

# WATER HOLDS MEMORY

TÓ ÉÍ ÍÍNÁ ÁT'É  
WATER IS LIFE

# MISSION

## WATER HOLDS MEMORY

The documentary and photo storytelling project aims to create space for Effie to tell her story with the goal of raising awareness about the water crisis in the Southwest and what needs to happen in order for families like Effie's to maintain their way of life.

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*This project operates on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Hopi, Navajo, Southern Paiute, Pueblos, and Ute Tribes. In offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty, history, and experiences. We acknowledge these lands carry the stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity. We recognize Elders past and present as peoples who have cared for, and continue to care for, the land. In offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm Indigenous self-governance history, experiences, and resiliency of the Native people who are still here today.*

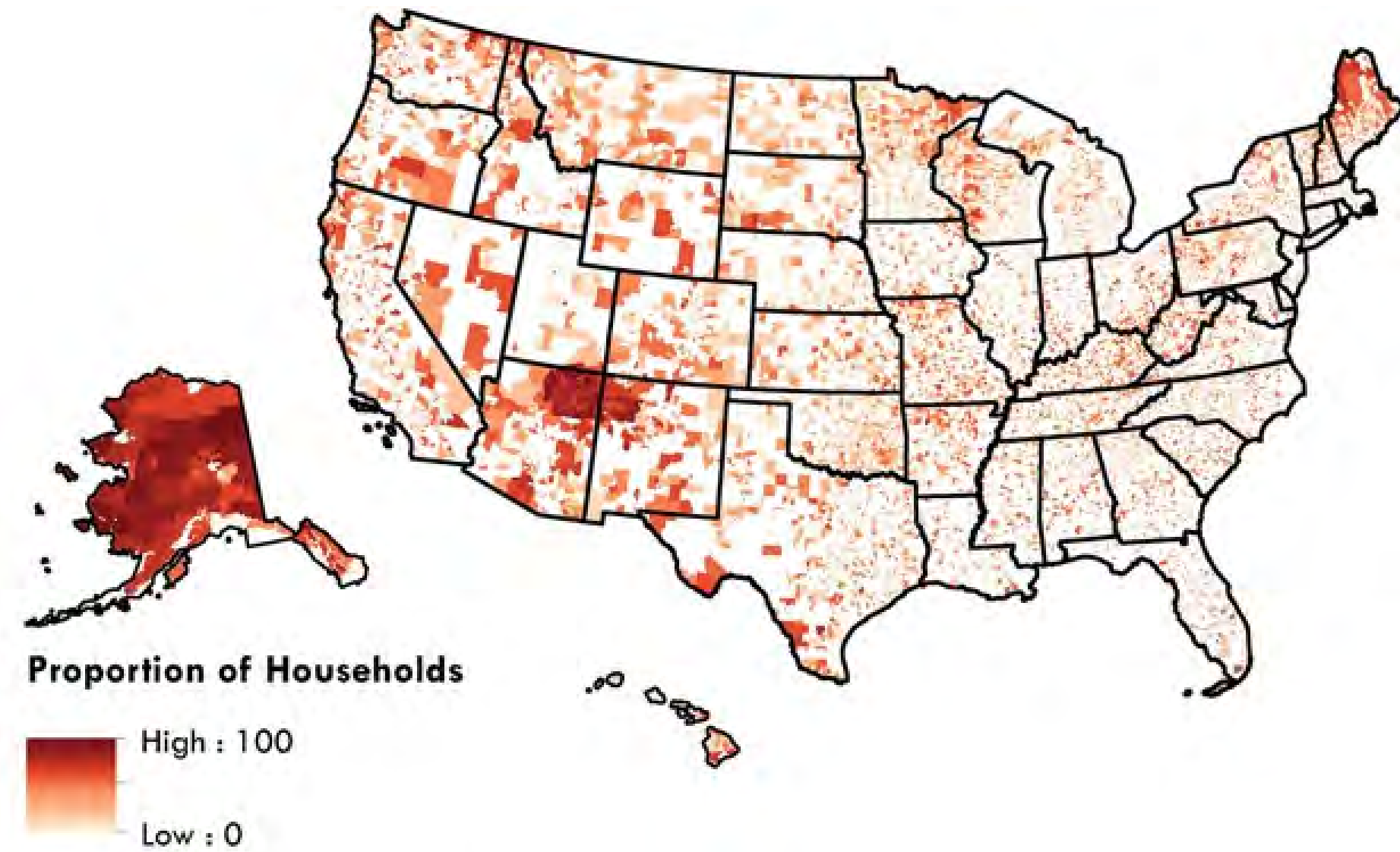
# STORY OF WATER

Water Holds Memory is an unsparing account of clean water accessibility witnessed through the documentary portrait of Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park resident elder Effie Yazzie, who belongs to one of the last twelve families allowed to live in the park. Effie's life, inextricably bound to the fate of water since her birth, carries the complex cultural, environmental and geopolitical history of water rights in the United States. This project partnership has been going for a few years now. The following photos are a small body of work that celebrates Effie as woman, water collector, and her resiliency in face of the water crisis in the Southwestern regions of the United States.

Effie has never had water or electrical infrastructure in her home. Her family makes trips every two days to collect water at springs nested miles away in Monument Valley's unforgiving terrain. These trips can take up to 4-6 hours, time that could be spent providing for her family. Her story echoes a problem that many of the Navajo Nation and Southwestern United States communities face today: life without water.



