

United States Senate

April 11, 2018

Brenda Burman
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Commissioner Burman:

With the passage of the Fiscal Year 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) received increased funding for rural water projects. BOR has made significant progress toward bringing clean drinking water and good jobs to communities in Montana, but there is still a long way to go to complete rural water projects already underway. It is critical that we keep up investments in both the Fort Peck/Dry Prairie Rural Water Project and Rocky Boy's/North Central Rural Water Project. I respectfully request that significant additional funds from the Rural Water Projects account be directed toward completion of Montana's rural water projects.

Based on BOR's own analysis, it could take nearly 50 years to complete all outstanding rural water projects. That is far too long for Montanans to wait for access to clean water. I am appreciative of the allocations BOR has made for Montana's rural water projects in previous years, and call for additional funding for the projects for FY 2018 to meet the considerable construction needs still present at these projects. Montana's rural water projects meet a basic drinking water need of highest importance to the health and welfare of the people served.

- The Fort Peck/Dry Prairie Rural Water Project will serve an area of northeast Montana that includes thousands of tribal residents of the Fort Peck reservation as well as the surrounding rural counties and communities. These additional funds will be used to construct critical elements of the project and the request is within the capability to spend funds in FY 2018. Design, cultural resource surveys, wetland surveys and easements related to all proposed project features are substantially completed by the Tribes on the eastern half of the Reservation and by Dry Prairie in its western service area and will be approved by Reclamation in advance of the use of FY 2018 funds. For a federally-authorized project that is nearly two-thirds complete, and partially supported with local funds, the fiscally prudent course of action would be to finance the remaining construction sooner rather than later, thereby saving taxpayer money and removing from the project from the list of on-going rural water construction projects financed with Reclamation funds. The project sponsors have informed me that they can make good use of approximately an additional \$27 million this fiscal year. I support a strong investment well above typical annual funding for this project.

- The Rocky Boy's/North Central Rural Water Project will provide reliable drinking water to the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's reservation and many of the surrounding counties, covering 6.8 million acres of rural Montana. The project has particular importance as it supports the implementation of the Chippewa Cree tribal water rights settlement. Of the five authorized rural water systems around the country, the Rocky Boy/North Central Rural Water system is the only one without a water treatment plant (WTP). As a result, almost two decades after settling their water rights, the Chippewa Cree have not received any water from their compacted water and both tribal members and surrounding communities are suffering. In fact, due to the inadequate annual funding, the Rocky Boy's/NCMRWS Project remains approximately 75 percent incomplete. Due to poor water quality, tribal members suffer health risks from E-coli Bacteria, fecal coliform bacteria, and h-pylori bacteria which cause stomach ulcers, extreme gastritis and even stomach cancer. This should not be the case in the United States in 2018, particularly when a settled water right was supposed to resolve these issues. I understand that BOR has been in contact with the Chippewa Cree Tribe in an effort to expedite the delivery of water to the Rocky Boys Reservation by the year 2020. The project sponsors have informed me that they can make good use of approximately an additional \$48 million this fiscal year. I support a strong investment well above typical annual funding for this project.

Your agency has a great opportunity to make significant progress on these rural water infrastructure projects this year. Montanans served by these projects deserve reliable and adequate water systems that will promote public health and lay a solid foundation for economic growth and opportunity. I respectfully ask you to prioritize these projects and provide the necessary funding to see them through completion in a timely fashion. I thank you for your attention on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font. A long, thin horizontal line extends from the end of the signature to the right across the page.

Jon Tester