

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION

*Bill's
Network*



STAN STEPHENS, GOVERNOR

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HELENA, MONTANA 59620-2301

January 30, 1992

Richard Whitesell, Area Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Federal Building
316 North 26th Street
Billings, Montana 59101

Dear Mr. Whitesell:

The Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission has been negotiating with the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boys Tribes and have set these negotiations as the Commission's top priority. This reflects the 1987 Montana Legislature's intent to make resolution of the Milk River Basin water rights its foremost priority. In the past two years the Commission and the Fort Belknap Tribes have come to several agreements and have signed a memorandum of understanding. The Commission and both the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boys Tribes set an ambitious schedule to have a compact for both tribes before the 1993 Montana Legislature.

The Commission has been waiting for the past two years for compact proposals from both the Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap Tribes so that negotiations can continue. However, representatives of both Tribal governments are saying that their technical consultants can't conclude their assessment of the Tribes' water needs without additional funding. Any further delay in these negotiations will mean that the Commission will not be able place compact proposals before the 1993 Montana Legislature, necessitating the reassignment of Commission staff time. Therefore, the Commission strongly supports the full and expeditious funding of Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap's technical consultants.

Furthermore, the Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap Tribes along with the Blackfeet Tribe, the Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission, and other interested parties in the Milk Basin are cooperating in an intergovernmental coordinating committee (ICC) with the intention of integrating all parties concerns into the Milk Basin planning process. This ICC group has effectively incorporated the three Milk Basin Tribes into the planning process, and we believe this important process should continue. The State of Montana has committed staff to

Richard Whitesell
January 30, 1992
Page 2

this effort, and we hope the federal government can provide adequate funding to the Tribes so that they can be effectively represented in this process.

We ask that you do all you can to expedite this crucial funding so that our cooperation in the Milk River Basin can continue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Tweeten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chris Tweeten
Chairman

CT/cb:cl

cc: William P. Main, Fort Belknap Community Council; Rocky Stump, Rocky Boy's Agency; Tom Fredericks, Fredericks & Pelcyger; Yvonne Knight, Native American Rights Fund; James Rawlings, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation; Richard Aldrich, U. S. Department of Interior; Bob Delk, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs