

# SHO-BAN NEWS

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## Collaborative effort moves elk herd on Fort Hall Reservation



A helicopter service assisted in the herding of the elk on the Fort Hall Reservation on April 9. (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Fish & Game photos)

By **LORI ANN EDMO**  
Sho-Ban News

FORT HALL — In the interest of public safety, along with herd safety, approximately 539 head of elk were pushed from the west side of Interstate 15 to the east side of the freeway April 9 on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation.

It was a multiple agency effort involving the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Fish and Game, Fish and Wildlife, Tribal Transportation, Tribes ARM Department, Fort Hall Fire, Tribal Office of Emergency Management, Tribal Land Use Department, Fort Hall Business Council, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho State Police, Bingham County Sheriff's, Bannock County Sheriff's and Yarak Aviation.

The day began at 7 a.m. when a briefing occurred with all of the agencies involved at the Tribes Emergency Operations Command (EOC) office in Fort Hall.

Tribal Fish and Game Captain Tom Wadsworth said after they got lined out, they moved the herd south of Exit 80 first. Traf-

fic was shutdown at that time when Yarak Aviation – a helicopter service went out and were able to get the elk up against the retaining fence. He explained as soon as the elk started to cross, everything went across, the helicopter proceeded to move them a little bit further east, “As long as they went on their own, he (the pilot) backed off.” There was about 150 head in that herd.

Next, Wadsworth said they bumped up to the northern herd – just north of Exit 80. “In that herd we had about 389 elk and that herd actually split in two movements. “He (the pilot) was able to get on the northern portion of that herd first and we were able to get them across just south of the Sands Road overpass. As soon as they were done, he was able to bump down to the secondary portion of the herd and he was able to get them across just south of Tribal Farms.”

Wadsworth said everything went really well. “Our pilot handled



Elk move across the road on southbound Interstate 15.



An elk herd on the run during the move.

everything really good, he tried to keep the least amount of stress off of them as possible. Once he was able to get the herds to settle, once they got across, he pushed them

up towards Sands Road, in which they pretty much went by themselves.” “All in all everything was pretty much a success, hopefully we don't have to worry about them coming

back,” Wadsworth continued. He noted warmer temperatures are coming and “Hopefully them elk will be able to get back into their natural habitat to make it through the rest

of the winter.”

“I would like to ask though since we do have them back there, please keep in mind they're still trying to make it through

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## Sho-Ban Hotel loan paid off



Shoshone-Bannock Casino Hotel building. (Submitted photo)

By **ECHO MARSHALL**  
Tribal Public Affairs

FORT HALL – The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes now own the Shoshone-Bannock Hotel & Event Center as the hotel loan was paid off early on December 30, 2022.

Since the loan was paid off early, the Tribes saved millions of dollars on the future interest charges.

The original hotel loan was made with the Bank of Albuquerque in 2011 in the amount of \$33

million. In 2015, the loan was switched to Wells Fargo Bank and the principal amount was \$21.8 million.

“This is a wonderful accomplishment for the Tribes,” Fort Hall Business Council Chairman Nathan Small said. “The hotel is ours and now proves to be a successful project,” he said.

The Shoshone-Bannock Hotel & Event Center had a soft opening on July 27, 2012 and had a Grand Opening celebration on August 17, 2012. The

opening team consisted of 165 employees. The Hotel & Event Center is approximately 164,000 square feet and was built on an 83-acre site.

In 2018 and 2019 the Fort Hall Casino and the Shoshone-Bannock Hotel & Event Center went through a rebranding with the opening of the new Casino Expansion Project. The two properties were combined and became the Shoshone-Bannock Casino Hotel.

## Gila River Tribe & U.S. officials reach deal to save Colorado River water

By **KEN RITTER** and  
**TERRY TANG**  
Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) - A Native American tribe in Arizona reached a deal Thursday with the U.S. government not to use some of its Colorado River water rights in return for \$150 million and funding for a pipeline project.

The \$233 million pact with the Gila River Indian Community, announced in Phoenix, was hailed as an example of the kind of cooperation needed to rescue a river crucial to a massive agricultural industry and essential to more than 40 million people in seven Western U.S. states and Mexico. Officials termed it “compensated conservation.”

It's part of a broader effort to get states that rely on the Colorado River to substantially lessen their water use amid an ongoing drought that has dramatically dried

up reservoirs including Lake Mead behind Hoover Dam.

“Today's announcements and our partnerships with tribes like the Gila River Indian Community prove that tribes are a key part of the solutions,” Deputy U.S. Secretary of the Interior Tommy Beaudreau said. “We don't have any more important partners in this effort than in Indian Country.”

The federal government previously promised to use some \$4 billion for drought relief, and Colorado River users have submitted proposals to get some of that money through actions like leaving fields unplanted. Some cities are ripping up thirsty decorative grass, and tribes and major water agencies have left some water in key reservoirs - either voluntarily or by mandate.

Beyond the Gila

River announcement, the Interior Department has shared few details about how it plans to divvy up the rest of the \$4 billion, including how much will go to agricultural interests in the mammoth Imperial Irrigation District in California.

