

Rocky Mountain Tribes Support Fort Belknap Indian Community's Water Settlement

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines and Representative Gianforte:

As Tribal leaders of the Rocky Mountain region, we support the Fort Belknap Indian Community's water rights settlement. We believe the water and lands of our Nations are best managed by the tribal members who were promised permanent homelands and have called them home since time immemorial.

As sovereign nations, we urge you to support the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes Water Rights Settlement Act of 2019. Passage of this bill is critical to resolve long-standing water rights issues and provide essential funding for the Fort Belknap Indian Community to develop their water projects.

Fort Belknap Indian Community's water settlement is the result of many years of negotiations between the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council, the United States government, and the State of Montana. The resulting agreement to be considered by Congress reflects a strong commitment from the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes to manage their water resources for today and for future generations.

We know that the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes are responsible for the establishment of the 1908 Winters Doctrine in the Supreme Court decision *Winters vs. United States*, which recognized tribes' right to water on, under, and bordering their reservations. There are longstanding issues of water rights on our reservation lands that must be resolved, and funding is needed for critical water projects. It is time for Congress to support the Fort Belknap Indian Community's water rights settlement and provide certainty to all water users in north central Montana.

We urge you to continue to honor tribal treaties and support tribal sovereignty and pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Harlan Baker, Chairman
Chippewa Cree Tribe of Rocky Boy

Gerald Gray, Chairman
Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana

Ron Trahan, Chairman
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

Lee Spoonhunter, Chairman
Northern Arapaho Tribe

Alvin Not Afraid Jr., Chairman
Crow Tribe of Indians

Winfield S. Russell, Vice President
Northern Cheyenne Tribe

Vernon Hill, Chairman
Eastern Shoshone Tribe

Floyd Azure, Tribal Chairman
Fort Peck Tribes

Timothy Davis, Chairman
Blackfeet Nation

Ladd Edmo, Chairman
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes

DECEMBER 13, 2019