



July 10, 2023

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Chairman, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Vice Chairman Lisa Murkowski
Vice Chairman, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Schatz and Vice Chair Murkowski:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to express our support for the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 2023 as sponsored by Senator Jon Tester on his and Senator Steve Daines behalf.

This bill is the result of close to 40 years of negotiations between the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC), the State of Montana, local governments, non-Indian water users, and the federal government. It settles the FBIC's water rights established in the 1908 Supreme Court case *Winters v. United States*.

In 2001, FBIC entered a water rights compact approved by an overwhelmingly bipartisan margin in the Montana State Legislature. Recently, the FBIC negotiated updates to the settlement with the federal government and local communities. The result of these negotiations is the widely supported Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 2023.

The bipartisan settlement proposed in this legislation is a great example of the work we like to support, work that provides the tribes and the communities with the certainty they need.

Sincerely,

Bill Hodge – Montana State Director