



P R E S S R E L E A S E

KARUK TRIBE • SHINGLE SPRINGS BAND OF MIWOK INDIANS

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For more Information:

Craig Tucker, consultant, Karuk Tribe, 916-207-8294, craig@suitsandsigns.com

Krystal Moreno, TEK Program Manager, Shingle Springs Band of Miwok, 916-271-4624, kmoreno@ssband.org

Kalra's AB 2218 Passes State Assembly Unanimously

Indigenous Water Rights Bill Advances to Senate, Seeks Equity for Tribes in State Water Policy Decisions

Sacramento, CA – Assembly Bill 2218, authored by Assemblymember Ash Kalra, unanimously passed the California State Assembly last week, marking a significant step toward aligning California water policy with Tribal rights, stewardship, and justice. The bill now moves to the State Senate for consideration.

As the 19th century Gold Rush drove California to develop its water rights system under the doctrine of “first in time, first in right,” Indigenous People were excluded from recognition as lawful water users despite being the original stewards of the state’s watersheds. The result was a legal framework that institutionalized dispossession while shaping water allocation for generations.

“My tribe was displaced from our ancestral villages along the Sacramento River and Delta waterways, but we have not and will not abandon our role as guardians of the water. It is imperative for state policy to recognize and repair the harms tribes have suffered. State agencies should protect our water uses and ensure that tribes receive just compensation for the destruction of our lifeways,” said Malissa Tayaba, Vice Chair of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.

“Tribal Leaders recognize that California’s water rights system, based on the ‘first in time, first in right’ principle, purposefully disenfranchised the original water users,” said Russell “Buster” Attebery,

Chairman of the Karuk Tribe. “This resulted in California Tribes losing access to their water, traditional foods, and culture. We believe that healthy rivers and restored fisheries are inseparable from Tribal sovereignty in water governance.”

Indigenous People in California continue to face barriers to defining, quantifying, accessing, protecting, and controlling their ancestral lands, water rights, and cultural resources. Redistribution of water has reduced or eliminated access to healthy traditional food sources such as smelt, salmon, freshwater mussels, and freshwater plants. Disconnection from traditional ancestral land and water, and the resulting loss of traditional foods, is linked to serious and pervasive health issues. In addition, low or non-existent instream flows and associated water quality problems impair or prevent water-related cultural, spiritual, and subsistence practices.

As California confronts climate-driven water scarcity and ecosystem collapse, modern state leaders increasingly recognize that durable solutions must incorporate Tribal rights, knowledge, and governance.

“Unfortunately, colonization and the development of the modern water system stripped many Indigenous communities of their traditional water resources and watershed management practices. While it is encouraging to see some state agencies beginning to acknowledge this history, there is a pressing need for legislation that formally recognizes these past mistakes and begins to address the harms Native communities have endured and continue to endure,” said Assemblymember Kalra. “I am pleased to author AB 2218, which will establish a state policy of recognizing these harms and addressing them through a number of meaningful measures, including protection of tribal water uses and consultation on water projects, plans, and policies.”

AB 2218 establishes state policy recognizing and addressing water related inequities caused by state-sanctioned acts of termination, removal, and assimilation of California Native American tribes. The bill directs specified state agencies — including the State Water Resources Control Board, regional water quality control boards, the Natural Resources Agency, the Delta Stewardship Council, and the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation — to implement this policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, permits, or grant criteria. The legislation also advances consultation with Tribes in certain water rights investigations and signals a shift toward more equitable and sustainable water management for future generations.

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Editor’s notes: AB 2218 passed the Assembly on May 27, 2026, 57–0, with 23 members not voting, and was introduced in the Senate as of May 28. ([LegiInfo](#)) ([LegiScan](#))