

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

Steve Bullock
GOVERNOR



Mike Cooney
LT. GOVERNOR

February 7, 2019

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Representative Gianforte:

As Governor of Montana, my administration is committed to strengthening the government-to-government relationship between the State of Montana and sovereign governments. The Ft. Belknap Water Compact was established through an open process and I support the swift passage of the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) Water Settlement Act of 2019 to complete this process.

The FBIC Water Settlement Act of 2019 is the next step forward in the long-standing goal of Montana to settle all federally reserved water right claims through negotiated compacts.

The Ft. Belknap Water Compact passed the Montana Legislature 18 years ago with overwhelming support. The compact passed 94–6 in the State House, and 42–6 in the State Senate. Representatives for the Milk River Joint Board of Control, testified in support of the compact stating that it would serve to properly protect the Milk River irrigation system, which is the lifeblood of the irrigation districts in the area. Representatives for the Montana Water Resources Association added their support and indicated that the process for the compact was long and included multiple public comment opportunities.

The State of Montana continues to support the efforts to finalize the FBIC Water Compact of 2001, and the FBIC Water Settlement Act of 2019 presents an opportunity to do so. While certain provisions need further discussion, and there are some concerns about off-reservation, non-tribally lease lands, the State supports the general framework of the Act. In addition, the State and the Tribes have met and agree there is a workable solution moving forward to these concerns.

The time has come to put the final piece of legislation in place to make the FBIC Water Right Compact a reality. The compact will protect both the State and the Tribes' water rights, improve the local economy of the Highline region through an influx of money and resources, meet the need for critical water saving infrastructure improvements, and provide the Tribes with safe, clean water.

The State of Montana supports the Fort Belknap Indian Community in effecting the terms of the Ft. Belknap Water Compact through the passage of an FBIC Water Settlement Act of 2019 in the United States Congress. Let's not indulge in unnecessary debate or delay any longer on the passage and implementation of a mutually beneficial water compact. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Steve Bullock, written in a cursive style.

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor