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# United States Senate

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July 17, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. State Department  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

I write to bring your attention to serious concerns about transboundary water quality issues on the Kootenai and Flathead Rivers between British Columbia and Montana. Headwaters for both of these rivers originate in British Columbia near the Montana border, and mining and proposed logging operations in British Columbia could seriously degrade water quality downstream in Montana. Coal mining in the Elk River valley, part of the Kootenai River watershed, and proposed logging in the Canadian Flathead near McLatchie and Foisey Creeks have Montanans and federal agencies very concerned about adverse downstream impacts on water quality and wildlife. I ask that the Department of State raise these issues with your Canadian counterparts so we can work together to protect the Flathead and Kootenai Rivers. We have had great success over the past few years in working with Canada to protect the Flathead River, and I ask that, as we move forward, we bring that same sense of cooperation to bear on both the Flathead and Kootenai Rivers.

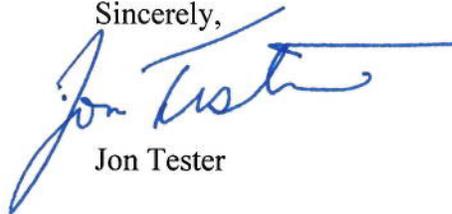
Montana and British Columbia share more than just a border – we both benefit from abundant natural resources and have economies that are strengthened by outdoor recreation, mining and logging. After working for years to protect the North Fork of the Flathead River, which involved balancing competing interests up and down the Rocky Mountain Front of Glacier National Park and beyond, I fear that damage to water quality in the Flathead watershed and the Kootenai watershed may occur before the issues are fully understood. My office was recently briefed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Geological Survey on two particular threats to water in Montana, namely coal mining and timber harvest in British Columbia. I understand the Kootenai River watershed is affected by high levels of selenium and other containments, which appear to be sourced from coal mining activity along the Elk River. The information I received indicates there is not enough source data to fully model the impacts to the greater watershed. A number of federal agencies, Indian tribes, and conservation organizations have shared these concerns as well.

Additionally, sedimentation from large-scale timber harvests has great potential to negatively affect these critical watersheds as well. EPA indicated it has recommended collecting more data on the cumulative impacts of these activities, including sedimentation and nutrient loading, but a final plan has not been agreed upon.

Although I understand that British Columbia approved an environmental plan for the Elk River Valley, a tributary to the Kootenai watershed, I am concerned that without a more holistic approach to managing these watersheds, piecemeal efforts to protect water quality from accumulating effects of selenium and other contaminants will be too little and too late to protect water quality.

Please raise these concerns with the governments of Canada and British Columbia. We need to better understand how development could adversely impact water quality in these two watersheds and ensure that environmental safeguards are firmly in place before irreversible harm is done. Thank you for your consideration of my request. Please contact my office if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jon Tester