

## Rising Star: Akin Gump's Katie Brossy

*Law360, New York (August 7, 2017, 4:21 PM EDT)* - Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP's Katie Brossy has worked on some of the biggest Indian water rights deals in history, such as a more than \$460 million settlement for the Crow Tribe, earning her a spot as one of three Native American law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

### **HOW SHE GOT HERE:**

Brossy, a member of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, comes from a long line of tribal leaders, who inspired her to pursue a legal career dedicated to protecting tribal sovereignty and representing tribal interests.

Through her work, she seeks "to make the legal environment better for tribal governments and their tribal members," she said. "To me, it's not just a client, it's someone I feel very invested in."

### **BIGGEST CASES OF HER CAREER:**

Brossy was part of the Akin Gump team that helped the Crow Tribe reach one of the largest ever Indian water rights settlements in U.S. history, which provides roughly \$460 million to the tribe to rehabilitate a dilapidated irrigation project and to build a drinking water system.

Similarly, she and her colleagues assisted the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians in inking a water rights agreement that provides the tribe with \$28.5 million for infrastructure needed to guarantee a permanent water supply.

The deals ensure the tribes have "wet water," meaning that rather than having pieces of paper that say they have water

## RISING ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ STAR



**Katie Brossy**  
**Akin Gump**

**Age:** 38

**Home base:** Washington, D.C.

**Position:** Senior counsel

**Law school:** Columbia Law School

**First job after law school:**

Associate at [Sonosky Chambers Sachse Endreson & Perry LLP](#)

rights, they actually have the funding necessary to provide “critical” infrastructure for those irrigation systems, drinking water systems and secure water sources, she said.

“At Crow, the tribal members had to boil their water,” she said. “It’s just not something that we think happens in the United States. We think all Americans should have access to clean drinking water — especially the first Americans in this country — and that just simply isn’t the case.”

**OTHER NOTEWORTHY WORK:**

Brossy also assisted the Gila River Indian Community in settling claims that the federal government mismanaged its land base and other trust assets, an agreement under which the tribe receives \$12.5 million and roughly 3,500 acres in replacement land.

Now, she and her colleagues are working to greenlight federal legislation also provided for as part of the deal, which would establish a foundation for a system of federal rights-of-way on the tribe’s reservation, something she said would open the door for the tribe to pursue further economic development.

Brossy is also committed to tribal pro bono work and has been representing the Ponca Tribe as it seeks to pass through Congress a bill that would designate as a historical landmark the Chief Standing Bear National Historic Trail.

She explained that during the late 1800s, the tribe was forcibly removed from its lands in Nebraska and had to walk to Oklahoma, a journey during which Chief Standing Bear’s son fell ill and, on his deathbed, asked for a homeland burial.

Determined to fulfill his son’s dying wish, the chief led a group of tribe members on the 500-mile walk back, but they were arrested just before reaching their destination.

“It resulted in a court case where the court said that Native Americans were human beings within the meaning of the law for the first time,” she said. “So what we’re trying to create is a historical trail so that people can learn about that important chapter in our American history.”

**ON OVERCOMING CHALLENGES:**

Brossy said that the kind of cases her practice is focused on tend to drag on for years and years, as it takes a long time to first settle the claims and then to pass requisite related federal legislation.

“It can be frustrating at times when you know the right result should be that they should pass and that tribes should have access to clean drinking water, a basic human right, but that because of the process, because of politics or whatever else is going on, it takes longer than you would obviously like,” she said. “You just have to be very persistent and dedicated and willing to see the big picture and stick in for the long haul.”

— *As told to Christine Powell*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2017 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,200 submissions. This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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