



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 10, 2016

FARM Makes Push to Ratify Compact & Meet Deadline for Water Court Adjudication

(Helena, Mont.)—In a new push to educate its grassroots members about the status of the Montana Water Compact's approval by Congress, Farmers and Ranchers for Montana (FARM) Co-Chairs explained that specific issues related to the Water Court as well as a pending new Administration in Washington, put a priority on Congressional action on the Compact this year.

"Our leaders in Washington need to know that the time is now to ratify the Compact," said FARM Co-Chair Tom Beck. "FARM will be stepping up its efforts to communicate this message throughout the state."

"Montanans desperately deserve the water rights certainty afforded by the Compact," explained Walt Sales, a Co-Chair of FARM. A fourth-generation farmer in the Gallatin Valley, Sales is a founding member of the Association of Gallatin Agricultural Irrigators and is keenly aware of the impact that failing to pass the Compact would have on water users. "The longer Congressional approval is delayed, the longer Montana water users are left not knowing if their water rights will be protected or if they will be forced to defend their livelihoods in court."

"The Gallatin is just one of the areas where claims made by the Tribe to protect their water interests have been stayed in the Water Court pending Congressional action on the Compact," explained Sales. "Thousands of Montanans are depending on the Compact to resolve these claims."

The Water Court has issued a stay on all Compact-related decrees until January 31, 2017 and is focused on clearing a massive claim backlog by 2020 as directed by the legislature. Without significant progress in Congress, there is no guarantee that the stay will be continually extended.

"Now that the adjudication process is moving forward at a consistent pace, proceeding without additional delay is critical to keeping the cost to taxpayers low and providing certainty to water users," said Lorents Grosfield, a former chairman of the Senate Natural Resources Committee and member of the Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission from 2003-2007. "If Compact ratification is delayed, then so is the completion of the adjudication process, which if not completed by the 2020 legislative deadline will require additional state funding. If the Compact is not ratified the Tribal claims must also be settled by the Water Court—forcing those who have water rights to defend them in Court instead of resolving them in a timely and cost effective manner through the Compact."

"With the recent progress made on the Blackfeet Compact, it is clear that our delegation understands that water compacts deserve to be treated with urgency," said Tom Beck, former President of the Montana State Senate and co-chair of FARM. "We are actively encouraging members of the Montana delegation to move the CSKT Water Compact forward so that the Water Court adjudication process can be successfully completed by the 2020 deadline."

The Compact passed by a bi-partisan majority of the Montana State Legislature with the support of the agricultural industry including the Montana Farm Bureau Federation, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Water Resources Association, Montana Agriculture and Business Association, and the Association of Gallatin Agricultural Irrigators. FARM reiterated their support of the Compact and encouraged Congressional action earlier this year in a letter to Senator Tester, Senator Daines and Congressman Zinke.

Farmers and Ranchers for Montana (FARM) is a grassroots coalition of farmers and ranchers, united with local leaders, Indian tribes, businesses and other Montanans committed to fair water policies and the approval of a Water Compact that quantifies and secures water access to the benefit of all Montanans.

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