



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## My Turn

### **Who most benefits from the Abeyta water rights settlement?**

By Pat McCabe

*The Taos News*, 4 Apr 2019

Observing recent events in my home, along with participating in sustainability conversations literally all over the planet, a distinct reality is forming:

If humanity believes that they must fulfill every contract that is now in place on the planet, we will absolutely bring devastating ecological harm down upon ourselves and all of life. That is a fact.

In our Taos Valley, I have been wondering who benefited the most from the Abeyta Settlement, including the signature parties involved. For me that has been in part because in this time of the startling revelation and the dirty darks being brought to light in all directions, that is an attitude that I have allowed myself to cultivate. Coming from an indigenous nation, who suffered from treaty breaks and the results of negotiations not made in good faith, this for me is a cultural norm at this point. But I am realizing that I need to check myself on this “divide and conquer” culture and orientation.

Part of our response to the place that we collectively find ourselves as a species at this time is going to require tremendous amounts of undoing. This will necessarily have to include the undoing of agreements made at other times for reasons that did not account for the precarious position we are currently recognizing we are in. There are no mechanisms for this kind of undoing. Our contractual agreements have been sacrosanct, but can they ultimately be more sacrosanct than life itself? Within this movement, there has to be room for all parties to reorient, for renegotiation within themselves, to consider what actually matters in our newly dawning final analysis as a species. And that is tender business. Values, dreams, plans will be undone and at times that will feel like being reduced to ashes. Time wasted. Energy misspent. Money thrown away. But as young Greta Thunberg is bringing home on the international political stage, we entertain nonsustainable activity, in denial, at our own great peril.

So here in Taos, as our young people, who have not been embroiled (or clouded) in the decades-long negotiations of the Abeyta Settlement, voice their concerns that perhaps in fact “the emperor has no clothes,” I must pause. This is not business as usual. It cannot and must not be. Not this time. So with this in mind, I will say that yes, I still would like to know who benefited from this settlement. Where did all the water rights end up? But now it is not because I am on a hunt to find scapegoats for the purpose of shaming and blaming and holding their feet to the fire. I want to understand what they

saw as the needs of our valley, and the needs of their part of the community. I want to understand how we see those needs today, and yes, also in the global context of potential ecological – and economic – collapse. If the needs were motivated by profit and greed and self-gain, I will most likely not be that interested in seeing that they are met. But if they were, and still are, truly looking at the health of our valley, which at this moment still has pristine waters, pristine soil and perfect potential to sustain our lives in health and happiness, then I am committed to seeing how we, all of us together, can meet those needs without taking huge risks with the watershed as a whole.

Those who are intent on making a profit, or wield power by owning water, perhaps to insure their own personal safety in an uncertain future, may be the last to realize that in the end there is actually no such thing as money. It has only ever been a fictitious place holder for the Earth herself, for her gifts. Some have called our home one of the most “impoverished” states and counties in the nation. But those of us who have lived here for any length of time know the richness of this place and our cultures, and our cooperative and collaborative relationship with the water and Earth is like no place else.

I give this counsel to myself as much as to my community: let us be gentle with each other in this process, let us be large, let us be undaunted by what has been and bold about what might be.

If Taos needs to be the one to set all new precedents for the state, the country, the world, so be it. ¡Orale!

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*Pat McCabe lives in Taos.*