

Chapter 8: The Future

It has been said that those who forget their past are prone to relive it. We have endeavored to ensure that our Community never forgets its past so that we will not ever have to experience the difficulties many of our people did with the loss of our water. But it has also been said that if a people do not know where they are going, then any path will get them there. Our future—and the future of our children—are too precious to allow any path to get us there. This final chapter gives us something to consider as we look toward our future. May we chart a clearly defined path for utilizing our water so that one day we will look back knowing that we arrived at exactly where we intended.

One of our elders recently shared his vision of the future that summarizes what we must do. “For decades, water settlement was a shared dream of our people. It was a vision of security and stability for future generations to enjoy a better quality of life here in the desert than the one many of us endured. Now that water settlement is a reality, our Community is faced not with pursuing that dream but with protecting it and building upon what past generations hoped would come to pass with our water settlement. Water is our largest and most precious renewable natural resource and we can now look forward to helping ourselves meet the future challenges. Water settlement will enhance our economy and improve our quality of life. It will ensure sustainable growth for the current and future people of our Community.”

Prior to the usurpation of our water by others, the Gila River sustained our agricultural economy. But it did much more than that. It sustained a way of life built around a lush riparian habitat of cottonwood and willow trees, cattails and other reeds along the river, and a mosaic of Mesquite, Ironwood, Cat claw, Palo Verde and other desert plants. The trees along the river provided habitat for wildlife, birds and fish. The river itself provided our people with relief from

the desert heat and served as the focal point of our Community and ceremonial life. When the river dried up, we lost these benefits and comforts. We lost a part of ourselves and a part of our rich, vibrant culture. Much of the land became a desert wasteland. But it needn't be so in the future.

As we look ahead, water settlement represents much for our people. When completed in a few years, the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project will deliver life-giving water to our lands once again. We will be able to irrigate as many as 146,330 acres of land, much of which was once alive with the fruit of our agricultural labors. We will have regulating reservoirs that we can also use as recreational sites. The new irrigation system will be fully automated and operated and managed by a state-of-the-art computerized control center that will both conserve our precious water and at the same time maximize our agricultural production. The water that we have for so long been deprived of, will again sustain a way of life that is unique to us and reflects what we value and deem important.

With water we can once again grow traditional crops such as tepary beans and corn. These and other traditional foods may help reduce the high rate of diabetes among our people. With water we can restore many of our traditional and medicinal plants and herbs. With water we can reestablish riparian habitat areas along the delivery system that will provide boating, swimming, fishing and picnicking opportunities for our people. Plants and animals that have been gone for many years will return home once again. Wetlands will be restored, providing us with an environment many of us have never known.

With our water we will also restore a new sense of pride in our traditional crafts. Scores of native plants, such as willow, cattails, devil's claw and arrow weed, will once again thrive and enable our people to perpetuate crafts that are unique to us and reflective of our culture. The

number of our people making these crafts will increase, with a market found at our own Huhugam Heritage Center. Here, we will also share our history and culture with others but in a way that reflects what we value and from our own perspective.

But most of all, with our water we will restore an agricultural way of life for our people. We have been eminent farmers since time immemorial. When we were deprived of our water a century ago, our economy and way of life suffered. But we persevered. And now with a good supply of water secured through the tireless efforts of our leaders and friends, we are not only preparing to restore our agricultural heritage and self-sufficiency but we will also once again become the breadbasket of Arizona. This vibrant farm economy will also stimulate a growing cattle and dairy industry within our Community, with our people owning and operating dairies, feedlots and ranches that produce goods that will find ready markets in surrounding cities.

Water settlement also brings new and, in many cases, better jobs to our Community. We believe there may be as many as 5,000 jobs created. These will be in primary businesses such as ranching, agriculture, aquaculture and industry. There will also be secondary businesses established such as farm equipment dealerships, welding shops, automotive and agricultural mechanic shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and financial and marketing institutions. We can once again develop a thriving agriculture-based economy that will stimulate and support the overall economic and social well-being of our Community.

With our water we will have newfound economic and social vitality. With good jobs available, our people will desire to live and work within our Community. Using the proceeds from the sale of our goods we can provide better educational and job training opportunities. Better education means our people will find jobs that provide a high level of personal satisfaction.

Over a century ago our people were entrepreneurs, providing food to the tens of thousands of emigrants passing through our villages. Our villages were, in fact, the center of Arizona. We are poised to again assume this role of providing for our neighbors and friends. Although we no longer live in the nineteenth century, we are still Akimel O'otham and Pee Posh. We have been here since time immemorial and we will always remain here. We have endured. With the return of our water, our way of life—our himdag—will continue.