



Catherine F. Munson

Partner

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Services

Litigation
Native American
Native American Litigation

Catherine Munson is co-leader of the Native American Affairs team and brings more than twenty-five years of experience resolving complex legal matters. She provides strategic counsel and advocacy for Indian Tribes across all areas of the team's Native American practice, with a particular focus on water rights, protection of tribal sovereign interests, enforcement of the United States' trust responsibility, and environmental law. Catherine has extensive experience handling significant tribal water rights matters at the litigation, settlement, and post-settlement stages. She secured a landmark federal appellate ruling recognizing that Indian tribes hold federal reserved rights to groundwater in *Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians v. CVWD*, 849 F.3d 1262 (9th Cir. 2017). A seasoned litigator, Catherine also served as lead counsel in two major tribal water rights cases protecting the Ak-Chin Indian Community's Congressionally confirmed settlement. In addition, she played a key role in several significant historic settlements resolving tribal breach of trust claims against the United States.

Beyond litigation, Catherine regularly advises clients on water marketing, leasing, and storage; water regulation and legislation; development of water-related projects; compliance with NEPA; and tribal code drafting.

Catherine is a regular speaker at Indian law conferences and co-chairs a tribal water law seminar each year.

Catherine was listed in the 2026 and six immediately preceding editions of *Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business* for Native American Law and she was also ranked nationally as a "Recognized Practitioner" for Native American Law in 2026 and the six years immediately preceding by *Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business*. Catherine was recognized in 2026 and the five years immediately preceding by *The Best Lawyers in America®* for Native American Law.

Experience

Obtained a landmark ruling holding that tribes have federal reserved rights in groundwater in *Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians v. CVWD*, 849 F.3d 1262 (9th Cir. 2017).

Lead counsel for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians in its case against California water districts seeking a declaration and quantification of Agua Caliente's federally reserved rights to groundwater. Successfully negotiated a complex settlement of the Tribe's claims, addressing water quantity, quality, governance structures,

land exchanges, and the Tribe's taxing authority. The Tribe's \$500 million settlement legislation is pending before Congress.

Regularly advise clients on environmental review of projects impacting tribal water resources.

Lead counsel for the Ak-Chin Indian Community in its lawsuit against two irrigation districts for degrading Ak-Chin's Central Arizona Project water. Obtained dismissal of counterclaims and negotiated with multiple stakeholders to obtain a favorable settlement resulting in protection of Ak-Chin's water.

Lead counsel for the Ak-Chin Indian Community in its lawsuit against Central Arizona Irrigation & Drainage District and Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation & Drainage District for degrading Ak-Chin's Central Arizona Project water. Obtained dismissal of the irrigation districts' counterclaims and negotiated a favorable settlement resulting in protection of Ak-Chin's water.

Lead counsel for the Ak-Chin Indian Community in its case against the Central Arizona Water Conservation District in the District Court in Arizona to protect Ak-Chin's water from being reduced. Successfully obtained summary judgment in favor of Ak-Chin confirming Ak-Chin and the United States' interpretation of Ak-Chin's settlement Act resulting in additional water being delivered to Ak-Chin on an annual basis.

Negotiated favorable multi-party settlement of claims related to 100-year lease of tribal water in Arizona to large metropolitan communities.

Successfully represented a Tribe and more than 1,000 allottees in a complex class action trespass claim against the United States regarding an expired transmission line right-of-way. The matter involved obtaining favorable rulings from both the United States Court of Federal Claims and the District Court for the District of Arizona.

Successfully represented tribe in connection with self-governance funding for an Arizona tribe and negotiated favorable settlement resulting in a substantial increase in annual funding for the tribe.

Played a key role negotiating substantial settlements for four tribal clients in actions against the United States for historical mismanagement of trust funds and assets.

Advised an Arizona tribe on Occupational Safety and Health issues, including development and successful full implementation of a Tribal OSHA Code.

Represent tribal client in Arizona in protection of its trademarks.

Obtained the first discovery ruling by a federal court requiring that the United States search through 34,000 boxes of records it stored at the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR) in Lenexa, Kansas. Prior to this decision, the United State required tribes to bear the burden of searching for the records.

Education

Emory University School of Law J.D. (1999)

with honors

Vanderbilt University B.A. (1995) Political Science, *cum laude*

Admissions

District of Columbia (2009)

Georgia (1999)

Court Admissions

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Tribal Court

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit

U.S. Court of Federal Claims

U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia

U.S. Supreme Court

Professional & Community Activities

Law360, Native American Editorial Advisory Board (2023)

Office Managing Partner, Washington, D.C. Office

Insights

[Events](#)

Water Rights are for Settling: Practical Tips and Lessons Learned from Negotiators of Recent Tribal Water Rights Settlements

October 15, 2026

[News Releases](#)

Kilpatrick Attorneys Earn 102 Rankings in 2026 Chambers USA and Global Guides

June 5, 2026

[Alert](#)

Colorado River Developments and Potential Compact Litigation

April 23, 2026

[Alert](#)

Proposed New WOTUS Definitions and Impacts on Tribes

December 4, 2025

[Events](#)

Agua Caliente: A Discussion of the Settlement

October 16, 2025