

November 17, 2015

Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Congressman Zinke:

There is no doubt that water is one of Montana’s most important resources, but this resource is of particular importance to the agricultural community of our state. We are writing to express our strong support of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai (CSKT) Water Compact as a negotiated agreement between farmers, ranchers, irrigators, water users, and tribal members that will help to ensure the future of agriculture in Montana.

By defining the federally reserved water rights held in trust for the CSKT, the Compact settles claims the Tribe could make on existing water rights. Defining these water rights provides benefits to the Tribe, farmers, ranchers, and water users across the state through the certainty provided by the Compact.

Without the Compact, the Tribe would proceed with claims in the Montana Water Court—claims that would impact thousands of Montana farmers, ranchers, and irrigators. These claims would then have to be adjudicated, a process that would cost Montana’s taxpayers and agricultural community millions of dollars and would drag on for decades, creating uncertainty in land values and impacting the transfer and sale of land.

Our analysis shows the Compact further protects the agricultural community and water users in Montana by providing measures to mitigate damage in times of drought. These “shared shortage” provisions ensure that when drought strikes and Montana’s farmers and ranchers need water, that every available resource is utilized to meet their needs.

Additionally, our support of the Compact stems in part from the protections that are provided to existing water right holders and the additional certainty the Compact gives to those irrigators and water users who do not have water rights but still depend on being able to reliably use Montana’s water resources.



We hope that as you begin the process of reviewing the Compact, that you will feel free to approach any of our groups for additional insight into why we support this essential agreement. Please let us know should you or your staff have any questions or concerns that we can assist with.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



---

John Youngberg, Executive Vice President  
Montana Farm Bureau Federation



---

Jay Bodnar, Natural Resource Director  
Montana Stockgrowers Association



---

Mike Murphy, Executive Director  
Montana Water Resource Association



---

Mike Gaffke, President  
Association of Gallatin Agricultural Irrigators



---

Marty Lundstrom, President  
Montana Agricultural Business Association