# "PLUMBING POVERTY" MAP



Map showing proportion of households without complete plumbing. Source: U.S. Census 2016. In the Four Corners region, you can see that there is a higher proportion of households with incomplete plumbing infrastructure.

## THE WATER CRISIS

Nearly 30% of the Navajo Nation does not have access to running water in their homes. Approximately 2.2 million Americans do not have access to running water and adequate sanitation. This epidemic is heavily intertwined with socioeconomic status as most communities without water infrastructure are in rural areas and low socioeconomic communities. According to a report from Dig Deep on the Economic Impact of America's Hidden Water Crisis, families who lack water infrastructure spend thousands of dollars on healthcare costs and spend more time and money acquiring clean water which results in a loss of time at work and school. The water access gap also causes 219,000 cases of waterborne illness a year and 71,000 cases of mental illness.

This region also faces impact of climate change and continued environmental injustices. Increased temperatures, desertification, unstable weather conditions and drought have threatened the few precious water reserves in this region. Monument Valley is bordered by the Colorado River and San Juan River, and federal agencies declared its first ever shortage of the Colorado River in 2021. The communities located near Monument Valley also is also vulnerable to water contamination from bacteria, toxins, and uranium from abandoned federal mines and oil exploration.

# BE' IINA' NA' HIL NAA REBUILDING COMMUNITY

TSÉ BII' NDZISGAI, DINÉTAH "MONUMENT VALLEY"

Our outreach strategy is currently with our partner the We Are Water (WaW) project, a National Science Foundation-funded project that aims to create a space for people who live in the Four Corners regions in the Southwestern U.S. to find a community to talk about the complicated issues of water and see other water stories across this region. This project collects stories about shared watersheds, the local ecosystem, and connecting neighboring rural communities through their experiences with water. WaW hosts a traveling exhibit with over 86 stories in approximately 12 under-served rural libraries in the Four Corners regions. WaW has fourteen scientists, Indigenous science educators, learning researchers, informal educators, and library staff partnerships. We plan to showcase the documentary in the traveling exhibit and a film festival at the end of 2023. WaW will co-host a storytelling workshop on best practices for telling local stories around water in the Four Corners regions. Through We Are Water, we are hiring an aspiring local young storyteller to help them gain production experience and help us co-create a narrative that helps support a story that impacts their community.

The documentary will also be a fundraising tool to buy new water tanks that Effie and her family need for water collection. This initiative will be our call to action upon releasing the project publicly through social media campaigns from team accounts with an approximate audience of over 10,000 followers. We intend to expand our project audience by submitting the documentary to film festival circuits. Nixon has working relationships with the Denver Post, CBS, GEO, and Netflix and plans to pitch the story to the outlets as well.

# GALLERY ABOUT

The following photos are from Lianna Nixon's last visit to Effie Yazzie's home during 2021. It was a short visit due to COVID restrictions in the park. These images were part of a small fundraising campaign to help Effie with her roof and procure a refrigerator that can work off-grid using solar power.





TSÉ BII' NDZISGAI, DINÉTAH "MONUMENT VALLEY" from the visitor center, the view many people come to see from all over the world.



A different view: many who go to Monument Valley see stunning landscapes and not the reality of the twelve families who take residency in the park.





Effie Yazzie laughing sitting in front of her hogan. Effie Yazzie is Navajo Elder and resident of Monument Valley. The Matriarch of Monument Valley, she is a gifted weaver and backcountry horse guide in the park



Effie has over twenty sheep and six horses she cares for and support her sources of income of weaving wool rugs and backcountry horseback riding tours in the park



Effie holds her spindle outside of her family's hogan where she weaves her tapestries and rugs.



Inside her hogan she holds her weaving comb. The only light in the hogan comes from the hole in the roof and the open doorway.



Inside her hogan Effie stretches wool from a spindle before weaving on her loom



A closer look at Effie's technique, she has learned this sacred knoweldge from her the women before and has passed it down to her daughters and grandchildren.



Alvina Yazzie stands in front of her family hogan with a piece she has been working on. She learned these sacred skills from her mother



Alvina Yazzie who stays with her mother to help with the animals feeds the sheep in the morning





Ph.D. Post Doctoral Researcher and local Tommy Rock gives us a tour of one of two water collection tanks he maintains and samples in the Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park. Rock's work focuses on the identification, monitoring and communication of environmental hazards related to legacy uranium mining, and ongoing oil and gas exploration in the Navajo Nation



A herd of wild horses peer at us over a ridge at one of the local water collection areas. When Effie collects water for her livestock, she will also make sure these wild herds get water too.



Effie poses with her outhouse that she uses.  
Approximately 30% of the Navajo Nation do not have access to clean running water in their homes and tens thousands more without sanitation



Effie Yazzie stands in front of one of the recently installed water collection tanks in Monument Valley called Piney Springs. Her grandfather used to collect water from the head of the spring when she was a little girl. This water collection tank is nested miles away from her home, where she must off-road to access it

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# CONNECT WITH US

A herd of horses is silhouetted against a cloudy sky as they stand on a grassy hill. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn. The horses are of various colors, including light and dark shades. The overall mood is serene and natural.

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