

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 13, 2022

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso
Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Manchin and Ranking Member Barrasso:

We are writing to request a markup for the *St. Mary's Reinvestment Act (S. 737)*. This legislation will provide much-needed support for rehabilitation of the St. Mary's Diversion Dam and Headworks in Montana. This infrastructure is over a century old, and is in dire need of significant repair and rehabilitation work.

St. Mary's Diversion Dam is the keystone of the Milk River Project, which provides water for over 121,000 irrigated acres, and provides water for four municipalities, two rural water systems, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community. North central Montana's economy relies on the Milk River Project, and we are dangerously close to losing this piece of water infrastructure. In 2020, the concrete Drop structures shortly downstream of the St. Mary's Diversion Dam failed catastrophically, cutting off any diversion from the St. Mary's River into the Milk River, and putting agricultural producers across the hi-line of Montana at risk. With support from the state of Montana and Bureau of Reclamation, those drop structures were repaired for just under \$10 million. The St. Mary's Diversion Dam, which currently relies on wood planks and crumbling concrete to control the flow of water, will likely cost over \$60 million to rehabilitate. Rehabilitating the entire Milk River Project will cost well over \$200 million.

Our bill builds on the \$100 million for rehabilitation in the bipartisan infrastructure package to provide targeted funding for rehabilitating the St. Mary's Diversion Dam, the highest priority piece of the Milk River Project for rehabilitation. Past rehabilitation efforts have stalled due to the current 74 percent nonfederal costshare for rehabilitation work on the Milk River Project. In response, our legislation sets the costshare for water users on an ability-to-pay study conducted by Bureau of Reclamation, setting the pricetag for rehabilitation on what water users can actually afford. Water users have already worked with Reclamation to get that study under way.


Advancing this legislation, which has been a bipartisan priority for Montana's delegation for years, will provide critical support to rehabilitating water infrastructure that is integral to supporting agricultural producers, Tribal water rights, meeting international commitments, and mitigating the impacts of the ongoing drought in north central Montana.

We thank you for your leadership in addressing pressing water infrastructure needs like this one, and stand ready to assist however we can.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator