



July 10, 2023

Members of Montana's Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of Bear Paw Development Corporation, I am pleased to provide you with this letter of support for S. 1987, or the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 2023. This legislation is the culmination of decades of work by many and provides certainty for both tribal and non-tribal entities in the Milk River Basin concerning water from the Milk River for purposes of irrigation, municipal use, economic development and recreation.

Importantly, S. 1987 will provide \$300 million of non-reimbursable funds for critically important infrastructure repairs to the St. Mary/Milk River Project to assure that water from this source continues to flow along the Hi-Line, assuring the viability of these areas in northern Montana for the foreseeable future. Knowing the Milk River would run dry without water from the St. Mary System in seven of every ten years, the absolute importance of this rehabilitation effort cannot be overstated.

It is clear the benefits of this legislation are significant, both for the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine people at Fort Belknap, but also for the Hi-Line and the communities of northern Montana that are reliant upon an intact, up-to-date water delivery system that will benefit the economy of our region for generations.

Without hesitation or reservation, our organization strongly supports S. 1987 and urges its passage.

Best regards,

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