In total, the Biden administration plans to spend about \$15.4 billion approved by Congress for infrastructure improvements and inflation reductions for drought-related projects across the West, according to a government fact sheet released with Thursday's announcement.

The Gila River tribe will get \$83 million for the pipeline project to reuse about 20,000 acre-feet (25 million cubic meters) of water per year, and \$50 million per year over three years not to use 125,000 acre-feet (154 million cubic meters) per year of

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**ELK, continued**  
the winter.” “I also do want to say this operation was necessary today not only for public safety but also for herd safety. This is something that had to happen where they were on the west side, they don’t have any place to go to keep working further west,” Wadsworth said. “In order to get them in more suitable habitat, they had to come back across the interstate. It wasn’t something we wanted to do – it’s something we felt like we had to do.”

Fish and Wildlife Director, said the elk have been here all winter and they’re actually in decent shape. “I’m glad that we were able to control the chaos today – the crew was very large (about 50 total) and very well prepared,” he said. “Unfortunately we had to make this move today – it’s not what we wanted to do, but it had to be done in order to get these animals over in a safe place. I think that’s the best we can do right now.”

Kyle Stenberg, Yarak Aviation pilot and owner, said moving the elk was challenging sometimes as a couple of groups cooperated – one group seemed to want to stay on the west side and it took extra convincing. He’s been flying for 16 years and does a lot of work in Idaho and Wyoming noting he does move elk quite often. He’s previously moved elk south of Pocatello but it’s the first time he’s moved elk on the Fort Hall Reservation although he’s helped with winter survey counts. Stenberg said 90% of his business is wildlife capture.

Concerning closing the freeway, the first rolling roadblock took around 30 minutes. When they moved to the northern herd, ISP wasn’t able to do the rolling roadblock so they rerouted traffic at Exit 80 and 89 moving traffic to Highway 91.

Wadsworth thanked those involved for taking the time to participate in making the operation a success. He also thanked the public for their cooperation in giving the room needed to complete the task.

Chad Colter, Tribal

Elk on the move



During the move effort on April 9, a herd of elk line up to jump over a fence. (Sho-Ban Tribes Fish & Game photo)

**WATER, continued**  
water currently stored at Lake Mead. The latter is part of a broader effort to get Colorado River water users to substantially lower their water use.

An acre-foot of water is enough to cover an acre of land 1 foot deep (1,233 cubic meters), or about enough to serve two average households per year.

Gila River Indian Community Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis also pointed in a statement to a third pact providing a federal grant for a solar-covered canal project.

“These three agreements, taken together, represent a future of how we can work together to confront the urgency of this moment,” Lewis said, “... to find, foster and fund innovative solutions that will have a long-term impact for the Colorado River.”

Thursday’s announcement comes days before the Bureau of Reclamation, the federal agency that controls water flows on the river, is expected to outline plans for all seven Colorado River basin states - Arizona,

California, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Wyoming - to use less water.

The states, together, are allocated 15 million acre-feet (18.5 billion cubic meters) per year, and Mexico is allocated another 1.5 million acre-feet (1.9 billion cubic meters). U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Touton called on the states last year to collectively cut up to 4 million acre-feet (4.9 billion cubic meters) of use, but the number has proven elusive.

The Gila River tribe,

by comparison, is allocated 653,000 acre-feet (805 million cubic meters) per year. It committed to give up about one-fifth of its allocation until 2025.

In all, 22 of 30 federally recognized tribes in the Colorado River basin have recognized rights to 3.2 million acre-feet (3.9 billion cubic meters) annually, or up to 26% of the basin’s current annual flow, according to a 2021 policy paper by the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy and the Environment at the University of Colorado.

Data shows the river flow was overestimated 100 years ago, and has decreased due to drought since 2000, to about 12.4 million acre-feet (15.3 billion cubic meters) per year, the center’s study said.

Officials said an exceptional series of wet winter storms that have swept from the Pacific Ocean into California and the West this year will not be enough to break a megadrought that scientists call the worst in 1,200 years. The dry spell has led to concerns that hydropower plants could go dry and water deliveries could stop for farms that grow crops for the rest of the nation.

“Despite recent heavy rain and snow, the historic 23-year drought has led to record low water levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead,” the Interior Department said in its fact sheet.

The announcement in Phoenix was part of a series of appearances by Biden administration officials, including one on Wednesday outlining plans to spend \$585 million for 83 projects including dams, canals and water systems in 11 states. That announcement was made at the Imperial Dam in Yuma, Arizona, which is slated to receive more than \$8 million.

Officials also said \$36 million promised under Reclamation’s Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program will go to California’s Coachella Valley. The main water district in that region promised to conserve 30,000 acre-feet (37 million cubic meters) of water in Lake Mead.

Another \$20 million was pledged toward water storage projects in Utah and California, including at the Salton Sea, a drying inland lake formed when the Colorado River flooded in 1905.

Combined, Lake Mead on the Nevada-Arizona state line and Lake Powell formed by Glen Canyon Dam on the Arizona-Utah line were at 92% capacity in 1999. Today, they are at less than 30%.

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Idaho Coalition