning all of our water resources—Central Arizona Project, San Carlos Irrigation Project, groundwater and other sources—would flow in a single canal system across our Community. The Bureau of

Reclamation had authority to build the system to deliver our water under the 1968 Colorado River Basin Project Act, which authorized the Central Arizona Project.

The first person we employed on what would become known as the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project was E. Lee Thompson. At that time the project to deliver our irrigation water was called the Central Arizona Project Indian Distribution Division, or the CAP-IDD. We were told in 1992 that it would take the CAP-IDD eight to ten years to complete the environmental impact studies before construction could begin. That meant no construction would begin until 2001 or 2002. We found this to be unacceptable and began looking at other options.

To speed up the process, we proposed the idea of using cooperative agreements with the Bureau of Reclamation to do the work ourselves. This would allow us to complete the environmental impact statement using the 1985 Master Plan as the benchmark. These cooperative agreements, first signed in 1992, allowed money to begin flowing into our Community to hire consultants and the first staff members to begin planning the irrigation delivery system. But despite some funds, the Bureau of Reclamation remained firmly in control of the decision making process.

We desired to control the planning, designing and construction of the irrigation project. So in 1995 our Community Council adopted Resolution GR-43-95 and took over the Bureau of Reclamation's functions of the on-reservation CAP-IDD. We used a federal law known as Indian Self-Governance and signed an historic agreement with the United States Government (Department of the Interior) to take over and design, plan and construct the irrigation system. What this means is that our funding comes from the Bureau of Reclamation since it is obligated to construct the delivery system for the 173,100 acre-feet of CAP water for which we had contracted and agreed to accept in 1992. But, rather than have the Bureau of Reclamation

construct the system, we decided to do it ourselves. To demonstrate that we were now in charge of designing and constructing the system, we renamed the CAP-IDD the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project, or P-MIP.

Our Community Council further directed P-MIP in 1995 with Resolution GR-95-95. This authorized the Department of Land and Water Resources (under which P-MIP was housed at the time) to adopt alternative four of the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. This simply meant that the Council directed P-MIP to construct the main stem delivery system along the selected route. In 1996, the Council further authorized the Department of Land and Water Resources to execute the planning and development of alternative four. That same year we entered into our first annual funding agreement (called an AFA) with the Bureau of Reclamation. When we executed this historic document, we became the first Indian tribe in the country to put an irrigation project under self-governance.

The years of 1996 and 1997 were years of planning. Since we did not yet have our own engineers on staff, we hired several architectural and engineering firms to assist P-MIP in designing the canal and pipeline project. P-MIP then set a goal of beginning construction in 1997. The question was, where would be the most effective place to begin? Several options were considered for the initial construction, including reaches on the east, west and central portions of our Community. Ultimately, the Memorial Area in District Four was selected and approved by Council since it had the fewest cultural and environmental challenges and construction could begin almost immediately. In 1998, our Community again made history with the groundbreaking of the P-MIP system when reach MM-IC (just east of the Lone Butte Industrial Park) went into construction. Then-Governor Mary V. Thomas and Lieutenant Governor Cecil Antone, as well

as many other Community dignitaries, officially commemorated the occasion with a groundbreaking ceremony.

In the meantime, a “Record of Decision” was made in 1998. This document showed the Bureau of Reclamation how we intended to construct the system and deliver the 173,100 acre-feet of CAP water using money available under the 1992 delivery contract with the United States Government. Reclamation agreed to pay for the delivery system to irrigate the land using CAP water. This is the amount of land the federal government was obligated to help us put back into cultivation due to its failure to protect our water a century ago. Because we have planned to put up to 146,330 acres of land back into cultivation, we will have to find other sources of funding to fully develop the acreage targeted in the Master Plan.

In 1998, we also signed a Master Repayment Contract with the Bureau of Reclamation. This agreement spells out how the funds Reclamation would have spent to build the delivery system—had it built it—would be expended. The Bureau of Reclamation wanted to make sure the money was spent in an appropriate manner. P-MIP can spend this money on any activity related to delivering CAP water to lands within our Community.

Since 1996, P-MIP has designed and constructed the Sacaton Ranch South reservoir, the 4-Mile Post pipeline and pump station, the Memorial Area pipeline along Price Road from Goodyear Road north to Pecos Road and west to Interstate 10 and then under the Interstate west all the way to Pecos Road and Seventh Avenue. P-MIP recently began its next phase of construction on the West End by continuing this pipeline from Seventh Avenue and Pecos Road to 55th Avenue and Ray Road. P-MIP has also completed the earthwork on the Huhugam Heritage Center reservoirs, rebuilt nine miles of the Southside Canal, completed construction on the Highline Canal, which will take settlement water from the Salt River Project, the Roosevelt

Water Conservation District and the City of Mesa to the lands of Santan Ranches, and has continued construction on the Santan Canal extension near Goodyear. P-MIP is planning to begin new construction on the Southside Canal in Districts Two and Three this year or next year.

The Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project has completed over thirty-six miles of canals and pipeline since it began construction in 1998, expending more than \$117,000,000 through fiscal year 2004. And now that our water settlement bill has been approved by Congress and signed by the President, there will be additional money available beginning in 2010 to rebuild the existing San Carlos Irrigation Project on the eastern portion of our Community. P-MIP has also overseen the near completion of a Water Resource Management Plan and the land classification of more than 190,000 acres. These two plans ensure that when we apply water to the land that it is suitable for agriculture and that we can manage the water that is put on the land without creating water logging. Working with the newly formed Gila River Indian Irrigation and Drainage District and the Office of Water Rights, P-MIP has helped put together an Agricultural Development Plan for the Santan Ranches that will be a model for new agricultural areas within our Community. P-MIP staff has also assisted many of our people in putting their land back into production or putting it into production for the first time.

The P-MIP system is of great importance to our Community. While the Office of Water Rights fought to restore our water and the Gila River Indian Irrigation and Drainage District will operate the irrigation system, P-MIP must design and construct it. By the time the P-MIP system is completed we will have over 2,400 miles of canal and pipeline delivering water to our land. Working together, we have accomplished much in a short period of time.

Putting our land back into agricultural production is important to our Community. Not only will this help restore our agricultural heritage and secure for our Community a more stable

economy, but it will also restore a sense of accomplishment and pride in our Community. Today we remain the only tribe in the nation building an irrigation system through self-governance. We are charting new ground and blazing new trails for other tribes to follow. And in the process, we are building a better future for our people. For this, we owe a deep gratitude to our many leaders—both those present today and those who are no longer with us—for their persistent faith in seeing this day arrive.