

# THE SUN-GAZETTE

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## Tule River Reservation reaches for state's help amid water crisis

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### **The Tule Tribe continues its battle with extreme drought conditions that have left residents without bathing or drinking water**

TULARE COUNTY – The Tule River council hopes that asking the state for less might lead to more money as they drop their request from \$30 million to \$6.6 million to help mitigate their water crisis.

Wells are running dry in the rolling foothills of the Tule River Reservation, which has occurred every summer since 2013. The Tule River Reservation recently appealed to the California legislature requesting \$6.6 million to fix the water reservoir and water treatment center, as many in the community have little to no access to water for drinking, hygiene and sanitation. Measures to remedy the lack of water access have even gone as far as moving the Eagle Mountain Casino (EMC) in fall 2022.

“The Tule River Indian Tribe calls upon its congressional delegation members, and the Biden administration,” the council stated in a state of emergency letter. “To put aside partisan politics, and to work effectively with the tribe to help find long-term solutions to its water storage and domestic distribution system during ongoing extreme drought conditions.”

This request to the state is only a fraction of the roughly \$30 million previously requested for water infrastructure improvements. These funds have yet to be put aside for the tribe and the process is lengthy, however the tribe has received some help from grants, such as the California Department of Water Resources' \$2.1 million towards the Tribes water infrastructure.

“DWR, State Water Resources Control Board, Indian Health Service, and Self Help Enterprises have been actively coordinating outreach to Tule River Tribe,” the California Department of Water Resources stated. “Advising the tribe of various programs available through DWR’s Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Implementation Grant Program, and the Urban Streams Restoration Program.”

Though grants have helped alleviate some needs in the past, there has been no permanent solution to the tribe’s water crisis granted by the state. As a result, they have had to truck in water and donate bottled water to residents. During the summer, when water supply is the lowest, government buildings and residential houses run dry, and residents are unable to bathe, cook nor have access to clean drinking water.

Gov. Gavin Newsom stated in a letter to Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney that the lack of water access has resulted in a housing shortage. There is a 200-member waitlist in the Tule River Indian tribe for those wanting to move onto the reservation. They are also unable to renovate 58% of the current on-site homes, but without water, this is not tangible, according to Sweeney. A large remedy for this has been relocating the Eagle Mountain Casino.

“While the casino is the tribe’s main source of government revenue, it is also the largest user of water in the community, contributing further to the local water shortage,” Newsom wrote.

EMC was previously located on the tribe’s reservation bounds, but because of the water crisis, the tribe council requested to move EMC to a 40-acre lot within the city of Porterville. Since the new location will be in the borders of Porterville, the EMC will be connected to the city’s water supply. Moving the EMC will not only alleviate the strain on the tribe’s water sources, but also allow the casino to be more accessible to those outside of the reservation.

“The Tribe has partnered with the city of Porterville on plans to develop a water reclamation facility that will further increase the availability of potable water for the city,” Newsom wrote.

In a letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom, Sweeney stated that the reservation relies on three wells, springs and water from the South Fork of the Tule River. The wells frequently become dry and their springs are used for agriculture since they contain high levels of carbon dioxide, which is harmful for humans to consume.

Additionally, the tribe fears that if a fire were to occur on the reservation, the fire hydrants and fire sprinklers would only have enough resources to run for a few minutes.

“These drought conditions have already reached historic levels and now pose an imminent threat to public health, to life and property, and can lead to substantial economic hardship,” the council stated.