

Tribal Governing Board Reaffirms Commitment to Signor Water Quality

The Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Governing Board (TGB) is working diligently to address the longstanding concerns about water quality in the Signor community. According to LCO Vice Chairman Tweed Shuman, despite the spread of misinformation, the board remains fully committed to finding a sustainable solution that ensures residents have access to cleaner, more reliable water.

“We have been and continue to be committed to providing resources to the residents of Signor that improve the quality of life,” the TGB said. “This has been a challenging process, but we are making progress, and we want our community to know the facts.”

Over the past five years, the LCO TGB, in collaboration with the LCO Public Works Department, Indian Health Service (IHS), engineers, and other tribal professionals, has conducted multiple studies, drilled test wells, and explored various solutions to improve water quality for Signor residents.

Timeline of Efforts

- **June 2020:** LCO Public Works requested assistance from IHS to study water quality and drill a test well for a potential community water system.
- **September 2020:** \$30,000 was awarded for the study and test well drilling.
- **January 2021:** Sampling of ten individual wells revealed varying results, with most showing increased levels of manganese and iron. Though still within EPA safety limits, these elements contributed to discoloration and an unpleasant odor.
- **Spring 2021:** Investigations into potential community water system locations began, but the available sites were found unsuitable due to contamination risks and land ownership issues.
- **August 2022:** The TGB allocated \$2.8 million from the ARPA Local and Tribal Consistency Fund (LATCF) to engineer and construct a community water system. However, finding an eligible site remained a challenge due to regulatory setbacks.
- **Fall 2024:** The remaining IHS award money was used to treat individual water systems in Signor homes.
- **December 2024:** Coleman Engineering was hired to conduct a second-opinion water analysis, verifying previous findings by IHS and tribal experts.
- **February 2025:** ARPA informed the TGB that LATCF funds must be obligated by March 2025 to avoid forfeiture to the U.S. Treasury. Given the lack of an eligible site, the full-scale project could take 1-2 years to complete.

Exploring Feasible Solutions

During the preliminary engineering study, IHS presented two potential solutions:

1. **Community Well System** – This option would involve drilling a community well and treating the water at a central pumphouse to remove discoloration and odors.

2. **Individual Water System Treatments** – This approach focuses on providing each household with treatment systems to address the specific water quality issues at their location.

TGB is currently awaiting results from Coleman Engineering while simultaneously working to implement treatment solutions for individual wells. Additionally, the LCO Housing Authority has engaged in service agreements to provide water treatment for rental units within the Signor community.

“We recognize the urgency of this issue and are doing everything in our power to find the best solution for our people,” the TGB said. “Our goal is to ensure that all residents of Signor have access to clean, safe, and reliable water. This remains a top priority for the Tribal Governing Board.”

Residents can expect continued updates as further decisions and progress are made regarding the Signor Water Project. The TGB remains steadfast in its mission to improve the quality of life for all tribal members.