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United States Senate

October 18, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Kerry:


I am writing to express continued concern about transboundary water quality issues in Lake Koochanusa and to request an update on engagement with Canada about the health of the broader watershed. As you know, existing and proposed expansions to coal mining operations in the Elk River valley in British Columbia pose substantial long-term risk of adverse impacts on downstream water quality and fish populations in Montana.

In July 2015, I wrote to you regarding ongoing concerns I have heard from state and federal agencies, Indian tribes, and conservation organizations about high levels of selenium and other contaminants from coal mining activity along the Elk River in British Columbia. At that time, I encouraged you to raise this issue with the governments of Canada and British Columbia, and I subsequently urged President Obama to make transboundary water quality issues such as this a focus during Prime Minister Trudeau's state visit in March 2016. Furthermore, in February 2016, the Council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) formally requested that the government of the United States refer the matter to the International Joint Commission (IJC).

As the State of Montana and British Columbia continue to work to address basin-wide water quality issues, we need to also have a coordinated focus at the federal level, increased involvement from impacted Indian tribes, and continued engagement with the government of Canada. Montana and British Columbia share abundant natural resources and each of our respective economies depend on world-class opportunities for fishing and other forms of outdoor recreation. Additionally, Indian tribes, like CSKT in Montana, rely on the federal government to promote international stewardship to protect treaty guaranteed water and fishing rights that are essential to traditional practices and tribal economies. The long-term health of the Elk River and Kootenai River watersheds is critically important, and we must address the full scope of potential impacts to Montana's water quality.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet in person to discuss the status of coordination among state and federal agencies and engagement with officials in Canada. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester

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