



April 25, 2023

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines, Representative Rosendale, and Representative Zinke:

St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group strongly supports Congressional passage of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 2023. The Ft. Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) will be the last tribe in Montana to secure a Congressionally approved water rights settlement. This is a significant achievement for the State of Montana and provides the certainty we all need to manage our water supply into the future.

The Act will ratify the 2001 Ft. Belknap-Montana Water Compact, which was approved by the Montana Legislature with an overwhelming majority of 95% in support. The Act will also provide critical water infrastructure funding that will support FBIC's development of their water supply and make significant improvements to their irrigation and domestic water systems, and support important mitigation activities that protect non-tribal, state-based water users across the Hi-Line.

Specifically, the Act will provide \$275 million for the Bureau of Reclamation to fully rehabilitate and restore the St. Mary Canal to its full capacity of 850 cubic feet/second, providing a sustainable water supply for the Milk River. This crucial component of the Settlement Act will address a major problem for water users across the Hi-Line. The additional water supply will provide protection for Milk River Project users and communities who may be impacted from the FBIC's Indian water rights development and ensure the overdue restoration of the St. Mary Canal.

Finally, the Act will generate significant long-term economic benefits for both the Tribes and our local businesses as critical project infrastructure funds are implemented. This will give an economic boost to our communities across the region. We need your leadership in the United States Congress and strong support for the passage of this important Act.

Sincerely,

Dave Peterson, Coordinator
St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group